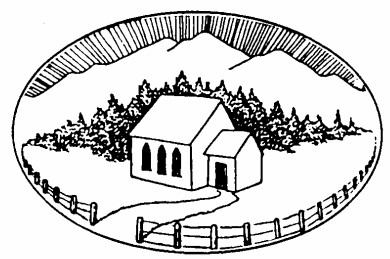


Rural Network News



No.35 September 2007

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

The Church in Rural New Zealand

- is made up on people with deep roots going back generations and also of people rediscovering rural New Zealand
- knows that work, land, the seasons, weather, world markets, animals and crops, are all part of God's world.
- has a long view of the ups and downs of life and is familiar with disappointment.
- knows that city models of church life often do not work for them
- is a highly rewarding ministry with many opportunities for lay leadership.

Listening to the Weather

Guest editor Chris Bedford writes...

I'm a weather forecast listener. I was brought up to it, (*you DO NOT TALK during the weather forecast!!*) and remain an avid listener in my old age. I bet there are lots of Rural Network News readers like me! ☺ Living in one of the driest parts of New Zealand, I feel for my northern friends as they are told to expect yet another downpour.



Having been at the Conference at Brandon, there's now another dimension to weather listening for me. I hear news reports about too much rain on the prairies, too little rain in outback Australia, floods in Bangladesh, fires devastating the olive groves of southern Greece and I pray for those farmers and their rural communities.



"Inter-connected" is the word I've brought back from Brandon. I visited farms in Alberta and Manitoba. Over meals at Brandon I listened to stories from Australia, Indonesia, Korea, India and England. What happens in rural communities around the world is my concern because I live in an inter-connected world. They are my brothers and sisters. They are people for whom Christ died and among whom Christ lives.

I hope this issue of Rural Network News will also help you feel connected with other rural Christians around New Zealand. We live in a blessed land. Let's remember those beyond our shores – for we are 'inter-connected'. It is still God's world.



2008 Trans Tasman Conference Taking Shape

Write on your calendar in large letters

Trans Tasman Conference
Marlborough-Nelson
April 7 – 11 2008
"Changing Seasons, Changing Times"

This is a wonderful close-to-home opportunity to connect with other rural Christians, engage with the issues, develop friendships, hear stories that challenge and inspire.

Take two or three (or more!) people from your parish for added value!!

The Trans-Tasman 2008 Conference will be a moving event. It will span Marlborough, Lake Rotoiti, and the Waimea Plains near Nelson. Buses



will take people from place to place. The journey will not only take in the sights and aspects of each region but will allow ample time for networking and individual discussion.



Beginning in Marlborough and on the east coast we will be looking at the unique agri-business ventures and

ministry challenges. There will be a cultural adventure on the Omaka marae. Then moving through to the Nelson Lakes National Park we will look at conservation issues, high country farming and living and working in an isolated community. The last days will be spent at the Teapot Christian Camp on the Waimea Plains where there will be workshops, conversation groups, and plenary sessions.

History

Since 1984 the four-yearly Trans-Tasman Rural Ministry Conference has enabled clergy and lay people to experience enriching and inspiring events to help them with their work of ministry in the Changing rural scene.

1984 Darfield, Canterbury - theme Rural Church Perplexed

1988 Kyogle NSW – theme Bearers of hope

1992 Waipawa – theme Rural realities
Creation or chaos

1996 Myrtleford, Vic

2000 Northland – Theme: Country
Conversations

2004 Clare, SA – Theme: Recapturing
Passion for the local church

2008 New Zealand Marlborough / Nelson
Changing seasons, Changing times

Get your Trans-Tasman Registration information at

<http://www.nelsonanglican.org.nz/resources/ruralpages/request%20information.htm>

Reports from the IRCA Conference in Brandon,

Manitoba, Canada

July 3-9, 2007

“Cry from the Heart”



The International Rural Church Association is a network of people with a passion for rural communities based on their passion for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

They seek to be an international community of rural Christians. They share stories of struggle and of hope, joined by their reliance on the land for their livelihood and by determination and hope because they have faith in God.

The IRCA vision is to be a voice for Rural community worldwide. The new IRCA website is www.irca.is – it is hosted by Iceland and will be a place for sharing resources and news about rural churches world wide.

Pray for Christians in rural churches around the world. Email Robyn McPhail chirmac@xtra.co.nz and ask to be put on the mailing list for news and prayer concerns.

A Kiwi To Be Proud of. Tributes to Robyn McPhail, chair of the IRCA Conference.



