**SHARED MINISTRY – A WAY OF BEING CHURCH AT THE HEART OF RURAL MINISTRY**

“Naku te rourou nau te rourou, ka ora ai te iwi”

Ko Maunga Korowai, Mt Torlesse, toku maunga  
Ko Waimakariri toku awa  
Ko Darfield rawa ko Otautahi oku kainga  
Inaianei nō Pukerua Bay,Te Whanganui a Tara, ahau.  
Ko Tangata Tititi te iwi.   
Ko Jock Dawson rawa ko Joy Houlker oku matua  
Ko Graeme Dawson toku teina.  
Ko Jim McAloon toku tane.  
Ko Jenny Dawson ahau.

Ko te wehi ki te Atua  
ma whakakororia tona ingoa  
i nga wa katoa.

Nga mihi atu e Ngai Tahu, te tangata whenua o Te Wai Pounamu  
Tena koutou e manuhiri, nou mai haere mai  
No reira, kia ora tatou katoa

I greeted you, beginning with the whakatauki or proverb *“With your basket and my basket the people will live”.* Together, this week we will share experiences and insights that will bring new life to our people. I also spoke of my home, my family, and greeting the people of this area as well as our visitors and all of you.

**SLIDE 1**Ministry can be a very tangled, knotty, and confusing thing.   
So, because one side of my family came to this country with the woollen industry,   
I am going to lay out some strands of yarn with you this morning   
and eventually bring them together.   
 There may be some strands that you can use and maybe some that you don’t like at all,   
but my goal is simply to lay them out for us to see, as this conference begins. You may also be interested that the word “yarn” has a particular use in NZ and Australia, as something that can be spun but also relating to a what’s often a long rambling story.   
I hope this is not too long and rambling!

**Strand One (SLIDE 2):**  
I want to acknowledge who I amand who I bring:   
groups of people I have been privileged to meet with in Tasmania, the US, Scotland and England (some of whom are here),   
where a common pattern of meeting parish people   
has been to go around the group saying your name and your ministry.   
I have always loved hearing people do that   
because what is important is how the group opens up  
to what they maybe take for granted in their life together.  
It also allows individuals to claim for themselves a ministry   
that they share with these colleagues.  
Today I bring with me people who have no or less connection with the church: like the Playcentre parents a few decades ago here in Kaikoura and Takaka, and my family   
especially my farmer brother who is a great storyteller  
 with a vibrant sense of place – which in a way is where all this begins…

I will start with two stories, two yarns, from this island, Te Wai Pounamu,   
that indirectly say something about the kind of Shared Ministry   
that I see being at the heart of rural ministry.  
I.The PlayCentre movement **(SLIDE 3) –**Gwen Somerset was born here in Canterbury but it was in Wellington she became   
one of the founders of PlayCentre around 1950.   
PlayCentre is still an early childhood movement based on collective principles:   
everyone bringing their skills, parents getting the training they needed when they need it,   
and whole families learning together.   
It continues to thrive in some urban and many rural areas   
where there are fewer options for kids to get early childhood education.   
Rural churches often find they have to engage and equip all their people   
for mission and ministry in a similar way.  
II.The story of the stud rams and the flock rams **(SLIDE 4**)   
was written by Boyd Wilson, about the Canterbury farmer in the hills who had always bought stud rams from the plains for breeding. His niece went away to study and learned about the kind of sheep that do well on different country.  
So she suggested that the Boss use locally-bred flock rams,   
which produced progeny that did far better.   
The original story is much longer and worth a look. Some people call seminary-trained clergy “stud rams” and those who are ordained from the local community “flock rams”. It’s all about being suited for the particular kind of country and context.

