

# RURAL THEOLOGY

## FORTHCOMING ARTICLE ABSTRACTS

### **The Power of Place: Listening to Visitors' Prayers Left in a Shrine in Rural Wales**

*Tania ap Sion*

#### ABSTRACT

Previous empirical studies of intercessory prayer-requests left in Christian locations in England and Wales have shown that aspects of prayer content may be shaped by place. Further studies relating to 'place' and 'space' for prayer and personal reflection have sought to explore this relationship further. The present study builds on and develops this research tradition with an analysis of 939 prayers left at the church and shrine of Saint Melangell in rural mid-Wales, which are read within the broader context of place. A number of 'shaping place themes' are identified in the visitors' prayers, such as, Saint Melangell, place / sacred place, sanctuary / haven / refuge, pilgrimage / journey, a place to return, answered prayer, nature / environment, ecumenical openness, women, and shrine guardian. The study concludes by asking what rural churches may learn from such visitors about the significance of place and prayer in their ministries to those outside their gathered congregations.

Keywords: Sacred place, prayer, church visitors, open churches, shrines, shaping place themes, spiritual tourism, rural

### **What Prevents Christians from Learning to Be Good?**

*Jeff Astley*

#### ABSTRACT

This article riffs on the title of John Hull's classic work, *What prevents Christian adults from learning?* in which he identifies the pathology of the 'unlearning religious person' and the defences that individuals and churches construct to avoid the pain of Christian cognitive learning. Learning Christian values and virtues is rather different, but can still be a pain – and a much more potent and personal one. The paper explores some of the problems and possibilities, both for disciples and ministers, of 'learning the Christian character'.

Keywords: education, character, formation, learning, morality, virtues

## **Impact of Covid-19 on Fragile Churches: Is the Rural Situation Really Different?**

*Leslie J. Francis, Andrew Village and S. Anne Lawson*

### **ABSTRACT**

In a series of earlier papers in *Rural Theology*, drawing on qualitative research, Anne Lawson has advanced and documented the fragile rural church thesis. The present study draws on data from 745 full-time parochial clergy serving in the Church of England who responded to the *Coronavirus, Church & You Survey* to test two objections to Lawson's thesis. The first objection is that the qualitative research has not demonstrated the *extent* of the fragile church thesis among rural clergy. The new data show that one in three rural clergy endorse the thesis. The second objection is that the qualitative research has not demonstrated that the thesis is *specific* to rural ministry. The new data show that, although the fragile church thesis is not limited to rural ministry, it is more in evidence within rural areas.

Keywords: Fragile churches; rural churches; Covid-19; empirical theology

## **Theological Diversity in Rural Churches**

*John Holdsworth*

### **ABSTRACT**

Although the importance of context and particularity has long been recognised in relation to biblical texts, less attention is paid to the particularity and context of congregations. At a time when church franchise programmes are popular and when those are increasingly derived from urban contexts, it is important to defend and describe the particularity and diversity of rural congregations. The Bible contains many interesting and varied pictures and images of the Church, but recent scholarship has rarely pursued their implications. A sense of place is important in theology, and it is unfair to deny congregations the opportunity to explore options for theological description and so to help them establish and explore their own theological particularity. Biblical narrative may also be helpful in this regard and two examples are given from the author's own experience: the Remnant Church and the Pentecost Church, as a prompt to further discussion.

Keywords: Context; place; rural church; diversity

## **Faith in Lockdown: Experiences of Rural Church of England Clergy and Laity during the Covid-19 Pandemic**

*Andrew Village and Leslie J. Francis*

### **ABSTRACT**

An online survey examined the experiences of clergy and lay people in the Church of England during the lockdown caused by Covid-19 from May to July 2020. Comparison of 1,001 people who received ministry in rural areas with 1,823 who received ministry elsewhere suggested fairly similar experiences in terms of accessing online worship and support from their churches. Rural worshippers were slightly less likely to access worship from their own churches. Comparison of 274 rural stipendiary parochial clergy with 507 counterparts ministering elsewhere suggested their churches were equally busy in offering online worship. Rural clergy offered more Services of the Word, and fewer Communion services. Although the support and care offered by clergy was similar in both sorts of area, rural clergy seemed better placed to serve their local communities and to offer occasional offices. Rural clergy felt better supported by the public, the national church, and funeral directors.

Keywords: Church of England; Covid-19; ministry; online worship; pastoral support; survey

## **Comparing Religious Beliefs and Strategies in Rural Ministry among Catholic and Evangelical Anglican Clergy**

*Christopher J. F. Rutledge*

### **ABSTRACT**

This study explores the way in which rural parishes served by Anglican clergy shaped in the Evangelical tradition and rural parishes served by clergy shaped in the Catholic tradition may experience different forms of Christian teaching and different styles of pastoral ministry. Findings from a survey completed by 212 clergy serving in a defined area of a rural diocese demonstrated considerable difference between these two groups of clergy.

KEYWORDS: Rural ministry, Christian belief, evangelical clergy, Anglo-Catholic clergy