“Well done, good and faithful servant, continue on in the joy of your Lord!”

She was always smiling, always energizing, always practical, always encouraging (“We’re all the experts!”), always sensitive. And hugely appreciated by everyone at Brandon. Robyn McPhail was a wonderful IRCA Conference chairperson.

We have received these tributes to her –

From Lloyd Vidler in Australia -

Robyn McPhail became Chairperson of IRCA at the conclusion of the Chennai conference in 2002. An immediate result of her appointment was the development of the Prayer Bulletin which brought news of rural congregations throughout the world and joined those congregations together in a fellowship of prayer.

She has represented IRCA in a commendable way in negotiations with IRCA Korea and with the organizing committee of the Canadian Rural Church Network.

During the IRCA conference at Brandon she was obviously on top of the programme and all that had to be achieved during the course of the conference. She showed great sensitivity to the cultural, denominational and national interests represented at the conference. Her contribution in the leadership team was clear and thoughtful. Her ability to commit decisions to prayer and to seek God's guidance was a helpful development.

None of that refers to her energy, her computing ability in producing Powerpoint versions of the announcements and a photographic gallery. Her willingness to go the second mile was always present. Bravo Robyn, well done!

From Dave Ruesnik in the USA -

Working with Robyn was such a pleasure. She saw the "big picture" while working with important details. One of the most important contributions was to make rural church leaders from all countries feel like their work was the most important. By placing them on her prayer Listserv, they were connected with the rest of the world. She was always available for reactions and responded to e-mails very promptly, yet brilliantly. The most amazing tributes for Robyn is that she kept the rural-small church at the forefront of her work and mission.

From New Zealand Rural Ministry Unit chairperson Garth Cant -

Those of us who travelled from Aotearoa New Zealand are very proud of the role which Robyn has played and the qualities of

leadership which she provided. Alongside the high profile leadership she was a mentor and a quiet encourager for each one of us. Our enthusiasm for rural ministry and our vision for its future has grown because we have been alongside Robyn.

Kiwi Participants report on the IRCA Conference



The Kiwi contingent gives a hearty rendering of 'God Defend New Zealand' – in Maori of course!

A Conference that Connected – George and Marjorie Morrison's story....

The IRCA Conference was a gathering with a very defined message. We feel that Canadian agriculture has come under increased pressure similar to our (NZ) experiences in the mid 1980's, when subsidies were removed from farming, although now, sheep farming is coming under increased pressure through lack of returns and increased costs. This made the message from the Conference very relevant to a number of rural areas in NZ.

The melding of the two Keynote Speakers, Dr. John Ikerd and Dr. Roman Juriga, and our Bible Studies led by Rev. Dave Webber and Dr. Cam Harder, so rightly showed that the speakers messages and challenges were already prefixed in the Bible, and the basis of the studies "The Bible and the Rural Economy" has certainly challenged us to look further at this topic, and I cannot stop talking about it.

We have had the opportunity of presenting two "Conference Reports" and plan to have further studies in our own Congregation, based on the Bible Studies of the Conference.

The opportunity to network with other rural parish people or "small Worship Group" churches, we found invaluable as our own Parish is challenged with this, not having had a full-time Minister for the last 2½ years.

The topic of Colonialism is very relevant as the Film "Amazing Grace" on William Wilberforce is currently being widely promoted around the communities, and so it is very easy to talk Industrial Colonization and people get the "feel" of the Conference.

Sharing our stories and concerns with others from around the globe, was a particular highlight, with many new friends being made.



First Nations, Rural Economics, and Hutterites – Janice Purdie shares her Conference experience

Just being there - sharing in worship, and sharing in concerns of people living in rural areas – with eighty very different people from thirteen different countries was special.

One highlight was the Rev Bernice Salteaux's sharing about her journey as a First Nation person, and my visit to the Sioux Valley Reservation. A major learning for me was that each tribe or group of First Nation (i.e. indigenous or Indian people) people in Canada (and also in the U.S.A.) has its own distinct culture and language.. While the physical needs of the people are taken care of on the reservations with the provision of good medical care, schooling, and adequate housing, little or no thought has been given to their spiritual needs, to the provision of meaningful employment, or to acknowledging and honouring their own cultures, values and self worth. Four young girls, beautifully presented in traditional dress, and six young men welcomed us with dance and drum. This brought joy and hope to the hearts of the old people. But I felt a sadness; a ho hum feeling among the people of the reservation. They were surviving, but the joy, the zest for life appeared to have gone.



