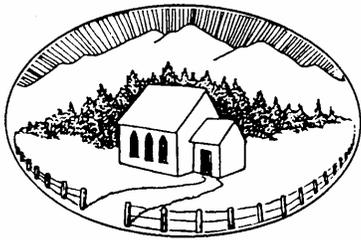


# Rural Network News



No. 33

October 2006

Be kinder than necessary, for everyone  
you meet is fighting some kind of battle.

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.*

## A Rural Story

Today I met Jesus - tattoos all over his arms,  
bearded, roughly clothed.

There had been a road accident. A message that my  
tractor was required. Vehicle off the road, crashed  
into tree. A four year old boy was trapped. The 14  
year old driver (a relative of the boy, I presume)  
and others were struggling to free him. The  
bearded, compassionate man was continually  
reassuring and comforting the little fellow.

Eventually the tractor was attached and gently the  
body of the vehicle was released.

Once on the ground and warmly covered while  
awaiting the ambulance the boy continued to get  
the comfort and reassurance. The ambulance  
officers were quick to note the rapport the 'Jesus'  
man had developed with the boy and asked him to  
travel with him, firstly in the ambulance and then  
in the helicopter.

The man thanked me twice for the little I did but,  
on reflection, it was him that needed the thanks.

Not concerned about what his plans were but  
totally focused on the little fellow and his needs. A  
young lad of neither his blood or mine.

Today I saw Jesus in the heart of that gang  
member.

From the Bay of Islands Co-operating Parish  
newsletter, contributed by a parish member

## "Cry of the Heart" 3rd IRCA Conference Manitoba, Canada, July 2007



**Location:** Brandon University, Brandon,  
Manitoba, Canada

**Dates:** July 3-9, 2007

**Worship Leaders:**

Dr. Christine O'Reilly and Rev. Peter Bush

**Theme Speakers:**

Dr. John Ikerd, Professor emeritus of Agricultural  
Economics, University of Missouri

Dr. Roman Juriga, Director of the Orthodox  
Academy and the Centre for Application of  
Renewable Energy, Vilemov, Czech Republic

**Bible Study Leaders:**

David Webber, Cariboo House Churches, B.C  
Daniel Thiagarajah, Sri Lanka

Each participant (or national group) is asked to  
report on the health and hope of the rural church  
where you are. There will be opportunity for all  
your stories, a day of field trips to choose from,  
and more.

There is also an option of pre-conference  
hospitality with a Canadian rural church and  
community. This follows Mennonite practice for  
international gatherings of holding a "conference  
scattered" prior to the "conference gathered".

In the words of the organising team: "Let us  
worship God and find Christ's leading, together".

**Brochure enclosed with  
this newsletter**

Also available at [www.irca-canada.org](http://www.irca-canada.org) or contact  
Catherine Christie [cchristie@sasktel.net](mailto:cchristie@sasktel.net)

IRCA international contacts: Dave Ruesink  
[druesink@tamu.edu](mailto:druesink@tamu.edu), Secretary of IRCA, or Robyn  
McPhail, Chairperson, at [chirmac@xtra.co.nz](mailto:chirmac@xtra.co.nz) (ph: 09  
401 7554, fax: 09 4017555).

## **Rural Ministers: Outstanding in their Field**

When I commenced a Transition Ministry in Ellesmere, Canterbury, in January this year I quickly discovered that, in the parish's 28-year life as a Cooperating Venture, no minister has stayed beyond five years. Why is this? Is this the normal experience in cooperating and union parishes, in rural parishes, and particularly in rural cooperating ventures? I set out to gather information to see if there was a pattern, and what issues are perceived as being important factors affecting whether or not a person will take up a position in a rural CV.

### **KEY CONCLUSIONS**

Long-term ministries make for the greatest possibility that a church will grow. Challenges that are worked through, rather than avoided, denied or skirted around, increase the likelihood of a long-term effective ministry. "Tenacity" and "perseverance" are key words. The requirement for a CV appointment to last no more than 10 years (notwithstanding recent changes in this area) is a disincentive for ministers seeking a long-term mission leadership opportunity.

The key issue affecting whether a minister stays long term in a rural parish (as in any other) is the personal relationship between the minister and the parish leaders. Simply put, it's about how well they get on with each other.

