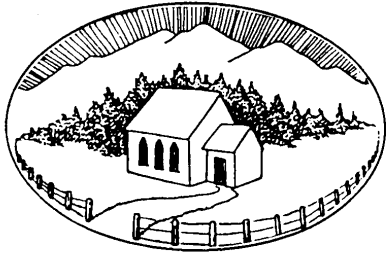


Rural Network News



No. 39

April 2009

Watch how you live. Your lives may be the only gospel your sisters and brothers will ever read.

Dom Helder Camara

Rural Network News aims to share ideas for ministry in neighbourhood and land-based communities.
Te kaitiakitanga, te manaakitanga, te kotahitanga.

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

Responses to items always welcome.

ONGOING SUPPORT FOR RURAL MINISTRY

The Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit has been asking questions and reshaping the ways in which our region supports rural churches within the nation, and across the globe. The Unit expresses its warm thanks to those readers who wrote to Nicola Robertson and made inputs into that process.

We met in February, received and considered a wide range of insights, and reaffirmed what we see as ongoing priorities:

- The value of rural ministry as something unique and special.
- The need for rural church people to be able to have a voice and express views safely.
- The value of an ecumenical group since, in large part, this is how rural churches survive and function.

- The continuing need for support of rural ministry (for both clergy and laity) and of rural parishes.
- The value of “rural” events.

We propose the formation of a New Zealand Rural Ministry Network which will link us into Trans-Tasman Rural Ministry and International Rural Church networks and provide support for face to face rural ministry events at the grass-roots level. The network would be an electronic linking of people which supports and publicises face to face meetings throughout the country.

The Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit will complete its life once a national network is established.

A Canterbury working group had provided a draft job description for a New Zealand Rural Ministry Network. The aims of the network might include the following:

- To encourage, support and publicise rural ministry events at local and regional levels, and in all parts of the country e.g. JRC mini-forums, the Webbers visit to New Zealand parishes.
- To build and maintain rural ministry links with the rest of the world e.g. TransTasman conferences, IRCA Conferences, overseas visitors on study leave, New Zealanders on leave overseas.
- To encourage New Zealand churches, and the institutions providing theological training, to provide intentional recognition and support for rural clergy and rural parishes.

Readers are invited to comment on these goals, and to suggest the names of people who have the skills and enthusiasm needed to play a linking and co-ordinating role in a national network. Robyn McPhail, as Editor of *Rural Network News*, has agreed to receive these replies. Email her at chirmac@xtra.co.nz or write to her at 17 Campbell Lane, Kerikeri 0230. **Responses appreciated by mid June.**

Garth Cant, Christchurch

Life isn't about how to survive the storm, but how to dance in the rain.

Anon

'CHURCH POSSIBLE' IN THE FAR NORTH – IT REALLY IS

“Church Possible” was a ministry training programme for churches, sponsored by Churches Together in Northland and the Local Shared Ministry training programme ‘Methodist Enable’. Its aim was to help ordinary people in ordinary churches minister effectively to the people of their own area.

People gathered on Sunday afternoon March 29 at the Bay of Islands’ Centre for Re-Creation in Paihia and stayed until lunchtime on Wednesday.

The subjects included:

- Being the small church of tomorrow
- Creative worship in small churches
- Living in a Local Shared Ministry parish
- Working together as teams in a church
- Agreeing and disagreeing together in a church
- Communion – what it means and how to do it
- Touching our local communities for Christ when there’s only a few of us

A leadership team of Bonnie Heberton, Marilyn Welch, Nigel Hanscamp, Peter McKenzie and Val Nicholls provided stimulating and practical input. They guided the group to uncover and share the ample skills and experience already at hand.

It was a great opportunity to connect with people from other Northland churches and get ideas from what they are doing, as well as from the leadership team. New ideas shared meant that some were itching to get to work implementing them.

When asked why they had come to the event, one comment was that it was a chance to get away and spend time with others. What was appealing was the opportunity to learn things and make connections. There was also recognition of the need for churches to have someone as an enabler, or ministry resource person, and this was an event to help develop that side of one’s ministry skills.