Another highlight was the keynote address "The Role of the Rural Church in Sustaining Rural Communities" given by the retired economics professor John Ikerd. His opening words were *"Under the guise of rural economic development, rural areas around the world are being colonised. ... Rural people are losing control over their communities, as corporations use their economic and political power to dominate local economies and governments. Irreplaceable precious rural people and cultures, are being exploited to increase the wealth of corporate investors."* His challenge to us in these times was for the Christian church, in working to sustain rural communities was to find the courage to reject the arrogance, intolerance, selfishness and pride that permeate much of global society today, including many of our churches; to teach and preach a message of faith, love and hope - the hope of the possibility of a better life for rural people, and to teach and preach the message of sustainability as a fundamentally better way of rural life.

In the 'Conference Scattered' week prior to the 'Conference Gathered' at Brandon I visited a Hutterite Community near Morris, Manitoba. Following a tour of their community kitchen with its latest in equipment, childcare centre, food storage area, and laundry. I shared lunch with them, families sitting together. The people farm, - crop, raise and process chickens, have an orchard and vegetable garden - using modern tractors and machinery. Other work is needed to sustain the community. They use their woodwork and engineering skills to give help to local farmers and neighbours. The tour finished in the home of friends of my host. It was great to be able share with the people about their faith and their simple lifestyle. The community has its own school – a one room school which takes the children up to about our year 8 level. They have their own dress code, but not as rigid as some of the Amish dress codes. They move freely in the local district. I saw some, recognisable by their dress, at the Morris community fire works to mark Canada Day on 1st July.



Rural people must realise it is not a sacrifice to care for other people. God created us as social beings. When our pursuit of material wealth diminishes the quality of our relationships our quality of life is diminished.

John Ikerd, at Brandon

From the Maritimes to the Prairies - Garth Cant reflects on his Canadian experience

A rural ministry conference in Canada was a great opportunity. There are close affinities between New Zealand, Australia and Canada in terms of gospel, culture, race relations, and rural Church. We see a Australians often and draw deeply on their insights and enthusiasms to mutual advantage. We see much less of Canadians. Brandon was a great place to be and the rural ministry conference was crafted to make the most of the opportunity of being in Canada for "conference scattered", and then being together from around the world in "conference gathered".

Let me trace my highlights:

Firstly, going to Nova Scotia for "conference scattered". Lester Settle was a thoughtful and generous host, he introduced me to the Londonderry Pastoral Charge, he took me to Nova Scotia Agricultural College, to a First Nations cultural centre and megacentre (astride a four line highway) at Truro, and to an Ann of Greengables reconstruction in a National Park on Prince Edward Island. Sunday was Canada Day: I preached on Samaritans, rural ministry and nationhood: they chose the hymns – O Canada and three by New Zealander Shirley Murray.

Conference gathered was a great experience: sixty people from 13 nations, from Iceland to Tonga, together for a week. A mix of keynotes, Bible Studies, small groups, social events and fieldtrips. Being alongside Uniting Church Australians was comfortable and familiar. Being alongside Mennonites and Lutherans from Canada opened up exciting new horizons. Cam Harder, Lutheran from Saskatoon, did both Bible Study and keynote, unpacking the shame that surrounds farm bankruptcy and reflecting on what that does to family and community.

In among "conference gathered" were the fieldtrips. All of us went to the International Peace Gardens, astride the North Dakota/Manitoba border. Twenty five of us went to the Sioux Valley First Nation reserve with Rev Bernice Salteaux, Visits to the site of a residential school; listening to the stories of Indian children taken from homes and families and detached from language and culture; some like Bernice lived, but others died; all are remembered. Time with the health centre, the lodge for those stricken with strokes and dementia, the FM radio station where Robyn McPhail and Christina Morunga were interviewed and the Kiwis and the Tongans backed them up with waiata.

We grew in insight and enthusiasm for rural church and rural ministry. Thank you Canadian hosts, and New Zealand companions.

A Greeting from new IRCA chairman, Lothar Schellerus of Switzerland.



Lothar Schellerus(left) with new IRCA secretary Garry Hardingham (Australia).

Grace and peace to the NZ Rural Network! Looking back five years IRCA from Chennai to Brandon, my heart is full of thanks for your contribution to give a voice to the voiceless, to make the silent voice of rural spirituality be heard.