An incarnational approach to ministry is critical in rural ministry. Who you are, what you do and the way you live, impact as much in the long term as what you say. Isolation and the need for personal and professional support are key issues in rural ministry. Rural New Zealand is a mission field crying out for people who will make a commitment to long-term, mission-focused ministry in a rapidly changing world.

### **ISSUES HIGHLIGHTED**

**Travel:** Even in a relatively compact rural parish, distances are an issue both in terms of

- the time spent travelling,
- the cost to a parish of paying mileage allowance.

Rural parishes are often at the smaller end of the parish-size scale, but many have to pay their

minister large mileage allowances. In my own parish of Ellesmere Cooperating I have averaged 1,183km per 4 weeks since commencing ministry here, which will amount to over 14,000km for a full year. In the suburban South Auckland parish from which I came, my travel amounted to about 5,500km for a full year.

There is also the significant personal cost to a minister and his/her family if they wish to travel to a major centre for personal reasons, be it health, education or entertainment.

**Rural parishes as first parishes:** In the past at least, rural parishes were seen by all denominations as first parishes for newly trained ministers. There they would cut their teeth, get ministry experience and generally prepare for ministry in the cities. Many rural parishes have experienced this repeatedly and become almost resigned to it.

**Isolation and personal support:** In rural ministry, you have to be strong inside yourself, mentally, spiritually and psychologically. There is little personal collegial support easily available. There may or may not be clergy of another denomination in the same district. Even if there are, they won't understand the issues you experience within your own denomination.

In earlier days, visits from a Ministry Resource person, or a staff person in the Presbyterian Parish Development and Mission Department, brought encouragement and ministry suggestions. I was hugely appreciative of the support I received from Robin Lane, David Grant and Simon McLeay in earlier rural ministry. Sadly, financial constraints have meant that this is no longer available – and rural ministers wear out and burn out faster because of it.

There are other support groups and training programmes I could access if I lived in the city.

**Family educational needs:** Excellent primary schools are available in most rural communities. However, the situation is different when it comes to secondary or tertiary education, and ministers must take seriously the needs of their family's education when considering a place to minister. Thus it is likely that most ministers in the period of mid life – when they have both energy and often ministry experience – will be unavailable to rural areas.

**Other family needs:** Employment opportunity for a clergy spouse will probably be limited in a rural area. Thus if a spouse is professionally trained – and many are – it will be difficult for them to find employment. That second income is often critical in saving for the future.

There are also the needs of shopping and entertainment. The supermarket bill becomes a whole lot larger if you have to travel for half an hour or more to the nearest supermarket.

**Affinity to the land:** It is a huge help in rural ministry if you like farming or agriculture, and are genuinely interested in the issues affecting lives of your parishioners and on their farms.

**Working with small groups:** If you're going to be in rural ministry, you have to understand that you will almost always be working with small groups of people. The vision of a large, multi-programme, multi-staff church is not one for scattered rural communities.

The Sunday congregations in the four churches I minister to range from six to 40. From extensive experience in rural parishes – I've served in five of them – I know it is a lot easier to lead worship for 40 people than it is for four. Critical mass does make a difference.

**The rural downturn and shrinking churches:** In the late 19th century when many rural churches were established, each community had its own church – as well as its store, garage, school and maybe bank and transport company.

The movement of people to towns, the increased size of farms and reduced requirements for farm labour have dramatically reduced the size of rural communities. This downturn continues to affect the church. Many of the stalwarts of rural churches are long-time residents who accept, and maybe welcome, change in their farming and business practices. However, they have difficulty in accepting change in the church.

**Time off:** Ministry is a lot like farming. There's always something to do, and you can always find an excuse not to take time off – to the detriment of self, marriage, family and parish.

Step outside the gate and there are people to see and who “could do with a visit”. Turn the computer on and there's stuff to read, preparation to be done.

The most effective time off is that taken outside the parish area. Physical distance means that in a rural parish, which by its nature encompasses a significant geographic area, you have to travel to get that freedom. That in itself is a financial cost. This is an issue that ministers in urban areas do not face.

I am grateful to my wife for being strong in encouraging, pushing and at times demanding that I take time away from the parish. Overnight stays and days away in districts outside the parish area enable me to switch off from parish work and its issues, however valuable and interesting they may be. It helps to look in on the parish work “from the outside”.

## PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS

**The rural mission field:** There are now significant areas of rural New Zealand with little if any intentional, active, missional Christian witness. If there are problems with ministry in towns and cities, these problems are exacerbated in rural New Zealand.

