



## PASTORAL LETTER

October 2019

Dear Friends in Christ

Bishop Nick, Bishop Jackie and I are writing to you at a crucial moment in the story of our nation. Though there have been detailed negotiations about our future relationship with the EU this week, the political landscape is constantly shifting and we still don't know exactly how things will play out. What is certain is that we will need to find new ways of relating to our neighbouring countries in Europe.

There are also deep divisions in our nation. Whichever way you voted in the 2016 referendum, what cannot be denied is how profoundly unsettling and politically divisive the current situation is for many people. How should we as Christians respond and pray in this turmoil?

Our role as church leaders in this situation is not to take sides. Last month the Bishops of the Church of England made a public statement about Brexit

(<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/news/bishops-issue-open-letter-brexit>) calling amongst other things for a renewal of respect in public discourse. The current culture of recrimination, scapegoating, and of blaming and shaming is damaging our national life.

The Church of England must continue to be the Church for everyone. There are leavers and remainers in every congregation in Devon, but as Christians we are united by our shared responsibility to work for the common good and to promote a culture of mutual respect. We also have a responsibility to speak out for the most vulnerable in our communities and to help them as best we can. Are there practical things we can do by way of support? As a Diocese, we have an incredible network of parishes, schools and chaplaincies across Devon. If we work together, we can make a difference.

### **Food Banks**

At this time of enormous uncertainty, it is likely that foodbanks will come under additional strain. In the event that we leave the EU without a deal, it is possible that there may be temporary shortages of some foods. Prices may also rise and foodbank usage may go up. So please think about giving extra support to the food banks in your area. Ensure that stocks are high and that your local centre is staffed by enough volunteers.

### **I was a stranger and you welcomed me**

In his parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25), Jesus praises those who welcome the stranger, who feed the hungry and clothe the destitute. This is a moment in our nation's life for friendship and generous hospitality, and above all for welcoming the stranger in our midst. As the uncertainty continues, levels of fear may rise. Now is the time to reach out hands of friendship to any EU nationals in our neighbourhoods, including groups of migrant or seasonal workers on our farms.

## Supporting our Farming Community

The farming community in Devon is coming under increasing pressure with the uncertainty surrounding Brexit. None of us know exactly what will happen in the event of a no-deal Brexit, but many fear that farming will be badly affected by inflated tariffs and uncertain support mechanisms. It is highly likely that our beef and sheep farmers will be particularly badly hit if the Government does not step in to support. And, of course, it is not only farmers who will be affected, but their workers, contractors and suppliers, and all the inter-related businesses in the rural economy.

The resources listed below may be of use to you in supporting and signposting people in your locality. We all need to watch out for the lonely, the anxious and the vulnerable. The Farming Community Network has prepared a comprehensive list of support in Devon: <http://www.devonchurchesruralforum.org.uk/rural-issues/mental-health/mental-health-organisations-and-resources.php>

This link has details of some of the organisations specifically geared to supporting farmers and their families: <http://www.devonchurchesruralforum.org.uk/farming/food-farming-and-related-organisations/>

In Devon, we are fortunate in having a number of Livestock Market Chaplaincy Teams. These are ecumenical and coordinated by Andy Jerrard: [andy.jerrard@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:andy.jerrard@tiscali.co.uk). Being present where the farming community gathers is important. A familiar face helps renew confidence when things feel fragile. Please pray for their work.

We also have a superb Farming Community Network Team which comes alongside farming families to support them confidentially. If you or members of your congregation(s) would value their support or advice, then contact Joanne Jones [joannejones.farmer@gmail.com](mailto:joannejones.farmer@gmail.com) or Colin Smallacombe [candasmallacombe@gmail.com](mailto:candasmallacombe@gmail.com)

## Supporting our Fishing Community

There is also uncertainty facing Devon's fishing community, where traditionally wages are low and the work dangerous. Questions remain over what changes there might be to fishing quotas, the export of fish into Europe and the rules about who can access the fishing grounds surrounding Devon's coastline.

Finally, although we are circulating this letter to the clergy and readers of the Diocese, we very much hope that this letter is shared as widely as possible. You may wish to include it in your parish magazine or newssheet or read all or part of it aloud in church on Sunday. One thing we can all do is to pray for the unity and reconciliation of our nation, for our politicians and community leaders, for journalists and all who shape public opinion. Let us pray that, strengthened by the Spirit of unity and truth, we embrace positively whatever the next chapter holds for our nation and walk together in love, compassion and hope.

**God of hope, in these times of change,  
unite our nation and guide our leaders with your wisdom.  
Give us courage to overcome our fears,  
and help us to build a future in which all may prosper and share;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

+ Robert Exon

+Nicholas Plymouth

+Jacqueline Crediton