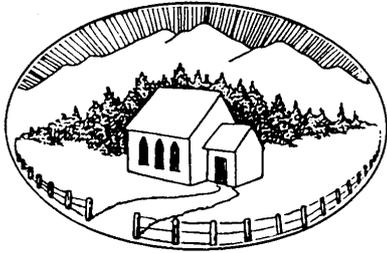


Rural Network News



No. 36

March 2008

If you give me an egg and I give you an egg,
we each have one egg.

If you give me an idea and I give you an idea,
we each have two ideas.

West African proverb

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.

THE HEADLINES SCREAM DROUGHT, FLOOD, DOOM!

Depending which side of the Tasman you are on, the media have been leading with doom and gloom for the Rural Sector in one way or another. While it is true to say that our Rural Sectors are facing challenges, these and other challenges are the things that not only legends are made of, but which also hone the rugged skill sets that have seen rural communities survive and prosper through time.

The church not only sits within these communities but in a lot of ways is the community. Like the Rural Business Sector we are required to change and adapt to the changing environment. It is a very different world out there than the time when our older church buildings were built let alone the economic shocks of the 1980's.

Every four years a Trans Tasman Rural Conference is held with the aim of helping the emerging Rural Church to face the challenges of change and be at the cutting edge of Christian Ministry.

This April it is the turn of the churches of the top of the South Island of New Zealand to host a five day moving conference which will lead us through some of the iconic scenic and farming areas of Marlborough and Nelson. "***Changing Seasons, Challenging Times***" will have input from industry as well as different churches working in the field.

Our two guest speakers are Mark Gibson and Andrew Wells. Mark Gibson is a Methodist minister in Christchurch with a strong rural background and a special interest in the ecological imperative for the Christian faith. Andrew Wells is a scientist working on research on the interface between geology and forestry. He lives in a small rural community in Central Otago. Between them, Mark and Andrew will speak to the emerging challenge of climate change for life and ministry in the Rural Sector.

So if you would like to come along and network with a great bunch of people who are outstanding in the field in regards to Rural Ministry don't waste a minute. Check out the web site <http://rural.nelsonanglican.org.nz/index.htm>.

Registrations close on 14 March 2008.

Recently we got an email from a person who had been away from home for four weeks and floods were making getting home impossible. But through various means he found a way to contact us because he saw this Conference as an important event in the life and development of Rural Ministry.

So what are you waiting for - make a positive investment in the future now!

Martin Harrison, Brightwater, Nelson

Changing Seasons Challenging Times

A Moving Trans-Tasman Event

7 -11 April 2008

rural.nelsonanglican.org.nz/index.htm

UNCOVERING SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

A conversation with Graham Jones

'Rural-proofing' the church's policies was a phrase new to those who sat down to share time with the Rev'd Graham Jones. Graham, along with his wife and family, recently visited Westshore near Napier in the course of a sabbatical tour Graham was making. He is currently based at the Arthur Rank Centre, Stoneleigh, England, set in the heart of the Royal Agricultural Centre. It is an ecumenical centre promoting the rural mission of the church.



Most of the dozen or so people in Hawke's Bay who shared with him in late January came from rural backgrounds. Rural-proofing related to how the church ensures the integrity of its mission against the encroachments of a mainly urban government mindset. It was an issue that New Zealanders hadn't really addressed, or more correctly forgotten about.

Graham shared the dilemmas that the Methodist and Anglican churches face in England. Half of the congregations are in rural communities, but not half the population. Government policies are not always rural-friendly. On reflection, however, we recalled the harsh times in the 1980s and 1990s when Rogernomics economic rationalisation was in full flow – high interest rates, withdrawal of service agencies and community services from the country areas.

Graham said that Coventry University had completed research, 'Faith in Rural Communities', about how positively churches contribute to a community's wellbeing. It was agreed that the same occurs in New Zealand.