I believe that rural ministry is the poor relation in both the Presbyterian and Methodist churches, however unintentionally.

There are a number of ministers who give the impression they think rural ministry is second-class ministry.

Let me say right here that I love rural ministry. I love the people, I love farming, I love the wide open spaces, I love the changing seasons and their activities, and I love living in a rural town. But I can only do this because my children are grown up and fending for themselves – in the city and overseas - and because my wife is willing to live with the uncertainty of relief teaching and drive considerable distances each morning to the various schools of rural Canterbury. Rural ministry needs to be marketed!!

**Long term ministries:** I say without apology that for rural ministry to be effective, we must be encouraging and supporting people to develop long-term ministries in rural communities.

The Uniting Churches in Aotearoa New Zealand need to be proactive in encouraging long term ministry in rural CVs.

The Cooperating Venture model works against this, and those involved in Joint Regional Committees and the Uniting Churches of Aotearoa New Zealand must recognise this and help change this, if they are really serious about the mission of Christ in rural New Zealand.

**Ministry of the People:** The Scriptures clearly speak of the ministry of the whole Christian community, the body of Christ. In that community, everyone has their place in the team and plays their part for the community's benefit. This applies to all churches everywhere.

A number of financially struggling rural churches no longer afford a professional clergy person and have moved to a model of ministry teams, a model known as Local Shared Ministry, supported by a professional clergy ministry enabler. As the church seeks to develop "ministering communities" – faith communities that can minister to themselves - it needs to recognise that residential professional clergy people continue to have an important place.

They have a role in speaking into a community, coaching and encouraging the development of local ministry, and being the visible face of the church and Christian faith in a rural community. They often bring to a rural community professional leadership skills and a wider world view that are otherwise lacking.

In a rural district, a minister can fulfil a role that no-one else can. They can be a focal point, not involved in the history or the politics of the area. Time taken to walk the main street of their country town, participation in community activities and events, and involvement in community organisations is time well spent.

The church in a rural community is often the source of spiritual sustenance for people from a wide range of faith backgrounds. They all carry their own personal experiences, practices and ways of expressing things that they particularly value. When people come together in study groups or special occasions and recognise and celebrate their diversity, relationships are grown. We weave a witnessing faith community from all these people together. In a city many of us would drive past one another going to our "own church", whereas in the rural community you don't have the choice – unless you're prepared to drive zillions of kilometres.

Worship leaders try to acknowledge the differences in music and language that will connect with people of different faith backgrounds. Different forms of administering communion need to be considered. That's just a fact of life in the places we choose to live.

**Our Ministry Model:** The model we have of ministry hugely affects the way we think of and plan for the churches future.

- **Pastoral Model:** Traditionally, we have brought to ministry a pastoral model. A defined geographical area, and an established group of people who gladly associate themselves with the church. It works moderately well where there is an underlying assumption that the community is generally Christian.

It is an inward-looking model. The hymns we sing on Sundays largely reflect this. It is a model that passed its use-by date in the middle of last century. Sadly, the wider church is only just realising this, and at a local level it is so much easier to continue to think in this way.

A three to five year period of ministry leadership works alright if your ministry model is a pastoral one, where the minister's first role is looking after the people who already belong to the church.

- **Mission Model:** A mission model of ministry addresses the reality that we are now living in a post-Christian world, where for most people the Christian message is an irrelevance. The mission model means we look at our work as ministers through a different set of glasses, and with different assumptions about what our priorities are.

Local church leaders and regional church courts are often still caught up in maintaining the pastoral model. Creative courageous long-term imaginative leadership may be a big ask in rural New Zealand – but it is the cry of the Gospel.

Chris Bedford, Ellesmere, Canterbury

*For a copy of Chris' full research report, please email him at [cksrbedford@clear.net.nz](mailto:cksrbedford@clear.net.nz)*

Through every star, through every blade of grass,  
God is made visible if we will open our minds  
and our eyes.  
Thomas Carlyle

## Religious Issues in State Schools

Under 'Tomorrow's Schools' decisions concerning religious instruction and prayer in State schools are made by the local School Trustees Committee expressing the wishes of the community it serves, under the guidelines of the law. A recent Seminar by the Law Society looked at the issue in depth. Here are the conclusions in brief.

