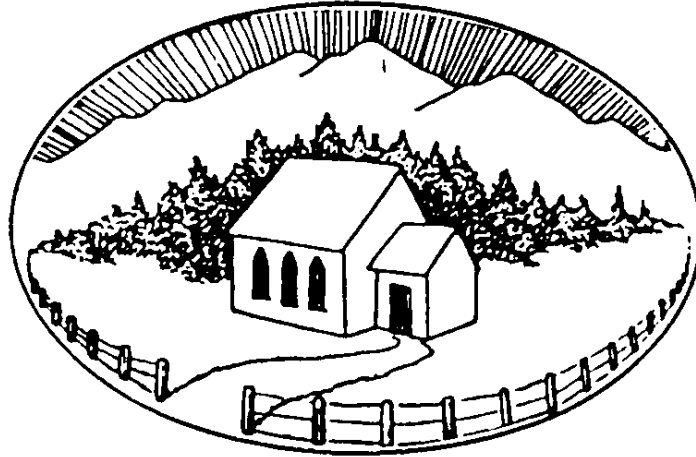


Rural Network News



No. 15

July 2000

It has been said that we do not pass the earth on to future generations but we borrow it from them.

Your Kingdom Come Mission Prayer Handbook, 1996

Rural Network News aims to share ideas for good rural ministry, create a sense of belonging to a unique group and encourage one another.

Te kaitiakitanga, te manaakitanga, te kotahitanga.

Please share this newsletter with others you think may be interested. Feel free to make photocopies.

Comments on any material are always welcome.

Gentle Rain and Refreshed Hearts

Lauriston's little church could have perhaps fitted another half dozen people, but that would have been it. It was virtually "full house" on a Sunday morning ideal for farmers to take time off. That is, with light rain falling and crops safely gathered in (more or less), people happily gathered to look back, look ahead and just enjoy being together.

Former residents were thrilled to receive special invitations to the combined Barrhill (Anglican) and Lauriston (Presbyterian) Churches event and a number took the chance to reconnect. In a worship event that was appreciated for being not too heavy and not too long, those present acknowledged the stresses of the past season – for example, too much sprouted wheat and the fact that it's not easy doing hard maths problems on your own because Dad and Mum are busy – and focussed on the real pluses of rural life – good soil and the continual promise of a new season to come.

The worship leader may have been a bit down after the Highlanders loss the night before (this is in Crusaders country), but her spirits were soon raised by the relaxed and happy faces of busy people taking time out to recharge their batteries.

For take time they did. Worship may have been over in 50 minutes, but the cuppa to follow was another matter. 9 am start yet home in time to think about preparing lunch!

Robyn McPhail

Country Conversations Enjoyed!

Imagine a week of warm cloudless sunny days in Northland at what someone called “the most radical church conference I have attended!” It was the Trans-Tasman Rural Ministry Conference from April 10 to 14.

The theme of the conference was “Country Conversations” and the local committee organised a creative and well-sequenced programme which enabled participants to work and live as a full conference for the first 30 hours then split into smaller groups which spent the next two days gaining grass roots experience and exploring rural ministry options before reconvening for a final plenary day.

The dramatic hills and estuaries of the Hokianga, the peaceful history-filled Oihi Bay and Marsden Cross, the Bay of Islands tourism industry in school holiday mode – were backdrops for the realities small rural congregations grapple with ...

- * the unemployment, health and educational needs of the rural northern Maori;
- * the struggles of isolated farming communities as part of the overall plight of the modern farmer in an age of globalisation;
- * experiments in a variety of forms of local ministry – Anglican, Co-operating, Catholic, Baptist;
- * discovering relevant servant, hospitality and outreach ministries in a variety of communities, including to the holiday makers and tourists of Paihia and Russell;
- * listening to those exploring non-Christian spiritualities in local communities;
- * new perspectives on orthodox theology - Pa Henare Tate and the theology of *Tapu* and *Mana*;
- * working with models of social change with the Northland Urban Rural Ministry team;
- * re-examining our history and its relationships to the Treaty of Waitangi ...

Looking at all these issues with a large contingent of Australians, but also representatives from Canada, US, UK, and India, while sharing in creative liturgies and contemporary hymns that come out of our Aotearoa New Zealand environment, led to a relevant and exciting week.

