

# On the vine

## **A Longer Read: Being Deaf in a time of Coronavirus**

*How does the coronavirus pandemic make an impact on the Deaf community? The Revd Neil Robinson explains...*

This year has been a strange one!! The news every day has been about the recent outbreak of the coronavirus and as a Chaplain to the Deaf Community it has been a heart rending experience to hear these sad stories from across the world.

Shock, confusion and nervousness are a common factor during this time but I feel it is has been much worse for the deaf community, British Sign Language users in particular. There has been lot of frustration throughout the Deaf community due to the lack of Interpreted access to the daily information updates from the Government.

At the beginning of this pandemic, there were BSL interpreters (both hearing and deaf) available for the Government's briefings but rarely did you see an Interpreter on the televised briefings. This led to a disparity of access for BSL users.

There have been many campaigns for a BSL Interpreter to be present at the briefings to enable Sign Language Users to have full access and to be kept informed as to the ever changing information on how to keep themselves safe during to the Lockdown etc.

I received an email request to sign the online petition to campaign for better access to this kind of information in BSL. I was happy to sign the petition because I feel strongly that the government needs to be aware of the Deaf community's access needs. Scotland and Wales have stepped up and started providing better access but I believe that the access in England is still lagging behind.

I have heard there have a few deaf BSL users who unfortunately were exposed to the coronavirus – they had mild symptoms and fortunately have made a good recovery.

As a Chaplain, my challenge is to try and reach out to those, in these difficult times, who may need support but who do not have access to technology. I have had to think of different ways to contact them and have achieved this by writing letters, dropping in notes or cards through their door, and working a lot with the Social Services' Specialist Team for Deaf People who have still been making face to face visits so we can keep the older people safe and well.

The Deaf Clubs across the diocese, including Bournemouth (where I have a Permission to Officiate to minister to their community) face a huge impact on their business. Deaf clubs are where people regularly meet up to socialise on a regular basis, but their committees have been forced to close the buildings to the public on instruction from the government. This has an impact on the wellbeing of deaf people and also affected the flow of information, as a deaf club is a great place to spread news and information.

I set myself a challenge to send text messages to deaf and hearing individuals every day to keep in touch and I am grateful for the various forms of social media that enables us all to keep in touch with family and friends.

I have also spent a lot of time in contact with those deaf people comfortable with technology via FaceTime, Skype etc and asked them about their experiences of the lockdown. One commented that it was “a difficult time for her family as they had to learn how to cope with staying at home for a long periods of time”.

She also said that the “lockdown had changed their perspective about relationship, taught her family that quality time with the family is invaluable and also to slow down with their life”.

To conclude, I would like to add an encouraging verse for those who have faith.

**Ephesians 6:10**

***Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.***

This verse teaches us to focus on our Lord Jesus Christ and be courageous as we face this strange time. Remember, be strong in the Lord. Don't lose faith - fix your eyes on Jesus.