Many thanks to Robyn McPhail who started with the prayer network a new chapter of networking worldwide spirituality. Thanks all of you that this network is going on and is still encouraging rural people all over the world with prayers given to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The IRCA general assembly in Brandon started a new chapter on the way to our Lord. It's a chapter of hope and mutual assistance in networking rural spirituality. Facing globalization we do believe that nobody on the earth can live for himself. That was the point where IRCA started in 1993. Let us link our different networks from all over the world. Let us share experiences and prayers, because our problems are the same. We are facing a never seen before destruction of old wisdom and spirituality. We are in danger to losing wisdom accumulated in thousands of years. In my vision IRCA would be a voice for the silent voice of that wisdom. Let us listen like Elijah not to the storm and the earthquake, but to the silent whisper of the voice of the Lord.

My hope is, that in the next few years, local and regional networks will continue the way, the prayer network started. That these networks will give access to their wisdom, their experiences and their hopes, creating web pages, to give access for everybody. We had a lot of very valuable prayers in the prayer network from the last years. Let us gather them in a database to be accessible to church people worldwide. There are statements, comments and studies of the problems of the rural areas. Let us make them accessible to all. There is so much to do to give the voiceless a voice through the network. Let us use the modern possibilities of the worldwide network, to bring the silent voice of rural spirituality to be a song of glory to the Lord.

May the Grace of our God, the Love of our savior Jesus Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit be with us for ever.

Lothar Schullerus

SPECIAL VISITOR FROM ENGLAND

Rev'd Graham R Jones, National Rural Officer for the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church, will visit New Zealand in January and February next year. Graham is based at the Arthur Rank Centre in England. Graham is undertaking study leave and is particularly interested in the church's strategic thinking and how the church

engages with government and other partners in the voluntary sector; how does the church 'rural-proof' its own strategy, and how does it contribute to the ongoing debates about government rural strategy and policy?

He hopes to meet various people involved in rural ministry in New Zealand.

Graham arrives in Auckland on January 20 and flies out from Christchurch on February 19.

If you would like to meet him and perhaps show Graham and his wife and 2 young daughters some great Kiwi hospitality, please contact Garth Cant – gandecant@xtra.co.nz

Rural Ministry with a Difference

Rev David Webber and the Cariboo Presbyterian House Church Mission.



David Webber presented two of the Bible studies at the IRCA Conference. Chris Bedford interviewed David at Brandon and heard a remarkable story.

David and his wife, and three colleagues, are missionaries to the Cariboo region of inland British Columbia. Their ministry area covers approximately 20% of British Columbia and the team drives from 2,000 to 2,500 km. per week to get to and from ministry points. This is a vast area of small settlements, and the church there consists entirely of house churches, the traditional style of church having collapsed in the first half of the twentieth century.

The house churches are interdenominational and intergenerational, and vary in size between 5 and 50 people David visits 5 or 6 of the house churches each week, providing input to their worship gathering, and guidance and encouragement to local leaders. Their ministry is part of the Presbyterian Church of Canada.

As more and more remote parts of New Zealand become beyond the reach of the traditional style church, the pattern of ministry in British Columbia may be worth considering here. Read more about the Cariboo Presbyterian House Church Mission at <http://www.cariboopresbyterianchurch.bc.ca/map.html>

MAKING A GOOD RETIREMENT –

Lynette Fowler, Rangiora

It is over a year now since we retired from farming, had a clearing sale, packed up our house, and moved to a different region.

We now have a healthy retirement fund, a newer and warmer house, town amenities, closeness to extended family plus plans for travel and a life away from farming. A year later I believe we made the right decisions.



Nevertheless the whole experience of retiring and leaving a farm is extremely stressful. Emotionally as well as physically demanding, it is not an experience to be taken lightly. Not surprisingly many people suffer depression and stress related physical illnesses.

There are different issues for rural people in retirement, and people dealing with them need to be wary of suggesting city solutions and current 'flavours of the month' which seem to be 'stay working and living in your own home'. Fine, if your community has medical services, public transport, shops which deliver, install and service appliances and if your community has changed so little that family and neighbourhood support enjoyed in the prime of life is still there.

The reality for some is that much has changed. I do not go along with the idea that today's rural communities are less friendly but believe many are not geared for the needs of the elderly. This article will not address the fact that farm houses are often needed for working members of the family, except to say that some well meaning advisors advocate the 'stay in your own home with your memories' scenario and that it is OK to blame other people or circumstances for any sadness.