COMMON THREADS

John Morris, an Australian participant from New South Wales, gives us this listing of key concerns to emerge from the conference:

(1) Globalisation. The impacts of globalisation are being felt by rural areas in every country. By sharing and listening we discovered that our rural problems are not caused by farmers in Britain or Europe or North America or Australia. We are all impacted by the same global forces. These same forces diminish the quality of life of people in Third World countries, Indigenous peoples and the urban poor in our own countries.

The search for new ways forward has begun. Rural communities, like those in Northland, respond to the cry TINA (“There is no alternative”) with the creative reply TAMA (“There are many alternatives”). The priority of the Gospel and the Marae unite – “*He Tangata, He Tangata, He Tangata ... People ... People ... People ..*” Rural Churches have things to say to Governments and the Churches were there in the protests in Seattle.

2) Maori Pakeha Experiences

The Australian Churches are working to build new relationships between Aboriginal Christians and White Australian Christians. It was thus an equally important experience for Australians and Pakeha New Zealanders to enjoy Maori hospitality, to experience a rich communal life and to learn about Maori Christian theology. John writes:

Tamatea marae at Motuti was a complex and significant beginning to the Northland journey. It created a theological framework that cradled subsequent responses.

Despite differences and tensions, there are real attempts to work together. The Maori community and the Churches are searching out a neighbouring spirituality, a conscious striving to bring two worlds together in Christ.

The experience together at Motuti gave strength and energy for the rest of the journey.

(3) Ministry teams

A variety of ministry models, in action on the ground in Northland, were reported on during the week. Local shared ministry can work. There was a determination to celebrate good things, work through “the rough bits” and name the problems (eg “eight headed Vicars”).

Local ministry teams (in a variety of forms) are affirmed: they provide full ministry where previously congregations got a small share of a ministry based somewhere else and all members are in ministry.

Teams central now to ministry in Northland are working because there has been careful planning and training provided by the larger Church working with the local Church. Time has been taken to prepare local congregations and to select and equip ministry teams.

(4) Ongoing questions

- How does the Church stand alongside rural people?
- What is the role of the regional Church? What is the role of the national Church?
- How can we continue the conversations?
- How can we match conversations with actions?

THE “GIFTS” OF THE RURAL

With the drift from the land, the yearning for a Creation based spirituality is heightened. Though innately more conservative, rural people are proving very creative, especially in their close involvement with their communities. Their new styles of ministry, though often forced on them by economic factors, are the “cutting edge” of the church’s mission. Sharing the vision and articulating the theology are part of this new leadership.

RURAL MORALE

New larger scale corporate styles of farming, lifestyle blocks and tourism, are reducing many long term country dwellers to a new servant status. With loss of status and political clout, as well as loss of income, farmers, their rural communities and families need affirmation – especially in their mandate to care for the natural world and to live in a creative relationship to it. The Church has a key place, both in the times of celebration and in its pastoral presence through traumatic events, to build up community.

Our prayer is that the “Country Conversations”, stimulated around the places visited and the issues raised, will continue to enliven the Church’s ministry in many rural and provincial centres.

This item is based on reports received from Dr Garth Cant and Bishop Murray Mills: many thanks to Garth and Murray.

Quotable Quotes from Pukekohe

Prior to Northland’s *Country Conversations* 21 rural church practitioners and resource people from the United Kingdom, South India, Canada, United States, Australia and New Zealand gathered at Pukekohe to share their rich supply of experiences and insights.

Here are some of the things that were said:

Regarding leadership...

Fear leads to legalism – hold to the manual, do things by the book. Anxiety stifles creativity.

It is sad that we, in talking of leadership, are not talking of ecumenical activity, ecumenical leadership.

When we look at good effective ecumenical activity we find it locally, but not in structures.

Regarding ministry...

When we talk of ministry of all baptised, clergy say “that sounds good, but I don’t think our lay people are ready for it yet” and lay people say “that sounds good, but I don’t think our clergy are ready for it yet.”

How do we expose lay people to our church when they already do so much in church and business that their lives are full and stressful.

We need a different 'how to' model from the professional ministry model.