Ideas for creative worship had people buzzing, along with hints for getting more people involved in a way they are comfortable with. The session on Communion had one person planning to share the range of styles and the learning about traditions with the worship team and the Parish Council. For another person Parish Council was in their sights,

along with the pastoral care team, for handing on insights gained regarding hospitality and engaging with people of different cultures.

The Bay of Islands Uniting Parish spoke about their decade-old Local Shared Ministry. The clear message was that local people can be the church in this way, with help from outside. They affirmed the importance of an enabler. Three people were present with experience as enablers, each in different contexts, and the group gained a lot as each of them told their stories and responded to questions. The questions just kept coming throughout this session. Curiosity abounds!

Numbers ranging from 28 to 35 over the three days really impressed the visiting team. A couple of parishes were represented by groups of people. Their willingness to come and the chance to experience the workshop together as a group will pay off significantly within each parish.

The event happened because two people in Northland wanted it to happen. It is relatively easy to get five resource people to come anywhere in New Zealand simply by asking them and organising it for them. Any place that wants to inspire its people doesn’t need to wait. No matter how far off the beaten track one’s home district may seem to be, people will come if they are wanted. The fact that the local organisers chose the workshops they knew related to the region’s needs virtually guaranteed the success of the event.

RIB TICKLER

The old timer didn’t know he had just won a million in the lottery. His friends asked his minister to break the news to him gently. “We’re afraid old Zeke might have a heart attack,” they explained.

“Ever won anything Zeke?” the minister asked cheerfully. She thought a bit of small talk about winning things might be a good opener.

“Nope.”

“What would you do if you won a million in a lottery, Zeke?”

“Don’t know, exactly,” said Zeke. “But for sure, I’d give at least half of it to the church.”

And the minister had a heart attack.

From RUMORS email newsletter ©Ralph Milton There’s no charge to subscribe to RUMORS. Send an email message to rumors@joinhands.com with SUBSCRIBE in the subject-line

RURAL CONFERENCE IN THE SOUTH

The exciting thing happening in the deep south this year for Presbyterian/Uniting Parishes is a conference for rural congregations sponsored by the Presbyterian Synod of Otago and Southland. The conference will be held in the, by then, newly completed St. Andrew's complex of the Balclutha Presbyterian Church from June 25-28.

Registrations forms have gone out and the organisers are waiting for the responses. Parishes were asked last year if they would like a conference and what sort of workshops they would like. Over half the Presbyterian/Uniting rural parishes replied with a number of suggestions and the conference organisers are thrilled that they will be able to offer 21 workshops that will cover the subjects requested. People have been very willing to front up to lead these workshops and some have offered to do more than one in their chosen area to cover different aspects of their subject.

Subjects include:

- worship and music in rural settings
- leadership (especially when there is no clergy)
- team leadership and team dynamics
- transition issues
- relating to young people and how to integrate them in urban parishes, especially when they head off to University
- ways in which to relate to the wider community
- the impact of changing farming patterns and attitudes to farming practices
- plus others

The key note speakers will be the Rev David Webber and his wife Linda from the Canadian Presbyterian Church of the Cariboo in British Columbia. A report on their mission was published in the July 2008 and November 2008 editions of this newsletter.

While in New Zealand the Webbers will also

- visit the Presbyterian Maori Synod Te Aka Puaho at Ohope;
- speak on the South Islands West Coast about their work (date: 18 June, contact: Ian Davidson in Reefton (03 732 8589)

- lead a day in South Canterbury (date: 20 June, contact: Joan Clark joanclark@xtra.co.nz).

During the week leading up to the conference they will travel and speak in Invercargill and Cromwell. (Times, venues etc. available from the local Presbyterians)

The rural conference will start on Thursday night the 25th of June and conclude with Sunday morning worship and lunch. The Moderator of the Presbyterian General Assembly, the Rt Rev Dr Graham Redding, will preach and lead communion while the Moderator of the Synod of Otago and Southland, Mrs Christine Hansen, will lead the service.