**Strand Two (SLIDE 5):**  
What is it to be rural?   
Definitions use language like countryside, pastoral, agricultural, farming.   
I think I would rather focus on the interaction   
between big spaces which allow for all kinds of possibilities   
and small numbers of people who often really struggle.  
It’s typical in such places to hear this:   
“Our church has a small core group which keeps our parish going. We all have to be Jacks-of-all-trades as most of our parishioners are elderly. This makes it is difficult to know what we or the leader should be doing less of. Upkeep of buildings, gardens, lawns, administrational duties, preparing of services and pastoral care work require all our energies.”  
At the same time there is a “Number 8 wire” mentality.  
That’s a kiwi expression meaning   
being able to make something out of almost nothing   
or to make a thing work in a simple unorthodox way to solve a problem. Fencing wire, number 8 wire, has many uses.  
And then there are country stories: Stories abide – and they last.   
A Catholic priest friend leaving a rural parish wrote this recently:   
“Many times in my years in the district I have heard the locals repeat stories of what their 70 year old neighbour was like as a child as if sixty subsequent years of life experience is not as relevant as the event one day when they were at primary school. Very often this ancient moment has become the event that defines the individual and this is rarely positive for the person. Often too stories abound about the mother or brother or grandfather of a person, stories which may be historically interesting and even true, but which do nothing to help us appreciate a person as a unique individual with their own gifts and experiences. It’s common to have someone introduced to us (and I exaggerate for effect), ‘this is John whose great uncle accidentally set fire to the school when he was eight’. “  
This raises further issues about the role of community memory,   
which of course is not unique to rural places.   
There seems to be an ability away from cities to remember what happened in relation to weather patterns and disasters of all magnitudes, and to recall connections between people as well as events. Are these stories just retold again and again without reflection?   
Learning from the context may be a rural characteristic but I wonder if we could mine this characteristic deeply by asking more incisive questions.   
Our common stories in churches and communities,   
especially in the church, add to our sense of identity as God's people.   
So we might ask: what did this response show us about ourselves?    
What do we treasure and need to work hard to protect even in the easy times? What is God teaching us?  
How might rural people foster this reflecting and learning from their context, and share it more widely,   
with a whole church that makes itself open to listening?    
A United States friend said to me recently that at a regional meeting   
she said to those gathered "We in our community are so fortunate to live in a place where we can still see the stars."    
She was not sure people got her point,   
that in metropolitan areas   
there is too much light pollution to see the stars in all their glory.    
For her – and me - being able to see the stars   
and the magnificence of creation opens me more widely and deeply   
to the presence and power of God.   
Is that a conversation rural people could bring to the wider church?  
  
How do we bring Jesus the Redeemer into the picture   
with people who are deeply centred in God the Creator?

How do we talk about the redemption and the power of the Holy Spirit  
 with our neighbours who are dealing with farming tragedies:   
the dairy farmers who were culling 22,300 cows on 28 farms   
in South Canterbury   
or the people in the districts where yet another farmer has killed himself?  
What we who listen to God in the wide open spaces  
know something about, is listening.   
Sometimes that is all there is.

Becoming more aware, more widely and more deeply,   
is a key part of growing in faith.   
The openness of being ecumenical is very typical of rural communities,   
where people who live under the same big skies all know each other,   
or think they do.   
“Ecumenical”, or a way of living as the whole household of God,   
acknowledges that many different perspectives are required,   
or are inevitable, in the household.   
There is a humility is discovering that we each hold only part of the story,  
and discovering that where you stand determines what you see.  
it may also be about what you choose to see…  
Maybe being ecumenical is not just about doing things together   
because we all know each other through local clubs,   
but is primarily about God’s grace and God’s space.

So how does that fit with being church?