### Primary Schools and the Education Act 1964

If the School Committee for the school district in which the school is situated, after consultation with the principal, so determines, any class or classes at the school, or the school as a whole, may be closed at any time or times of the school day for any period or periods exceeding in the aggregate neither 60 minutes in any week nor 20 hours in any school year, for any class, for the purposes of religious instruction given by voluntary instructors approved by the School Committee and of religious observances conducted in a manner approved by the School Committee or for either of those purposes; and the school buildings may be used for those purposes or for either of them. (S78)

If a school wishes to have a prayer or Bible reading during assembly they may do so as long as the time taken does not exceed the time for religious instruction over a year, as given above.

***Attendance at religious instruction or observances is not compulsory.*** If a parent does not wish their child to attend Religious Instruction they can inform the school by letter. The secular clause in the law for Primary schools means a school is deemed 'closed' during RI time.

The plain intention of S78 was to authorise religious instruction and observance for schools that wished to have it. A school wishing to have education about religion needs no authorisation. It is entirely consistent with the requirement of 'secular' education that there be discussion of religion, and of religious art and history.

The Bill of Rights Act 1990 affirms a whole set of civil and political rights, including freedom from discrimination. For religious matters in schools the most obviously relevant provisions are:

**13. Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion:** Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and belief, including the right to adopt and to hold opinions without interference.

**14. Freedom of expression:** Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, including the freedom to

seek, receive, and impart information and opinions of any kind in any form. ( Hence the presence of Chaplains in schools)

**15. Manifestation of religion and belief:** Every person has the right to manifest that person's religion or belief in worship, observance, practice, or teaching, either individually or in community with others, and either in public or in private.

### Secondary schools, instruction and observance

For secondary schools, the same end point may be reached, but the path is a little different and the outcome much less certain. There is no explicit power to have religious instruction or observances. One might contend that it relates to the power of a principal to manage the day-to-day operation of the school (S76), and of a board to control the management generally (S75). But, if a general power to allow religious observance or instruction be assumed, the position remains that the actual operation of religious instruction or observance must be consistent with the Bill of Rights. That brings in the requirement to respect the freedom of religion of all students, just as in relation to primary schools. It seems that religious instruction in secondary schools is out of the question.

**What of prayers in the secondary school setting? And Bible readings?** These practices remain in some schools. It seems that a secondary principal in his or her day-to-day management may exercise the judgment that an assembly commence with religious observances. A board, as a matter of overall policy, could decide likewise. Of course, in each case the opposite decision may be made as well. But the point is that religious observance is a possible option.

### What about Maori prayer at school events?

Some schools, perhaps many, will have occasions on which karakia are used. There may be official opening ceremonies for the new year, welcoming new students, which are conducted as a powhiri. Or there may be occasions when visitors to the school are welcomed, or when new school premises are opened. All of these may seek to recognise the Maori dimension of New Zealand. Section 61 of the Education Act makes it a part of every school's charter that it have the aim of developing policies and practices that recognise the unique position of the Maori culture. This compulsory charter aim suggests schools do not act wrongly when their official events create a space for Maori cultural

practices.

Such practices may contain Christian prayers and this leads to two related concerns: is the school acting unlawfully in holding ceremonies with an explicit religious dimension (the prayer as part of Maori ceremony)? If not, does this mean that it ought to allow prayers by other groups, or representing different faith traditions?

These are not easy questions and much will depend on the particular facts that give rise to them.

### **Religious controversies in education**

In the introduction to the seminar the speaker made this comment following on criticism in the newspaper from verbal complaints:

“Concentrating on the areas of controversy might, however, give a misleading picture. It should not be forgotten that controversies arise in only a small percentage of cases, and that a larger area of apparent contentment lies hidden from newspapers and radio reporters, who are more interested in conflict. It has been said, for example, that the Churches Education Commission, representing 15 Christian denominations, runs Bible in Schools in about 60% of primary schools. That is a very large number, and the inference is that schools are happy with it. So, too, the issues about Maori spiritual values are prominent only because the underlying legal system has facilitated, to some degree at least, the recognition of those values in resource consent applications and in the granting of scientific approvals. And the fact that it has done so indicates electoral support and political will.”

### **Churches Education Commission**

The Churches Education Commission is recognised by the Ministry of Education and the New Zealand School Trustees Association as the organisation responsible for Christian Religious Education in New Zealand state schools.

CEC claims to be the largest voluntary organisation in NZ with nearly 4,000 trained Bible-in-Schools teachers entering into over 60% of our Primary schools each week. Their aim is “to stimulate, service and co-ordinate the concerns of member churches and related organisations for Christian and general education in New Zealand”.