Our 'ministry' of all baptised may have nothing to do with the running of our church on Sunday morning for nine people in the congregation are involved in school as 'mentor' with high needs students.

It is important to simplify the institutional church to empower people to be Christians in the community.

A suggestion to uncouple priesthood and seminary training: ordain priests and train enablers. The primary and normative ministry of the church is that of the people of God in the world.

Regarding rural spirituality...

Very few can articulate the culture and spirituality of those who live and work on the land. Church denominations tend to speak 'Greenpeace' ecology, rather than local ecotheology.

We do not have theology or religious language to name eco-exploitation, water abuse and deforestation as sin.

Excerpted from the report compiled by participants, with thanks to editors, Garth and Lloyd.

Ohnosecond:

That minuscule fraction of time in which you realise that you've just made a BIG mistake.

Spirituality and Economics

Last RNN reproduced comments on the RFD+ email group, in response to host Brien McGarvey comment:

I am convinced that we cannot talk about spirituality in this age without talking about work and finances. In almost every instance, especially during Bible studies, I find that most of the hopes described by my parishioners are tied much more to possessions desired and financial security for the future than for the delayed gratification that heaven offers.

What do you think? How does your Bible and your experience address faith in the context of a consumerist society?

Here are a few more of the responses:

Just wanted to join in on the discussion of how consumerism is impacting rural America, and share with you what I have been sharing with my congregation.

It is not just consumerism that creates the systemic evil destroying rural society. It is the blind addiction of our society to a blatant consumerism that is totally oblivious to how consumer demands are met, who produces those consumer goods, how they are produced, and what are the long-term impacts of the current production and consumption systems.

The winners in the marketplace are ...those who can profit the most through their exploitation of human and natural resources.

It is a consumerism that worships at the god of a marketplace that is based on who can profit the most by providing goods and services at the lowest prices to the consumers. This kind of marketplace succeeds best when the true costs of production and consumption are paid by the society and the environment, rather than by the consumer. The winners in the marketplace are not those that can best produce goods with the greatest efficiency, but rather it is those who can profit the most through their exploitation of human and natural resources. It is a blind consumerism that says eat, drink, and be merry, for it does not matter what the consequences are for today or tomorrow, as long as I can consume.

In this system of consumerism, the marketplace becomes the all-knowing, the all-powerful, the invincible and the final arbiter of human endeavour. We have to sacrifice morality, conscience, and our Judeo-Christian heritage and never let such "emotional" concerns impact our economic decisions, as we offer our lives to this new god of the marketplace.

This type of consumerism is at the heart of the spiritual crisis that has engulfed all of America and much of the Westernised world, and is at the root of the economic, political, and social crises that are devouring rural America.

Karl Limvere, Medina ND

I want to add my 2 cents to what Jerry Avise-Rouse has uncovered by coining the word 'materiality'. [Is 'materiality' a word? It seems to me that Jesus, being a good Hebrew, was very materially oriented..., concerned about the necessities of life.] I think there is great utility in a word which reminds us, every time we say it, of the fundamental point: Jesus was very material without being consumptionist. I like that word better than consumerist, because it reminds me of the excesses we are now committing, and of the irreversible nature of some of it.

Jesus never surrendered his concern for people's material well-being nor his scorn for the display and misuse of wealth. While he never disparaged wealth itself, he also never blessed the seeking of wealth.

I sense a profound difference between wealth and abundance.

I sense a profound difference between wealth and abundance. I view wealth as abundance converted into currency and negotiable instruments or items and it often leads to hoarding, consumption, aggressiveness or even aggression. I think of abundance as the result of God's overwhelming love.

The problem with today's culture is that it tends to create, or at least foster, a zero-sum game. I can only become wealthy at the expense of others; if the other guy is getting wealthy, it must be at my expense. A perfect example is being played out in the computer industry.

But the best example for what I am trying to say is water. Water bubbling up from the ground at a spring: that is abundance. When people use that water to turn turbine generators, to irrigate cropland, to water livestock, to grind grain, even to flush toilets, I see them participating with God in the use of creation. I see the charge to humanity in Genesis 1, being accepted and fulfilled in the manner of a good steward. However, that spring water can also be bottled, stored, advertised, shipped and finally quaffed at swish gathering spots. Here is wealth and the creation of wealth out of abundance.