The term 'rural' as understood by us here probably differs in perspective from that in England. Graham said that in the United Kingdom 'rural'

applies to any community under 10,000 people. In New Zealand it refers to communities with under 1000. And generally towns under 5000 people will have a rural economic base. So, this comparison of scale means that rural people in New Zealand have a greater chance of voicing their concerns in the political arena. Despite the de-regulation of Federated Farmers it has a recognised profile in things political and rural.

In England the Department of Agriculture is at loggerheads with the farming sector. Farmers are in survival mode, struggling to keep afloat. The big supermarkets command the prices they receive. By contrast dairy farmers in New Zealand have real pulling power within Fonterra. There was a general feeling that despite our distance from overseas markets the rural economy is in reasonable shape.

Graham spoke of ingenious ways to make church buildings useful. Quite a number of rural churches are being used as Post Offices – two to three times a week the clerk brings along large 'suitcases' with all the post office amenities and sets up for business in the church! Some churches run a Fair Trade stall and/or provide refreshments and a place to chat.

Pastoral care is a pressing issue, as farmers in the UK have had one crisis after another – bovine TB, floods, Blue Tongue, Foot and Mouth. After the last outbreak of F&M three farming charities were set up: the Farming Crisis Network, the Arthur Rank Addington Fund (for housing), and the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Fund. The Westshore group agreed that pastoral care is a ministry that, in the light of the growth of Local Shared Ministry parishes, has suffered. However, the church does have a voice within regional Rural Support Trusts.

He told of other resource material being published to help rural churches and communities:

- 'Presence' – a workbook to help maintain a church presence in society;
- 'Network Change Programme' – helping churches further explore the use of the local church.

Bill Bennett, Hawkes Bay

Visit www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk and go to Publications and Resources for the latest and what is available.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Hope for Villages in the Baltic Sea Region

International Rural Churches Association member Rudi Job reports that key themes arose out of the workshops held in villages in Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, and with supportive input from Sweden:

- **Agriculture and fisheries** in the Baltic region have suffered greatly in recent years. It has taken considerable time and effort to change from a collectivized economic system to a market economy. The growing season is short, and competition from EU agricultural and fisheries policies has been negative. Finding ways to make farms viable and attractive (e.g. by adding value through bio-agriculture, herbs, direct marketing and eco-tourism) is essential.
- The **culture and history** of each region is an asset. The recovery of these traditions could provide a base for developing community identity and community economic development. The ideal would be to have the church and community work on this process together. This means ecumenical cooperation among churches, and cooperation between churches and non-governmental organizations and associations
- If churches were involved, church buildings could be a focal point for local pride and self-confidence, and for community activity. *(However, in countries that had an anti-religious policy, the churches also need time and resources to develop their own life and 'infrastructure'.)*
- In some areas there is a growing number of young people who want to stay in the countryside, return to it, and even to move from the city in search of a new quality of life.
- The tools, methods and skills of **community development work** needs to be more widely shared and learned in rural areas. This includes organization-building, and working with strategies and methods to enable people to participate in decisions that affect their lives.
- Reinforce the value of **networking local communities** to share ideas and good practises

and to learn from the strengths of different traditions. This can lead to common projects, initiatives and partnerships across the regions. Leadership training programs are required.

- There is also a necessity to develop **theological approaches** that relate to the village experience and to village priorities.

Rudi concludes: "The workshop and process encouraged people to 'dig in where they are' on the basis of a clear vision and hope that things can be changed for the better. The process of learning from others has created hope and inspiration as well as an on-going networking process. The theological method has been very inspiring and needs to be shared and developed more widely ..."

Compiled by Joyce Sasse from Rudi Job's report 'Hope for the Villages'. For Joyce's newsletter go to www.canadianruralchurch.net

NEWS FROM AUSTRALIA

IRCA member, farmer and Uniting Church in Australia Rural Evangelism Consultant Ross Neville responded to our request for an 'on the ground' report on the big dry in Australia.

The situation in NSW is very mixed. It is happening as predicted by the climatologists for climate change also as happened in the middle of last century on the East coast of Australia. This is the first time for about 30 years the monsoons have come in across northern Australia as they did in the 1950 1960's. The north Coast of NSW is getting floods, the north-east and north-west of NSW are getting floods from Queensland and good rains.

