

The challenges, sadness's and consequences of the Pandemic have been very dark for some, but there have also been glimmers of light and hope for the future.

In recent months there has been a sabbath rest for the natural world, less pollution, more bird-song, more attention to the garden and the allotment, new exploration of the countryside. A fresh opportunity to engage with the beauty and wonder of the world that God has made.

We've also been reminded of the importance of the retail food chain, an extraordinary supply that kept stacking the shelves of our shops, but only because of the dedication of lots of workers behind the scenes here and around the world. Recognition and appreciation of the work others do has increased and that must be a good thing.

However, climate change, the chaos wrought by floods and locusts, in addition to the pandemic, have had a much bigger impact on other countries than we have experienced here in the UK. And it is good for us to open our eyes to see that world-wide picture, rather than be trapped in an inward looking narrow vision.

One way we can help one another to do that is to respond to this year's Bishop's Harvest Appeal. As with previous years, we are supporting two agencies, which are both seeking to bring relief to those most affected by the Covid 19 crisis, Friends of the Holy Land and TEAR Fund. However, there are two changes this year. Instead of dividing the receipts equally between both agencies, we are inviting givers to state their preference for one or the other or both. Secondly, for the first time this year, giving can be done online.

I know that for many personal finances are really stretched. The same is true for many parishes as they seek to fund the costs of ministry and mission around the diocese. In October I am calling for two weeks of prayer, followed by two weeks of appeal for parishes to receive what they need to maintain their work at current levels. It was a challenge before the pandemic. It is now more serious.

But as Christians we look to others before ourselves and a generous response to the Harvest Appeal this year will demonstrate that. It will also prepare the way for the appeal for parish funds.

Let's respond as a Christian community to the grace and generosity of God, by giving Him and the work of the Gospel access to the funds at our disposal, to further His mission here and around the world. I often quote those words of King David in the Old Testament, where he made a prophetic statement.

'All things come from You and of Your own have we given You.'

May our giving this Autumn express the compassion of Jesus for those most in need of support and help many to come to know and love Him for themselves, both here in this great diocese of Blackburn, but in other places around the world.

May God bless our giving and generosity.

Rt Rev Julian Henderson
Bishop of Blackburn