The Commission is responsible for the training and accreditation of the teachers and the oversight of the approved teaching material. Teachers come from, and are supported by, the local churches.

CEC is also responsible for the selection, training

and accreditation of its 250 chaplains working in schools.

All Chaplains give up to four hours of voluntary time to the school under contract, and CEC in turn guarantees the chaplains receive professional supervision and on going training. For more information go to [www.cec.org.nz](http://www.cec.org.nz)

### **How does CEC receive funding?**

Traditionally funding has come from the member churches at national or diocesan level. The organisation is looking to the churches in the community to lay claim to the special ministry for Christ in their midst. CEC is also looking to corporate business for funding and support.

Margaret Williams, Kerikeri, Northland  
*Contact Margaret ([tepene@xtra.co.nz](mailto:tepene@xtra.co.nz) or ph 407 3515) if you would like to explore the issues in more detail.*

## **Welcome Package for Dairy Farmers**

The first 14 of our years in ministry was in rural parishes. After a further fourteen years in Dunedin, we returned to the country and the Knapdale-Waikaka Presbyterian Church about 30km from Gore. We were surprised to find that the rural scene had changed: in the past the majority were sheep and beef farmers with a little bit of cropping and some deer; now there are many dairy units.

People involved in dairying are extremely busy. We have also noticed that there is a hierarchy with the landowner at the top, then the sharemilker who has a staff of workers. Often there is a passion to accumulate more capital so as to climb up the ladder. Many do not have the time or inclination to become involved in the community.

Some folk within our church had been disheartened when they attempted to forge links with dairy families. Often they were just getting to know them when the dairy people were up and away. Contract day, June 1, had arrived and the dairy neighbours were on the move.

However this year our Session decided to do our best to make our dairy neighbours welcome and befriend them. So we sent out a call asking for gifts of meat, preserves, vegetables and jams. The response was a testimony to southern generosity. One of our people made up a laminated sheet with

information about community organisations such as sports clubs, schools, Federated Farmers, etc. and all the churches. A working bee made up 17 packages and a few days after the dairy people shifted in our elders went and visited them offering the gift package. There was widespread appreciation of being made welcome in this practical manner.

Some weeks later we wondered what we could do to strengthen the relationship with the new folk. Someone suggested hospitality and one Sunday one of our elders and his wife invited 42 people to their home for the midday meal. Twenty nine came and they had a great time in family and neighbourly togetherness.

There is no secret agenda in our reaching out in friendship to our new neighbours. God has provided for us and welcomed us to the table of our Lord Jesus Christ. We believe we must do the same for those God brings into our communities.

Alan Kerr, Knapdale-Waikaka, Southland

The church is like manure. Pile it together and it stinks up the neighbourhood; spread it around and it enriches the world.

Luis Palau

## Exploring how God is at Work in my Rural Community and Church

### Studying Rural Ministry at the Local Level

Each year the Ecumenical Institute of Distance Theological Studies (EIDTS) offers number of courses to extramural adult students wishing to study further the Bible, Church History, Christian Theology and various aspects of the church's Ministry and Mission.

About 10 years ago a group from many parts of rural New Zealand gathered to assemble a course suitable for people keen to understand their own rural community and the place of the Church. This resulted in the one-year course called 'Rural Ministry Studies'. It's very much a hands-on course, a sort of research project about the community within which we live and work. Much of it is gathering information and insights about what makes our own rural community tick. Also, we explore how the church has impacted on this

community, its historical development and its current shape. Four assignments are sent in at intervals throughout the year to the Tutor, currently Bill Bennett.

Opportunity is given for students to do interviews, tease out their own insights and present an offering from their own congregational experience – e.g. art work, a piece of liturgy for a special occasion, a poem or music. The four assignments are headed: Knowing your communities; Knowing the local church; Equipping yourself for rural ministry; and, Interpreting the Spirit of God.

For some this is a one-off exercise. But most like to tackle other topics as well that may result in a Ministry Certificate, an Associate Diploma or a full Licentiate in Theology (LTh). This can be done over a number of years.