The central and southern part of NSW and Victoria doesn't normally get summer rains except for storms and that is all that is happening.

Scattered flooding and storms don't help farmers much and are in fact doing a lot of damage destroying fences. Lake Cargelligo area lost up to 170 km of fences washed away. The large irrigation dams of central and southern NSW have not had any significant inflows. Many are still only 20% or less full. Irrigators have no water allocation for crops, and there is still some threat of some towns running out of water. The summer storms and cooler temperatures have in most areas helped postpone hand feeding of stock, but also created ripening problems and mould and fungus

difficulties not seen for many years. The sorghum crops have yet to ripen and be harvested before people rejoice too loudly.

The price for grain is astronomical and lot feeds, dairy, pigs and poultry are still going out of business because prices for products have not risen because of the global ceiling prices.

Grain producers except for the North of the state with sorghum have had nil to very small crops. The late rains and lack of irrigation quotas meant there was hardly any cotton or rice sown. For most farmers on the east coast of Australia winter cropping and winter livestock raising are critical, so it all depends on what the climate does in autumn winter and spring. These are the predicted climate change drier months and most farmers have been burnt badly by those seasons especially winter and spring this last 3 years. Fertiliser and chemical prices have doubled over the last two years as well as diesel so everyone is very wary of borrowing another \$100-200,000 to put this year's crop in. Some farm debts we know have risen to near the \$million this last 4 years with crop failures.

Except for the share market keeping real estate prices high there would be a rural collapse. Already we are hearing about lenders not allowing refinancing for this year's crop.

A bit of a long blurb but the media give such a wrong impression. 46% of NSW is still drought declared.

We have a retired farming couple visiting farmers and our church has pledged to employ two additional rural chaplains to help the rural communities. Even the federal government was talking 'rural chaplains', but we have a new government so that may change.

A Lament for the Dying Land

Red dust swirls on another cloudless day,
life and hope slips away as crop and pasture
is consumed by hungry ewe and lamb.

Where are you God?
Have you abandoned us?
Has your Spirit ascended in the
rush of a whirly wind or dry dust squall?
Or are you choosing to remain silent in the
face of our blindness to the damage we do to the
environment and community?

Where are you God?
Whose blessing to us seemed so real.
So assured through generation after generation.
Whose creation, though harsh at times
brought forth life and sustained community?

Where are you God?
Gone is our hope.
Gone with the wind and the hopeful clouds.
Are you gone with the fleeting rain?
Gone with our children,
seduced by the economy of prosperity and
bought off by the dream of technology?

Where are you God?
Where is your abundant love for us?
Where the covenant you made betwixt
Jesus one of us and Christ the Holy one?

What does this covenant of life and love mean to
you?
Will you abandon us to destruction?
Will you allow economics to triumph over life?
Life that sustains community,
Life that supports widows,
Life that makes room for the stranger in our land,
Life that brings to meaning even us?

Where are you God?
Where is your justice God of our mothers and
fathers?
Where is your compassion to those who are forced
to walk away from land?
Land cared for with a lovers caress,
Land made pregnant with the potential for life,
Land brought to life through the pain of childbirth,
the pain of drought and rain?

Where are you God?
Where is your justice in this time?
Justice that brings us back to your holiness?
Where is your holiness to be found in the
abandoning of the farm?

Where are you God?
Gather us in your loving arms,
in those hands that shaped creation.
Comfort us in our distress and
heal us from the wounds of the heart.
Feed us by your body and blood
that we might know the food that sustains
beyond the strength of our own arm.
For with the food of vain pride and self-sufficiency
we can no longer feed our-selves.

Even now creator God,
stretch out your arms across this land
and bring in your shalom.

Geoff Wellington, Lithgow, NSW, October 2007

MAKING A GOOD RETIREMENT

CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

In the September 2007 Rural Network News Lynette Fowler wrote about the experience of retirement and gave some tips for doing it well. There's just a little more she'd like to add, and then we have some further thoughts on retirement from another *Rural Network News* reader.