Bruce Fraser, Dunedin (*when he's not out and about*)

THE BAPTISM

He never came to church,
He didn't feel he should,
Until one day he called us
To ask us if he could.

The problem was quite clear -
It all concerned his son,
It seemed the time was right
To have his small boy "done".

So the preacher met with them
To hear the father say,
"I'd like my boy baptized
Next month - on my birthday."

Well, the meeting soon was over
And the preacher learned his fate,
When the council all agreed
This was a time to celebrate!

So the ladies baked a cake -
It was planned as a surprise,
And as the son was baptized
Tears filled his father's eyes.

The church sang "Happy Birthday",
There was no condemnation,
Just words of warmth and welcome,
And joyous celebration.

Now that man seems strangely different
In the silence of his heart,
For this company of strangers
Gave the best gift from the start.

Carol Carley, source: www.canadianruralchurch.net

Want to Study Theology at Home?

Read the EIDTS leaflet enclosed.

FINDING NEW LEADERS IN THE RURAL PARISH

Many urban people underestimate the accumulated skills acquired and needed by pastoral farmers, horticulturists, orchardists, grape-growers and all who work the land. A recent TV programme covered a cadet farm training scheme for aspiring young sheep and beef farmers. It is a two-year training programme – they even have to learn how to keep their whare tidy and cook a roast dinner!

The practical No. 8 fencing wire approach is very evident

Many in our rural communities develop new leadership skills by being involved in Boards of Trustees for their local school, local government, farming organisations and other community groups. The practical No. 8 fencing wire approach is very evident. Some even become funeral and/or marriage celebrants.

But when it comes to asking people to participate in some sort of local church leadership, one senses a hesitation – the realm of the spiritual means venturing into an experience of life and faith for which many feel unqualified. Handling the things of God demands something extra.

The issue is heightened by the fact that we have seen many rural parishes surrender the privilege of having a ‘traditional’ full-time minister. Finding sufficient funds to pay them has become tougher. Also, the status of ordained ministry and the place of religion in the community have receded. We hear ad nauseam that church attendance is dropping, yet rural churches can boast in many cases a higher ratio of church attendance than most town/city congregations.

people are called into new and unaccustomed roles

But the fact remains, when you don’t have a minister, people are called into new and unaccustomed roles.

The advent of total or local shared ministry units, the rationalising of parish boundaries and the increasingly ecumenical face of rural

congregations means that the load of church leadership has fallen on people who once assumed this was the minister’s role. Often it becomes a problem of work-overload, too few struggling to keep the parish focussed on its mission.

There is a basis for church leadership that exists already – in Eldership, Vestry or Parish Council membership; in leading prayers and reading the Bible in worship; in teaching Sunday School and in sharing in the practical maintenance needs of the local church.

But people are finding they are being invited to do up-front things that are outside their comfort zone.

This is nothing new. Think of Moses, suddenly thrust into leadership as a leader of his people and his overwhelming sense of inadequacy (see Exodus 3), or Paul called to follow his Lord on the Damascus road (Acts 9).

local ministry teams are being extended and stretched as they seek to continue the life and work of the parish

Now we are finding that local ministry teams are being extended and stretched as they seek to continue the life and work of the parish, once seen as the domain of the minister – they lead worship as liturgists, they preach, they take study groups, they take on pastoral visiting and counselling, they plan worship and music and confer with other churches, and assume administrative tasks.

They also experience both the bouquets and brick bats that the minister previously fielded, something which can be rather unnerving. Also, the experience of working in a team may seem like a job shared being a job halved, but human nature being what it is, they have to learn to work together and find ways through disagreements and conflicts, i.e. find a new spirituality of partnership.

Inviting people and introducing them to a leadership role calls for a particular skill. But if we are given a clear understanding of the role (a good job description) then the role can feel manageable. We need to get accustomed to one task before moving on to more challenging ones.

Which means that those who equip and advise need to recognise leadership needs and offer training. For example, many attend field days to advance farming skills – it should be the same with regard to skills in matters spiritual.