Contact Sue Haley, the Academic Registrar, EIDTS, PO Box 12 286, Christchurch 8002 OR Freephone 0800 667 969 OR email: [eidts@xtra.co.nz](mailto:eidts@xtra.co.nz) OR go to: [www.eidts.ac.nz](http://www.eidts.ac.nz)

Courses commence at the beginning of the academic year, so it's wise to register one's interest soon to procure a Handbook. To our knowledge a Rural Ministry Studies course is not offered by any other distance education institution.

### Absolutely essential brand new vocabulary additions to help you survive everything

- o Stress Puppy – a person who seems to thrive on being stressed out and whiny.
- o Swipeout – an ATM or credit card that has been rendered useless because the magnetic strip is worn away from extensive use.
- o Percussive Maintenance – the fine art of kicking or whacking an electronic device to get it to work again. Works just as well as calling a technician.
- o Ohnosecond – that minuscule fraction of time in which you realize that you've just made a big mistake. Like after hitting "send" on a totally cranky e-mail.
- o Blamestorming – Sitting around in a group, discussing why a deadline was missed or a project failed, and who was responsible.
- o Mouse Potato – the on-line, wired generation's answer to the couch potato.

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## Book Review

**GOD OF THE WHENUA:** Rural Ministry in Aotearoa New Zealand by *Bill Bennett*

For parishes wanting to keep a community church, this book gives positive ideas on what, at first, seems a difficult situation. Working together, and encouraging each other, there is a way forward. While the book cannot give all the answers, since every parish is different, it is enough to know we have a mission in our communities and there are a variety of ways we can go about fulfilling that mission.

It opens with three attitudes to land ownership, the two Pakeha telling of individual feelings and the Maori of the tribal connection. Factors leading to early church formation are outlined, followed by the changes in small communities over the years. As many well know, the declining rural population and income of the 1980s and 1990s left small churches struggling. Those resolute in their desire to maintain a church presence, when all else is changing, did so in a variety of ways. These are outlined, then samples from parishes are given showing their background, changes, current life and ministry, along with benefits and challenges. As with our parish, maintenance of worship is often the initial aim, then focus turns to reaching into and caring for the community. The author comments that many churches are "only now beginning to explore the nature of their mission."

In many of the models leadership is a shared task where all are equal, thus "it requires being open to the Holy Spirit." The results of this are exciting as a team works together.

I appreciate the Maori perspective set alongside the Pakeha view. The simple diagrams and excellent quotes give insight and clarity as ideas are discussed. It is a useful resource for anyone involved in a rural church.

Elwyn Smyth, Hinds, Mid-Canterbury

## Some Websites of Interest

Bosco Peters encourages us to visit his website: [www.liturgy.co.nz](http://www.liturgy.co.nz). The site draws on five years' experience as a rural vicar as well as other contexts and attempts to make worship work in our Southern Hemisphere seasons.

Visit [www.irca-canada.org](http://www.irca-canada.org) for information about the 2007 International Rural Church Association Conference 2-9 July in Brandon, Manitoba, and for registration details and forms.

[www.presbyterian.org.nz/2848.0.html](http://www.presbyterian.org.nz/2848.0.html) is the site for the International Rural Church Association and for Trans-Tasman rural networking within New Zealand. This site makes a link with the archive for "Rural Network News" which is accessed at [www.schoolofministry.ac.nz/RuralMinistry/](http://www.schoolofministry.ac.nz/RuralMinistry/)

### Bottom of the Barrel

A cat died and went to Heaven. God met her at the gates and said, "You have been a good cat all these years. Anything you want is yours for the asking."

The cat thought for a minute and then said, "All my life I lived on a farm and slept on hard wooden floors. I would like a real fluffy pillow to sleep on."

God said, "Say no more." Instantly the cat had a huge fluffy pillow.

A few days later, six mice were killed in an accident and they all went to Heaven together. God met the mice at the gates with the same offer that was made to the cat.

"Well, we have had to run all of our lives: from cats, dogs, and even people with brooms!" said the mice. "If we could just have some little roller skates, we would not have to run again."

"Done," said God. All the mice had beautiful little roller skates.

About a week later, God decided to check on the cat. She was lounging on her fluffy pillow. "Is everything okay? How have you been doing? Are you happy?"

"Oh, it is wonderful," said the cat. "I have never been so happy in my life. The pillow is so fluffy, and the Meals on Wheels was a nice touch."

From RUMORS email newsletter



*This occasional newsletter is printed and distributed by Anglican Diocese of Christchurch, PO Box 4438, Christchurch, ph 03 379 5950, fax 03 379 5954.*

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

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