First Lynette invites us to be honest about how difficult it can be to retire. Openness about the mix of feelings, including deep sadness, and willingness in others to acknowledge these feelings are important. She writes:

DO treat the matter of retirement with the seriousness and respect of a bereavement. Offer a service, prayers, communion or family celebration for a past life, memories and new beginnings.

And recognise that the rural landscape, way of life etc has become a part of that person's being and that separation from it is indeed a loss.



And now another person's thoughts on retirement:

What is retirement? Very elusive!

Unlike Lynette Fowler, (*RNN* Sept.2007) we have not had a 'stepping out of farming'. For us, retirement is a very gradual process and, yes, elusive. When people ask "Are you retired?" we usually reply with, "What's that?" In fact, as we try to decrease the time spent farming we just gather more voluntary work, both in the church and in the community.

Eleven years ago a family inheritance enabled us to buy a house in the town, a ½ hour drive from the farm where we had spent over 30 years. I was surprised by the grieving I experienced, even though it was something I really wanted. Another family member lived in the farm-house until the main block of 100ac with house and buildings had to be sold. My husband continued to commute, and still does, as we retain some lease blocks, grazing and 200 head of cattle. It seems that 'once a farmer, always a farmer' rings true for us. However, my husband now commutes as much as

possible only every second day, thus cutting fuel consumption (a big issue for rural dwellers) and, at 72, giving him some respite from the constant physical demands of life on the farm.

What is helping this gradual retirement process

- We retain a block of pine trees near to harvest and have always regarded that as our retirement fund.
- We retain 17 acres as well as the other grazing blocks. We have 40ac in a Family Trust and that has helped us and 'our five' – knowing knowing that there will always be a place that is ours, in the Maori district where they all grew up among people who will always be special and who have given us the taonga of some of their culture.
- We were able to take a big OE for 12 weeks last year, taking in three countries, including the International Rural Churches Conference in Canada – wonderful!
- I have the best of both worlds with a farm base that I enjoy going to on occasions to help, to work together as we always have, or just to enjoy the beautiful, peaceful countryside in each other's company.
- We endeavour to make time to do things together and to have precious time with our children and grandchildren.
- Moving to town has meant we are closer to our Church family and the Church and community activities we are involved in.

It is not an easy path. Some of our decisions have been made for financial reasons and at times we feel 'trapped' by the need to be still tied to caring for 200 stock. There is some concern about what will happen when my husband is unable to physically continue, for health reasons or death. This is something we have to face up to and do something about. However, we are making slow progress towards reaching our goals and 'a time for letting go' and having more time for those elusive retirement activities.

An afterthought

Maybe there needs to be more assistance available to help farmers and their families through the difficulties of retiring from farming, and thus avoid possible trauma.

ELLESMERE OPEN DAY

A DAY FOR MEETING, LEARNING AND INSPIRING

The 21st of November 2007 was a stunningly fine day in Ellesmere, Canterbury. A group of more than forty people from Hurunui in the north to Methven in the south met in Dunsandel at the main worshipping venue for the Ellesmere Co-operating Parish (which has four churches/sectors).

Chris Bedford opened the day with devotions. District Councillor Nigel Barnett gave us an overview of the key issues of the district: e.g. Selwyn is the second fastest growing territorial authority in New Zealand (with Rolleston, a satellite town to Christchurch, within its bounds) and the emergence of corporate farming in the dairy sector. This has been impacting the social fabric of the community by reducing voluntary input, increasing school rolls yet with higher needs in reading assistance and behavioural issues.

Ruth Wilson, chair of Dunsandel Sector of Ellesmere Co-operating Parish, spoke about the key issues for the church in the Dunsandel district.

Mid-morning we drove to Michael and Aneka Dalley's dairy farm at Brookside. They gave us an illuminating talk about their 139ha operation as we gathered outside the herringbone milking shed.

Michael spoke about the key features of their operation including the herd size (340 milking and 80 rising 1yr old heifers), staff, irrigation with two centre pivots (with 3m clearance so he could keep existing shelter belts) and 80 sprinklers from three wells, breeding, production, pastures, and fertilizer. Future issues for the farm were outlined including water, effluent, perception of dairy farmers, Fonterra, payouts and climate change.