Of course, water is for drinking by people, by ALL people, rich and poor, urban and rural, young and old. It is meant to be kept pure of contaminants, and to be so readily-available that no one has to drink the swill of the Third World slums, or the chemical leachate of the Love Canal, or the polluted fluid offered by the rural water company owned by tightwad "investors" living hundreds of miles distant.

God has given us more abundance than we need and people attuned to God's Spirit can unleash it

The task for all of us in rural areas is to step outside the culture's box, and to re-vision the situation. God has given us more abundance than we need; and, people attuned to God's Spirit can unleash and make productive, that abundance (in fact, they are a major part of that abundance).

Joel Turrell

More responses next time...

RFD+ is a daily Rural Ministry Discussion list provided by CHASSIE and the Center for Rural Church Leadership and Sponsored by the Rural Church Network of the United States and Canada. You can easily access RFD+, the Center for Rural Church Ministry and all the CHASSIE pages at: <http://ruralchurch.org>

Mouse Potato: The on-line, wired generation's answer to the couch potato.

Almost Sleepless in Seattle

In December 1999 the World Trade Organisation met in Seattle. There was widespread and unprecedented protest on our television screens. Rural people and the rural Church were there. The rural Churches representatives report:

BACKGROUND

In 1998 46 people from 25 countries, representing Christian farming organisations or Church programmes doing grass roots work with farming people, met for a week to explore the meaning of globalisation for rural people and to start envisaging a Christian response. The meeting appointed an ongoing steering committee, the members of which found themselves in Seattle for the week of the WTO negotiations.

'CHRISTIAN RURAL NETWORK'

We made a number of substantive decisions: to keep our association loose, informal and economical to manage; to gladly accept the backing of the Urban and Rural Mission Department of the World Council of Churches; to adopt the name 'Christian Rural Network'.

We also agreed to encourage well thought out and prepared exchanges and visits, beginning with a Canadian visit to India, and to seek an appropriate relationship with Via Campesina - the worldwide peasant and small farmer movement.

During the week we found ourselves drawn in our morning reflections to Psalm 82, Esther 4:1-17, Jesus' temptations in the wilderness, the feeding of the five thousand, and the story of Naboth's vineyard.

THE STREETS AND THE MEETING PLACES

Seattle, home of both MicroSoft and Boeing Aircraft Corporation, is in no way marginalised in the world economy. And yet all the churches decided to open their doors and make their premises available to those with grave doubts about globalisation.

This partnership began with two Jubilee 2000 services, the second followed by a large march. Throughout the week there were many meetings and teach-ins on aspects of globalisation - environment, labour conditions, women's rights and roles, plant patents, biotechnology, corporate power, family controlled agriculture, animal welfare and more. A consensus of concern and determination poured on to the streets, peacefully.

From the bringing together of local realities, a larger reality emerges starkly. As one US farmer put it, "It makes me mad when the SOBs take my corn at less than \$2 a bushel, and even madder when I know they will use it to bust another farmer somewhere else in the world." Typically farmers have accepted the line that their problem is other farmers elsewhere. A very important question will be how quickly this grasp of the global reality is able to spread from Seattle.

We have to help this awakening and give it a deeper basis. Christians see true 'globalisation' as being humanity united by love, not divided by an overwhelming principle of competition. God is over all, Creation is for all, past, present and future. Markets are not inexorable deities, but human creations.

INTER-GOVERNMENTAL NEGOTIATIONS AT WTO

In our lobby activities we focused on the negotiations on agriculture. In contrast to all predictions, agriculture was not the stumbling block for the Millennium Round. The negotiations were fierce, but progressing.

The point of hardest debate was the stated objective to "eliminate export subsidies". A compromise was reached by stating that a "substantial reduction in the direction of progressive elimination" is the aim, and that "all forms of export subsidisation" have to be taken on board, which includes also the US programmes of counterpart funds and export credits.

Very thrilling for us is the mentioning of "preserving the international food aid disciplines", so that the surplus and the scarcity question are balanced.

Seattle did not fail because of agriculture. However, great differences of opinion were also revealed. WTO is searching for new ways to resume the negotiations.