The interface of church and community means that trust and acquired skills need to be recognised

Some already have talents and gifts that God can use. Still others benefit by encouragement and study/training opportunities. Each congregation needs to have some way of affirming and recognising the authentic ministries of the leaders within their congregations. The interface of church and community means that trust and acquired skills need to be recognised. In some cases the experience of leadership leads on to further theological study, perhaps even ordination.

Well over 100 years ago Roland Allen affirmed the place of 'indigenous' or local leadership in the congregation. Those who live and work in their own locality know the community and are called to Christian mission where they are. We need to ensure they are equipped for their roles.

Bill Bennett, Napier, Hawkes Bay

The field of the poor may yield much food,
but it is swept away through injustice.

Proverbs 13:23-23

ENVIRONMENT IS 'AN ISSUE OF JUSTICE'

For the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, respect for the environment is not an optional extra, particularly for Christians. Getting our relationship with the rest of the created order into proper perspective is both a responsibility and a necessity. "There is no way of manipulating our environment that is without cost or consequence ... we are inextricably bound up with the destiny of our world."

In the recent Ebor Lecture at York Minster, Dr Williams said that "ecological questions are increasingly... defined as issues of justice.. both to those who now have no part in decision-making at the global level yet bear the heaviest burdens as a consequence of the irresponsibility of wealthier nations, and to those who will succeed us on this planet – justice to our children and grandchildren"

"The ecological crisis challenges us to be reasonable" says Dr Williams: "If you live in Bangladesh or Tuvalu, scepticism about global

warming is precisely the opposite of reasonable: 'negotiating' this environment means recognising the fact of rising sea levels...for us to be reasonable and free and responsible is for us to live in awareness of our limits and dependence."

Dr Williams described "what unintelligent and ungodly relation with the environment looks like. It is partialIt focuses on aspects of the environment that can be comparatively easily manipulated for human advantage and ignores inconvenient questions about what less obvious connections are being violated. It is indifferent, for example, to the way in which biodiversity is part of the self-balancing system of the world we inhabit. It is impatient: it seeks returns on labour that are prompt and low-cost, without consideration of long-term effects. It avoids or denies the basic truth that the environment as a material system is finite and cannot indefinitely regenerate itself in ways that will simply fulfil human needs or wants. And when such unintelligent and ungodly relation prevails, the risks should be obvious."

However Dr Williams suggested that "we are capable of changing our situation"; in "Christian terms, this needs a radical change of heart, a conversion." "The 'redemption' of people and material life in general is not a matter of resigning from the business of labour and of transformation – as if we could – but the search for a form of action that will preserve and nourish an interconnected development of humanity and its environment. In some contexts, this will be the deliberate *protection* of the environment from harm: in a world where exploitative and aggressive behaviour is commonplace, one of the 'providential' tasks of human beings must be to limit damage and to secure space for the natural order to exist unharmed. In others, the question is rather how to use the natural order for the sake of human nourishment and security without pillaging its resources and so damaging its inner mechanisms for self-healing or self-correction."

Dr Williams concluded with a quotation from the contemporary Greek theologian, Christos Yannaras who speaks in his *Variations on the Song of Songs*, "of how love compels you to see things differently – to love 'the landscapes we have looked at together.'" "We love" says Dr Williams "what we see together with God."

Based on the Lambeth Press Release

FROM THE BACK Paddock

The last twelve months have been the most volatile in my 37 years farming career, culminating in our most disappointing season since 1987/88.

In spite of a 40% drop in the value of our currency, reduced interest rates and some record prices, the weather had the last say.

We are vulnerable to five main adverse weather events: drought, too much rain (flood or wet harvest), unseasonal frost, hail, and wind storm. And yes, we had them all, with the unseasonal frost and drought doing the most damage.

Nobody in the arable industry has escaped unscathed this year but, for all their faults, farmers are notoriously optimistic, so we are looking forward to the next season. The challenge is to keep the bankers happy in the meantime.

History has shown that when chasing markets in agriculture you are always a year too late. Ask a sheep farmer who switched to wheat this year or a converter to dairying milking for the first time this season. A change in farming systems needs to be based on a well thought through business plan, not on the whim of a one year spike in a commodity price that you want a piece of.