Late morning the convoy of cars stopped at the historic Brookside Church, taking the opportunity to look in the church and around the cemetery. We learnt what a focal point the church has been to the community over the years for local farming families.

Our next visit was Peter Withell's mixed sheep and cropping farm. Peter (the parish chairman) outlined their farming operation which had been in the family for generations. He led some lively debate about the importance of irrigation particularly as the Central Plains Water Scheme was raised.

Peter's straight talking about his faith, farming, and leadership within the local parish was refreshing.

A scrumptious lunch and refreshments were catered for us by the team at St David's Church, Leeston. This was true rural hospitality at its best in the church hall. Sector members described how they saw the future of the church and Christian witness in this district. They also talked about the changing issues facing the local community.

With full stomachs we got in our cars and drove around the corner to visit Leeston Seeds for a guided tour of the seed dressing plant by manager Grant Davies. The extensive business utilised what was previously the railway station now containing many seed dressing machines from the old to the more modern. Grant explained that while he was a relative newcomer to the seed industry he had staff with decades of experience. Over recent years they have increased their storage capacity.

This full day had the most wonderful closing as we were welcomed onto Taumutu Marae. Denise Sheate spoke to us while we shared afternoon tea before heading towards the coast to Hone Wetere Church where Rosaline Brown talked about the history of the church, its annual service and the interplay between the church, marae and their role in the community.

As we left the tapu of church and urupā, we washed our hands and re-entered the noa of our everyday lives.

To complete an enlightening rural day's outing in Ellesmere some of the group went down to Fisherman's Point to see where Lake Ellesmere meets the Pacific Ocean. It was a day to remember.

Nicola Robertson, Lyndhurst, Mid-Canterbury

Rural Network News Archive New location

www.presbyterian.org.nz/4766.0.html

Other Websites of Note

www.irca.is

rural.nelsonanglican.org.nz/index.htm

www.canadianruralchurch.net

www.earth-ministry.com

www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk

www.ruralministry.com

A RURAL CALL TO PEACE

The following message went out at the end of last year from the new Chair and Secretary of the International Rural Churches Association. Its message continues to be relevant.



To decision-making bodies all over the world

Peace on Earth

At this time in the Christian world remind us of God's greatest gift for the world: "peace on earth good will towards humankind". Thus IRCA calls for a worldwide effort to transform this holy offer into reality.

We call all decision-making bodies in politics and economy to keep in mind that "peace on earth" means not only military but in the same way social peace.

We ask decision-making bodies all over the world to take care that people may live their own culture and spirituality honestly and peacefully.

We salute the new developments in using renewable energy and welcome the possibilities to give the rural region a new importance. Nevertheless we forewarn of the danger of the misuse of food by transforming it into energy. Such developments have to be stopped.

"Peace on earth" does not mean only peace for those who are living on earth, but in the same way "peace for the earth". Thus we ask for respectful and sustainable relations with natural resources.

We call for an immediate stop to all nuclear experiments in the ground and to inform people completely about the impact of such experiments on the energy balance of the earth.

We call all decision making bodies of the world to remember, that the earth was here before them and will be after them too. She is lent to us by God to live on her and to leave her better and more peaceful for the next generation.

May "peace on earth" lead us the closing weeks of this year and guide us through the next year.

Lothar Schullerus
Chairperson

Garry Hardingham
Secretary

If you would like to receive email Prayer/News from IRCA, contact chirmac@xtra.co.nz

RUMINATIONS

RURAL NEWSLETTER AVAILABLE

"Ruminations", the quarterly magazine on Rural Ministry published by the Uniting Church in Australia's NSW Rural Ministry Unit, is available in New Zealand.

You can receive it either for free by email or for \$15 by post.

"Ruminations" contains down-to-earth articles on issues in rural life, in relation to church, community and farming, as well as ideas and perspectives that encourage and challenge gospel driven change for the future.