THE VIEW AHEAD WITH WTO

When negotiators wrangle about whether and how you can include measures to protect food security in a treaty to regulate agriculture, and end by proposing that these are only allowable “if they are not trade distorting”, then we are looking into a fairyland. In the real world people would say you can trade if it does not distort the needs of food security. In many ways the WTO world is an upside down one. Yet the world does need rule-based systems, because without them the weaker nations and groups are very vulnerable. So what is to be done?

The discussions must go on. The Christian Rural Network will seek to renew contacts between the World Trade Organisation and the World Council of Churches, both of which are based in Geneva.

We feel very privileged to have shared the week, but very responsible as a result:
Rev. Martha Kovacs (Hungary); Rudi Buntzel (Wurtemberg, Germany); Anne Mutisya (Anglican Church, Kenya); Jaya Raju (Lutheran Church, India); Christopher Jones (Agricultural Christian Fellowship, Great Britain); John Garbutt (WCC URM programme in Europe); Stewart Clark (Canadian Food Grains Bank).

The Marvellous Resources We Have!

The Presbytery of the Central West has about 50 congregations. In the early 80's we had 28 ministers serving those congregations. In 2000, if all placements are filled, there will be 15 settlements, 3 of which are part time. That is mainly because about half the money available to pay for local ministerial leadership in 1980 is no longer available in 2000.

In the last four years, giving to Mission and Service Fund by the congregations of Central West presbytery has dropped from \$180,000 to \$130,000.

Some congregations have lost half their worshipping members. The popular explanations for this decline in the church are:

1. Declining income of farmers.
2. Declining population of rural towns and countryside.
3. Ineffective or unpopular ministers

There is no doubt that at least the first two of those three factors have taken a huge toll on rural churches. But those factors are not the whole story. Take my congregation of Narromine and its partner Trangie.

POPULATION GROWTH

- Narromine has a growing population.
- We have become a dormitory suburb to the fastest growing inland city in NSW, Dubbo.
- People are choosing to retire to Narromine from places further out such as Goodooga and Ivanhoe.
- Irrigation development has seen the growth of job creating industries like cotton ginning and hybrid seed processing.

PROSPERITY

The farmers of Narromine and Trangie are relatively prosperous. Irrigation farmers and many large scale dry land croppers are doing quite nicely, thank you. Smaller mixed farmers and others reliant on sheep are certainly doing it tough. But taxation office figures indicate that average taxable income in Trangie is well above the state average.

GOOD MINISTERS

We have had a succession of popular and effective ministers with relatively brief vacancies between settlements.

In summary, we are a prosperous rural community with a growing population, and the ministers seem to have done a good job. *Yet the church in Narromine and Trangie is going backwards just as quickly as other rural communities.*

So ... **WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?**

We wish we knew! If we knew why Narromine and Trangie are not making a go of it, despite the huge advantages we have, maybe other congregations would recognise some of our symptoms in their church. The rural church across Australia desperately wants to know what to do about the decline.

Maybe a first step might be to stop blaming external factors like:

- low commodity prices
- or population drift
- or "the synod" sending us the wrong minister.

Maybe we could explore how to make better use of the marvellous resources we do have.

We have enough money – if we really want to give it!

We have enough love – if we really want to share it!

We have enough gifts in the people of our congregation – if only we will unleash them!

So many rural Christians have convinced themselves that we are trapped in a spiral of inexorable and inevitable decline. Such defeatist attitudes will become self-fulfilling prophecies!

Bruce Irvine, Narromine, NSW

Bruce Irvine is the editor of the Uniting Church of Australia NSW Rural Ministry Unit's Journal Ruminations

"Losing" the Farm

At some time during their career, it is almost inevitable that ministers serving in an agricultural area will be called upon to provide pastoral care to a family who is faced with having to leave the family farm involuntarily. Although the degree of stress in the agricultural industry may not be what it was during the depths of the interest-rate crisis of the mid-1980s, each year some farmers have no option but to go out of business. This may be the result of a personal crisis (e.g. an accident or an emotional disorder), an unfortunate business decision, a hardship limited to one geographic area (e.g. drought, frost or flooding) or a downturn in an entire sector, such has occurred recently for hogs and grains. Whatever the cause, it can be difficult for those who are not farmers to fully grasp the anguish that leaving one's farm can cause. The following exercise is offered as an attempt to provide some comparison for what it might be like.