A respected local businessman and friend said to me some months ago in the middle of our disappointing¹ harvest “No matter how good things appear they are never as good as they seem and no matter how bad things appear they normally aren’t as bad as they seem”. I have reflected on this comment a lot since I heard it and decided it can be either sobering or comforting, depending on where the cycle is at the time.

Colin Lill, Methven

RURAL HERITAGE AN ASSET

In March 2009 Joyce Sasse in Canada wrote:

The CNN reporter was shocked. When he dared to visit rural USA his preconceptions were turned upside-down.

In Fargo, North Dakota, the economic well-being of the community appeared to be hail and hardy.

¹ Note also the farmers’ tendency towards understatement. Another farmer from the same district was more blunt in describing the past season as a “cruel season”. *Ed.*

Employment statistics were around 98%. Major constructions projects were meeting their deadlines. Business was carrying on as if the economy hadn’t imploded in “the rest of the country”.

We just carry on, the Mayor said. We are somewhat conservative in our spending, and don’t get caught up in all these schemes for sub-prime investments. Matter-of-fact, the spendings of our State Government are right on target. We’re not going to need bail-out money here.

I wonder how many other rural-based regions are the same? We don’t hear much about them because, from the urban media perspective, there really isn’t much of a story here.

Or is there? Most rural folks have lived underneath the media radar for years. They’ve faced the ups and downs of weather, politics, and economics with the same stalwart stoicism. They’ve banded together as community when it was necessary to give a hand up, and have had the courage to go against the current when they believed they had an idea that would improve things. Life hasn’t been spectacular, but it has been good!

Pamela Wallin, recently appointed Senator from Saskatchewan, talks about how her small-town upbringing in Wadena, Saskatchewan gave her the roots that encouraged her to pursue a most fascinating career.

She grew up in a community where she was free to roam around, to explore and play and get to know the various characters in the community. On her uncle’s farm she learned about the land. This was a kid who wasn’t afraid to check things out and take risks.

With that rural grounding, she moved from social worker, to TV and print journalist, to Canadian Consul General in New York, to Chancellor of the University of Guelph.

Now Senator Wallin is ready to challenge that great prejudice that implies nothing of importance happens in the hinterland. What a myth to suggest cities are the future for our country!

Joyce Sasse, Pincher Creek, Alberta, Canada

**Don't sweat the petty things. Don't pet
the sweaty things.**

WILL ISAK APRIL: LINKING THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA AND NEW ZEALAND

Will Isak April, from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia, is doing his doctoral research at Lincoln University. On 3 August 2008 he returned to Namibia for six (6) months field research. Rural News Network asked him to share about himself, the needs of the rural youth in Namibia, and the ways in which his fieldwork unfolded.

Will introduces himself: “I was born 28 years ago in the Republic of Namibia, and raised by my foster parents who passed away while I was 11 and 13 years respectively. We were raised in a family home of eighteen kids, of which nine were the biological children and nine the foster children of our parents. Being part of this extended family sparked my interest in community and individual development. There are three fundamental teachings my foster parents gave me for my journey: *have I lived wisely, have I loved well and have I serve greatly*”.

Being in the close proximity to Churches in Vaalgras in Namibia allowed Will the opportunity to become familiar with Christianity at a young age. By the age of five, he was reciting scriptures from the Bible at the annual community Easter and Christmas celebrations. As he grew into a young adult he combined his passion for service and educating others to help determine his field of study in university – Indigenous Entrepreneurship.

In March 2007 Will started his Doctoral studies at the Lincoln University in New Zealand. During his time at Lincoln thus far he has received honours and opportunities. Will received the New Zealand Postgraduate Study Award in 2008 to undertake his field research in Arandis, Namibia. He also got the opportunity to attend conferences around New Zealand (both on the South and North Islands).

In addition, with a strong support from his supervisors, he got a once lifetime opportunity to travel to Honolulu in Hawaii to present a paper on the rural youth in Namibia.

Whenever Will is not in his office he could be found in the Waipara Winefarms in Canterbury where he is an avid volunteer for pocket money.