Contact Robyn McPhail at chirmac@xtra.co.nz or 17 Campbell Lane, Kerikeri 0230. Cheques to Kaeo-Kerikeri Union Parish.

BOTTOM OF THE BARREL

Something for those with Scottish blood...

An English doctor was being shown around a Scottish hospital. Near the end of his visit, he saw a ward of patients with no obvious injuries.

He started to examine the first patient, but the man proclaimed: "Fair fa' yer honest, sonsie face / Great chieftain o' the puddin' race!"

The doctor, taken aback, moved on to the next patient, who immediately said; "Some hae meat and canna eat / And some wad eat that want it."

The next patient cried out; "Wee sleekit cow'rin tim'rous beastie / O what a panic's in thy breastie!"

"Well," the English doctor muttered to his Scottish colleague, "I see you saved the psychiatric ward for last."

"Oh, no," said the Scottish doctor. "This is our serious Burns unit!"

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

Witty sayings are as easily lost as the pearls slipping off a broken string; but a word of kindness is seldom spoken in vain. It is the seed which, even when dropped by chance, springs up a flower. The Old Farmers Almanac, 1853

IN LOVING MEMORY

Heather McCrostie Little

Heather McCrostie Little MBE JP from Cust died in February 2008 at age 77. Heather was a passionate advocate for rural communities and a role model for rural women seeking to make the world a better place.

Heather was a founding member of the Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit. When Lincoln College convened a Rural Development Conference in 1976, key policy makers attended and Heather worked with Des McSweeney to ensure that a wide range of rural participants were included – among them farm workers, stock and station agents, the Maori Women's Welfare League and "the Church". A year later "the Church" (in particular John Barker and Hugh Patterson) convened a rural ministry conference at Sheffield and included Heather Little and Des McSweeney in the planning and leadership. Heather encouraged "the Church" to include a wide spectrum of rural people – lay people and clergy, women and men, farm families and residents from rural towns were able to meet on equal terms at Sheffield in 1977. Out of that conference the Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit was formed.

Heather was brought up in Balclutha, qualified as a law clerk in the 1950s but found that career closed to women, became a receptionist at Warners, went on an extended OE and returned to be a travel agent. Heather and Brian's was a legendary romance. Brian came in from Hawarden to book a passage to South America. Farmer Brian and the travel agent Heather met, fell in love and married. Godson James Hill has vivid memories of school holidays spent with Brian and Heather on the farm at Littledale.

Heather began public life when she was elected to the Hawarden Licensing Trust in the 1970s. Heather and her neighbour Stephen Barker then contested elections and alternated positions on the Waipara County Council and the Hurunui County Council in the 1970s and 1980s. Heather lost the 1985 election (to Stephen). "That was a stroke of good fortune", said Stephen, "since it opened the way for Heather to be appointed to the Local Government Commission". That commission with five members, with Heather as the rural voice, reconfigured our cities and rural districts.

Heather was a significant advocate for rural people and rural communities at national and international level. She was a member of the Social Science Research Funding Committee, the Social Advisory Council, the New Zealand Planning Council. She represented New Zealand on the OECD for 12 years and formed close relationships with researchers and rural policy makers in Europe and North America. Professor Norah Keating from Canada, for example, worked closely with Heather on strategies to support the frail elderly within rural communities.

Heather played a pivotal role in linking together rural communities, rural congregations, government policy makers and universities for the benefit of rural communities and for the benefit of the nation. "When support was needed, Heather was supportive. When challenge was needed, Heather challenged". Her encouragement for young researchers, young academics, young journalists and young clergy was especially significant. She gave them insights into rural community and they emerged as passionate advocates for the place of rural New Zealand in the larger nation.

Heather was recognised and affirmed by the nation. She was awarded an MBE in 1989, a New Zealand 1990 medal, and a Women's Suffrage Medal in 1993. Heather's parents and her husband Brian died when she was comparatively young. She was a very public person and very private person. Her life was made complete by her Godchildren James, Anna and Diana and by close and mutually supportive friends in her local community, up and down the nation, and across the globe.

Garth Cant, Canterbury



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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