This exercise contains a list of ten items for you to reflect upon. It might be most effective for you to sit quietly while someone else reads the list to you slowly (e.g. 10 - 15 seconds between each item).

An Exercise in Visualising what it might be like to lose one's farm

Think about the one thing that most closely symbolises, represents or embodies each of the following for you personally and what it means to you. (This could be an item, position or ability, etc. but do not include any persons). As you consider each item, imagine how you would feel if it were to be taken from you, as a result of forces that were largely beyond your control.

- your current home.
- your most-prized material possession.
- security for you and your family.
- your ability to earn an income.
- your favourite place of retreat or spiritual renewal.
- your family heritage and/or traditions.
- your self-image.
- what your family and/or community expects you to be or do.

- your favourite pet or animal.
- your hobby.

Now try to imagine what it would be like to lose them all simultaneously, and then to be blamed for it.

David Morris, Southern Ontario

David Morris, along with his wife Elizabeth McKinlay, participated in the Northland Rural Ministry Conference.

Bumpy Chariot Rides

The following article, subtitled Notes for Generation X Preaching first appeared in the NZ Lay Preachers' Association magazine The Preacher and is reprinted here with the permission of the author. Although it is clearly urban in some examples given, its major points are pertinent and vital to the spirituality of our young people who may live in the country but are definitely global creatures.

Recently our college group was preparing for leading worship in the Friday chapel at United Theological College. As I was the preacher, I explained the outline of my sermon based on Acts 8:26-40, Phillip and the Ethiopian Eunuch. I had two themes in mind and hadn't chosen the main thread till I saw the enthusiastic response of two GenXers in the group. They lit up at the phrase 'irreverent spirituality' and tore away into Monty Pythonesque and Red Faces skits. They laughed hilariously as they imagined skits that would fit my chosen title, 'Bumpy Chariot Rides'. After their initial idea of two people sitting in an imaginary car as it swung around corners or bumped over pot holes, they moved on to making the pulpit into a chariot with Phillip running alongside to the music from Chariots of Fire. We finally decided to hold our skit in the foyer before going into the chapel as they did not want to offend anyone who preferred a more reverent form of worship.

IRREVERENT SPIRITUALITY

These GenXers in their love of the oblique and the bizarre, were displaying what Tom Beaudoin, in *Virtual Faith*, calls irreverent spirituality. Through irony, the grotesque or the alien, they explore a religious sensibility:

Life on the margins, on the boundary, demonstrates Xers' willingness to keep their horizons open, to live unfinished lives. In this openness to the future, people can find real religious truth. In pushing boundaries and turning inside out, Xers are implicitly preparing for (and encouraging) a religious experience, an experience of divine grace that upsets all boundaries and expectations. (p.133)

Beaudoin analyses several music videos, such as REM's *Losing My Religion* and Madonna's *Like a Virgin*, that reveal a searching for deeper understanding and more ethical faith. In some of these videos the Church and its representatives do not come out very well. It is often the preacher who has domesticated the message by 'selling out' the gospel to a consumer ridden society. Beaudoin claims that many of the videos that appear offensive and even blasphemous, are in fact trying to reclaim Jesus from the church that no longer truly hears his message of love, inclusion and acceptance:

As 'Like a Virgin' illustrates, the world of the street can be a site of religious activity and experience. Madonna liberates the saint, whose blessings of racial reconciliation are desperately needed in American society right now. Through her action, she claims resources from her religious tradition to address the real-life situations she faces, including racism.' The test of Madonna's faith is not how it is contained within the Church but whether it can guide her experience in the world (where she acts to right injustice), (pp.91-2)

Harvey Cox claims that despite the many articles bemoaning the selfish insularity of young people, the Generation X youth he meets are interested in spirituality. Although Generation Xers are famously suspicious of all institutions, including government, educational and religious ones 'they are looking for a Jesus they can trust'.

WILL YOU BE THERE FOR ME?