Will continues: “The winter of 2008 brought me many adventures. In August 2008 I had the exciting opportunity to travel back to my country of birth, Namibia, to conduct my fieldwork research amongst the rural youth in Arandis. The Kolin Foundation School, with approximately 800 learners, is the only Secondary School in the vicinity of Arandis. Most activities in the village surround the secondary school. Most of the learners in Arandis (and the out of school youth) are from the Nama tribe in Namibia. All of the learners are brought up in Christian homes and are fluent in English. The dominant churches in this village are the Catholic and the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Doing my research I was fortunate to meet the rural youth at school, after hours, and also at church almost every day. This close relationship enabled me to identify the needs of the rural youth. These are: Self-motivation, Positive role models, Responsibility, and the constant need to be Motivated by others.”

Will describes the current situation within which the rural youth find themselves: “They have the belief that they will never be able to make their mark in their own community. I was able to reassure them that the doorway to success opens inward, not outward. Life is a growth school; every single thing that happens to us is part of our destiny (excluding deliberate actions). Every adversity, every person we meet, every experience we go through has really come to us to teach us a lesson to advance along the path we are meant to go.”

Will believes that when his tenure as a field researcher came to an end in January 2009 he had touched the hearts of at least three learners within the community. He continues: “Honestly I was surprised by the way my fieldwork unfolded. I never imagined that the people would be so supportive and interested in my research. I was nervous and very anxious. I never expected such strong support both at the community and national level.”

Each month he was in the field, Will had the opportunity to air his research on national radio, to get more views and opinions from the Namibian people as to how they view youth entrepreneurship and culture. He also got the chance to speak to government officials, both in top, middle and lower level positions. However, he was not surprised that

people were looking for answers to their own problems: “Why is my kid not interested in school?”, “Why am I going through such pain?”, “Why are learners not motivated to reach for the stars?”, “Why are my kids not disciplined?” and even “Why am I here?” Linking these questions to his research topic, he noted that there is a very huge desire for knowledge on how to foster an entrepreneurial potential in the Arandis community and in Namibia.

These experiences have challenged Will as a person to stay grounded. He told Rural Network News how he worked this out on a daily basis through his journal, and through the support of the people he surrounds himself with. He summed up:

“The power of conversation is a tool that deepens us. I fervently hope that I never get to a stage where I lose sight of these things that are most important.”

Will is currently working at Lincoln University, doing his analysis and writing his thesis which he will submit at the end of the 2009 year.

TRANS-TASMAN 2008

Use the flier enclosed with this newsletter to order your

CONFERENCE BOOK

or make contact with Peter Carrell on peterc@nelsonanglican.org.nz

INTERNATIONAL NEWS



We wonder if it was the Global financial crisis poking its way into the life of the IRCA but, for a time, IRCA secretary Garry Hardingham was unable to access the website hosted in Iceland, www.irca.is!

Contact was finally made and he now has the ability again to up-date website material. Check for recent uploads and more to come.

Keep an eye out too for news on the 2010 International Rural Church Association Conference with a theme focussing on hunger as a global challenge.

Place: Landjugendakademie,
Altenkirchen/Westerwald
near Cologne, Germany

Date: 20-26 September 2010 with a Conference Scattered experience to different parts of Europe available in the preceding week.

WEBSITES OF NOTE

<http://www.townandcountryumc.org>

contains a resource that may be of interest: United Methodist Church in USA 'Local Church Action Guide'; click on "resources" in the upper right of the window, then select either a pdf or doc format of the Action Guide.

It lays out a 6-session process through which rural church leaders can use an asset-based approach for examining past, present and future possibilities for churches.

www.irca.is

www.canadianruralchurch.net

www.earth-ministry.com

www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk

www.ruralministry.com

RNN Archive:

www.presbyterian.org.nz/4766.0.html

Easter Christ...

You meet us in the dawn of each new day,
melting the darkness of fear,
and washing creation with the dew of rebirth.

Bill Bennett *Seasons of the Land*, p.40



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Contributions of news, views, insights on anything to do with the rural church and its gospel mission gratefully received.

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