- DON'T blame or judge others unless something is serious enough to warrant the attention of police or doctor.
- DON'T treat the matter lightly because a lot of money is involved and/or you have personally managed a number of shifts.

- DON'T counsel people to stay in a rural area if it seems unlikely their physical and emotional needs will be met before death or serious illness intervenes.

My advice to people who have retired and/or moved to another community.

- Take a holiday - preferably something like a cruise where you do not have to make many decisions, or perhaps a month in someone's holiday home.
- Get involved in your new community through volunteer work, service clubs, walk and craft groups etc before you redecorate the house. This way you soon see familiar faces at the supermarket. If one activity does not work out try something else.
- Take care not to get over busy and enjoy some rest.
- Keep in touch with old mates by phone and visits. Find out who the fellow expats are from your old community or region.
- Enjoy adventures while you may but leave yourself open to the possibility of returning one day to a centre closer to your old community.



Finally let us rejoice in and remember that it is a privilege to reach retirement and the third age.



This occasional newsletter is published by the Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit and is printed and distributed by Anglican Diocese of Christchurch, PO Box 4438, Christchurch, ph 03 379 5950, fax 03 379 5954.

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Guest Editor this issue: Chris Bedford 03 3243 315

People of rural communities must choose strategies consistent with sustainable economic development. Sustainable development must be capable of meeting the needs of the present without compromising the future; it must be capable of maintaining its productivity and value to society indefinitely. John Ikerd, at Brandon.

Thank you, Winter!!

It was dark, grey, cold winter's day.
The southerly wind swept strongly across
the Canterbury Plains, driving rain and sleet
and snow before it.
The cattle stood with their backs into it,
standing close together for warmth.

The sheep packed together in a tight bunch,
in the lee of the old pine tree shelter belt
planted so long ago. The people took refuge
around the log burner, and stared out the
window at the wintery blast.

The shortest day had come and gone. "Aye,"
said the old farmer, "it's true. The worst
weather comes after the shortest day" and
he pulled his oilskin up around his neck and
went to feed out.

But now, slowly but surely, the days were
getting longer.



Out by the gate, beside the drive, a
few centimetres below the surface,
life was stirring. The daffodils were
talking to each other.

"Time to start moving, folks" a big bulb said
to the others.

"God is calling me to bloom; the time for
resting is over". said another.

"It has been a wonderful winter, I've got
some great colour to give," said another.

"My form is just going to be great", said the
one by the mailbox.

"That cold darkness was just what I needed
to get my stem going straight and strong."
said yet another.

So the daffodils had a conference, and each
agreed to push a green shoot upwards. "I
want to be first", said the King Alfred with
the big yellow trumpet.

"I'm shy; I'm going to be a bit later," said
the daffodil with the pale white petticoat.

Up above, the farmer
was coming back in
from feeding out, water
still trickling down the
inside of his jacket, a
bit morose and
uncomfortable.



Suddenly he stopped and looked at the

ground by the mailbox, "A daffodil, by jove!" he
said.

As he sat down for his morning tea he said "The
daffodils by the gate are coming through,
Mary."

"That's good, soon they'll be a mass of colour
for us," she replied.

Meanwhile, out in the garden and down by the
drive, there was a big conversation going on.

The soil said to the temperature, "Are you
nearly finished? I don't mind being dark but
I'm a bit sick of being cold."

The temperature said to the wind, "I've nearly
run out of frosts."

The wind said to the daylight, "I'm tired of
blowing from the south, it's time to get warm
nor-wester out of the cupboard."

The daylight said to the rain, "I'm going to get
longer."

The rain said to the sun, "I'm going to send
some moisture, but it will be warmer moisture
because the frosts are nearly over."

The sun said to the soil "I'm going to warm you
up."

And the daffodils said:

"Thank you temperature, your
coldness gives me character.

"Thank you light, you help me wake
up and remember to start growing.

"Thank you wind, it will be nice to
bend to a warm nor-wester."

"Thank you rain, you help me take in the food I
need from the soil around me.

"Thank you soil, for giving me a nice safe
home."

"Thank you sunshine, you make me want to
dance on a spring morning."



To them all the daffodils said, "Thank you
winter. We needed you. Without you we could
not bloom and give joy and smiles and laughter
to so many people."

There can be no spring without winter. Often
the most intense colours come after the coldest
winter. Often we appreciate the sunshine most
after the darkest winter days.

Often we appreciate God's love and goodness
to us most when we have known his company
through a time of difficulty.

How would we appreciate spring if we never
had winter?

Chris Bedford