Many complain about the fickle nature of GenX and their seeming inability to make a commitment, yet Beaudoin claims that their most fundamental question is 'will you be there for me' (p.140). The main theme of this generation is one of absence. Dislocation through family reconfigurations, economic stress, fear of the future, Internet freedom and postmodern uncertainties leave GenX in a psychological and spiritual crisis of meaning. So many people, metanarratives and modern certainties have departed, leaving them feeling abandoned and fragile. The movie *Titanic* was extremely popular with GenX because the two heroes had a love that survived even death; they were there for each other even in the face of tragedy. The church must 'be there for them' even as young people flit in and out of worship because of their hurried lives.

A PLACE TO BELONG

Many in the church believe they are no longer reaching young people. They don't know how to relate to them or how to tell the gospel to this seemingly alien group of youth in and beyond the walls of the Church. Yet Sharon Reed says:

Young people hunger for a place to belong, a place to express themselves as well as their doubts and concerns. They long for a community that lives the beatitudes, is inclusive and expansive, hospitable and welcoming. (p.8)

If a community is willing to create a space where young people are truly met as themselves and not as they are made to feel, then that church will have a creative ministry and worship to young people.

Two stories from the United States remind me that young people are searching – in a variety of ways – for a deeper understanding and experience of faith. Both stories come from Seattle, the home of grunge music. The first describes a huge church, which was so full of 20 somethings (the bemoaned lost group in many churches) that they were almost hanging out of the windows (Acts 20:9). Unlike Eutychus, these young people did not fall asleep during the hour long sermon which presented basic teaching about the faith and the Bible. The second story describes a traditional Anglican worship held in a Gothic-style church where over two hundred young people participate regularly in evensong. They sit quietly while the choir sings centuries old chants and Gregorian hymns.

The secret behind these churches is their willingness to connect to young people's desire for community and connection. This willingness also means living with difference and accepting different forms of worship. If we understand the gospel of Jesus Christ, then we will be willing to open our communal life to the alienated, the isolated and the dislocated young people. It certainly means we will try to understand their stories and their lives and include them in our preaching.

We will also educate our churches to see youth as they are, and not as we hope them to be. A youth worker recently told me a story about a young person who was giving his testimony in church for the first time. It was a very moving story revealing the depth of pain and struggle that this young person had suffered in his young life. He wore a hat in church because he didn't want to offend anyone with the obscene words that could still be seen etched in his shaven head. One member of the congregation angrily criticised the youth worker for allowing the young person to speak in church with his hat on! Instead of rejoicing that one of the prodigal children had come 'home', the elder brother was harping about his clothes.

MESSY WORSHIP

The worship that young people design will be varied, include multimedia, be quick moving and full of images and imagery. It will be rich, messy and meaningful to them. Support their creativity by worshipping with them and living through their way of making meaning. Tom Beaudoin alerts us to the sacred dimensions of GenX lives and culture and urges us to tread carefully on this sacred ground. He sees the seeds of transformation – within GenX culture and within the church. Can we bear to be transformed by those who see another dimension of our own religions?

Christine Gapes

Tom Beaudoin (1998) *Virtual faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X* Jossey-Bass

Sharon Reed (1991) A Spiritually Challenging Vision for Youth, pp.1-12 in Sharon Reed (ed) *Spirituality*, Don Bosco Multimedia.

Percussive Maintenance:

The fine art of whacking the heck out of an electronic device to get it to work again.

Rural-Urban Dialogue: a fresh approach

“I don’t go anywhere if I can’t land there in a jet,” one acquaintance quipped when I told him I worked with rural communities in the vicinity. My immediate response was to say “How sad. You miss so much!”

Admittedly that isn’t the kind of guy who would much benefit from any kind of rural-urban dialogue. But there are many who are prepared to be pushed gently beyond the nostalgia-for-the-old-days. That “pushing” can be done by individuals who appreciate and practise that art of storytelling. And rural people have an advantage because storytelling is our chief means of communication.

We have a wonderful story to tell: about a way of life that is unique, about struggles that are Herculean, and about outcomes that effect people across the country. These stories are ripe with elements of passion and pain. And they ring true because so much of the time they are told on a first person basis.

START WITH THE POSSIBLE

First, pick your audience. You are only setting yourself up if you think you are going to get anywhere with the “Lear Jet affectionado”. But think of a story you can tell your kids, the town folks when you drop by the local watering hole, the ex-rural relatives who have moved to the city.

Let “Rural Is Cool” be your theme, and find stories and truths that tug at feelings of recognition deep inside each of them. Start with your stories, and they will be adding their own. Help them re-member their traditions. Update them on more recent happenings that confirm those old truths. When was the last time you listened to the subtle ways your kids indicated there are things about rural that they consider “cool”? Were you able to enhance their self-esteem? Do you wish you had?

NAME THE VALUES YOU HOLD DEAR

Storytelling helps us make sense out of our lives. The subtleties that capture our attention, the interpretations we add because of our experiences, the way we find ourselves coping with crisis ... It is as we ponder these things and choose how we will reveal them in a story context that we take ownership of the values and truths that underlie the stories.

To give a few examples - Because I’ve faced enough hardship to know there has to be a Source that brings life to the land, and strength to the people, I can talk about the Abiding Presence of God. Because I have felt the beating pulse of nature as I walk barefooted across the land, I can talk about the tragedy of seeing those places where the land has been made sterile. Because I have teamed with others to fight a grass fire, or build an arena, or work in the booth at a ball tournament, I can testify to the ways this community is an integral part of me, and I of it.

Because of the tears that spontaneously well up at the funeral of a neighbour’s child, I am humbled and wonder how I could bear such pain. Make a diary of your stories.

All of these responses give us clues to the spiritual values we hold dear. Add to this the way our hearts leap when we see these values reflected in literature and art and scripture, and we know that it is in this way our spirit is nurtured. Indeed we are able to help each other identify the values we hold in common as a rural people.

By sharing the values we hold dear with others who believed they no longer had a memory for these things, the circle of understanding slowly grows. By helping our children name and give credence to understandings they once thought insignificant, they become a visible part of

the circle. By reaching out to share our stories with those who may be looking for clues to how they can grow spiritually, we are inviting them to journey with us for the present.

CONCLUSION

A new attitude is necessary if we are to engage in real dialogue with our urban neighbours. Start with the stories. Be prepared to lay bare your soul that they may see why you feel so strongly about the place you have in God's creation. When it is time, they will ask about the things that threaten to undermine our culture and our existence ... And we can then invite them to become partners with us in our struggle to survive.

Joyce Sasse, Pincher Creek, Alberta

Prepared for the Agriville.com network as a Moderator's Column for May 22, 2000

COUNTRY CONVERSATIONS: the book of the Northland Conference...

To be posted by late June to all who participated in the Conference, it is No 20 in Studies in Rural Change and pre-publication orders are being taken by the publishers, Rural Ministry Publications, c/o 7 Owen Terrace, Christchurch. The pre-publication price is \$10 including P&P in NZ or Australian dollars (the latter will provide air post). This price will stand for all orders received by 15th July. About 110 pages, with several photos and full-colour cover, the text is being assembled by a large team under the general editorship of Dave Mullan of ColCom Press. An insightful record of the wide range of participants' experiences the book also draws out in some detail the central themes that emerged, together with reflection on them by Rt Rev Sir Paul Reeves: Globalisation, Pakeha-Maori Relationships, and use of Lay Ministry Teams.

Tom Libby, of Hawkes Bay: Possibly the most moving time was at the service at Marsden Cross. Being there felt as if you were part of history -- which I suppose we are. The bus trips with Brother Bryan were so informative and a real chance to see the beauty of the Hokianga and the Bay of Islands.

Dave Ruesink, Texas: We North Americans have so much to learn from the Trans Tasmanians about using lay people for strengthening rural church work.

Michael Cruchley, Wales: Valuable conversations, full of practical suggestions and experience about Christ's ministry by the people for the people where they are.

To recap: for pre-publication orders of "Country Conversations", send \$10 (NZD or AUD includes postage in each case) to Rural Ministry Publications, 7 Owens Terrace, Christchurch 8004 before July 15. Cheques payable to DIOCESE OF CHRISTCHURCH.

The whole earth stands in awe of the great things you have done. Your deeds bring shouts of joy from one end of the earth to the other. You show your care for the land by sending rain, you make it rich and fertile. You fill the streams with water and provide the earth with crops.

Psalm 65:8-9

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