**Strand Three: Ecclesiology (SLIDE 6)**.   
Baptism is at the centre of being church.   
Over the past 50 years almost our denominations   
have re-thought their understanding of baptism.   
Perhaps a critical point was the World Council of Churches document   
*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry,* in 1982,   
which included the recognition that baptism is baptism is baptism,   
whichever denomination,   
with some limitations around believers’ baptism.   
So new questions began to be raised, like:   
is baptism is full membership of the church?   
Who then are the “ministers” of the faith?   
How can baptism be valued as much as – or more than - ordination?   
If the Body of Christ is made up of “members”,   
in the way that St Paul wrote of the body,  
not in the way of local clubs,   
then they all come with different gifts   
which are valauable and need to .  
How is this possible in a church where the one   
Ordained to Word and Sacrament has traditionally been valued the most?   
I am often asked of a particular church “Who’s there?”   
and when I reply, “Several dozen good keen Christian people”   
I am told “Oh Jenny, don’t be silly, I meant who is The Minister!”  
It can be complicated as some of our denominations refer to   
the one ordained to Word and sacrament as The Minister.   
I noticed on the Kaeo-Kerikeri Parish website these words:   
“Ministers: **Everyone in the parish.** Minister to the Ministers: Robyn McPhail.” Love it!  
The story of Shared Ministry with its emphasis on all the baptised  
has over time   
turned some of the “one minister doing everything”   
kind of thinking on its head.   
Baptism means we are all ministers   
and we need to break through our old language   
to find ways of making that clear.   
The church is not about one person   
or even a team taking over the responsibility for ministry and mission.   
Again, Paul constantly describes a very different model.   
In all his epistles and in the book of Acts,   
I see him writing about a kind of “total ministry”   
where everyone is responsible,   
and the work of Christ’s mission is never relinquished to one person –   
or even to two or three.   
Self-supporting clergy can be a barrier to the “all are ministers” approach, unless of course they too share the vision.

**Strand Four: Church Leadership (SLIDE 7)**  
So some people, in certain roles, can be gatekeepers –   
or those who are in recognised formal ministry roles   
could choose to be permission givers.   
What we are calling Shared Ministry today   
was adopted with varying degrees of formality in several denominations,   
in different parts of the world a decade or two ago,   
with names like Total Ministry, Mutual Ministry, Every Member Ministry, Becoming Ministering Communities in Mission, or Local Shared Ministry. Andrew Bowden, a visitor to NZ from the UK in the 1990s,   
wrote that Local Shared Ministry here  
was characterised by pink elastic rather than red tape.   
There had to be key leaders who had the grace and trust   
to allow that pink elastic to be used.  
The process of formal recognition - what we could call the necessary red tape - turned out to be crucial for legitimation,   
as it is bishops and superintendents and moderators   
who can bless, or otherwise, any changes happening within the church.   
In fact in this country and elsewhere, in my Anglican denomination,   
and others,   
in this new millennium new church leaders have backed off fast   
from the recognition and support   
that would have allowed this movement to flourish into a second generation – but that is another yarn we will return to shortly.

A key aspect of the role of leaders is to encourage partnerships: Story called “Partners” from *Does God Have a Big Toe* by Rabbi Marc Gellman.

Roland Allen **(SLIDE 8)** is one who himself struggled with church leadership – and wasn’t that great at partnerships - but from his rather difficult life early in the twentieth century   
he left a legacy that has inspired the shared ministry movement.

He was a missionary who served in North China.  
When he returned to Britain, he critiqued the traditional church strongly,  
challenging it to re-examine its missionary practices   
in the light of its failure to ignite fervent faith   
among indigenous congregations,   
and in the light of the discrepancy   
between the practices of the first century Church   
and the twentieth century Church. **(SLIDE 9)**   
Allen advocated planting churches that from their inception   
would be self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-governing.   
To do this he would give the people:   
the scriptures (that is, local preachers),   
the sacraments (communion and baptism would always be available because local people would be ordained),   
and the creeds (with teaching about the faith taken to all in the church community).

Roland Allen wrote “St. Paul, for instance, established a Church when he organized converts with their own proper officers, but he did not organize a Church and then later, and piece by piece, devolve an authority which at first the Church did not possess.  He devolved all necessary power and authority upon the Church when he established it. When St. Paul had once established a Church there was nothing left to devolve.  We read nowhere of his going back to a Church and adding to its powers by devolving upon it some responsibility or authority which he had before kept in his own hands” (World Dominion 5 (1927): 278).   
Probably his most useful book is *Missionary Methods: St Paul’s or Ours*? (**SLIDE 10)**

In the mid-1980s a conference in Hawaii inspired Anglicans   
both Maori and Pakeha (those of European descent)   
to bring his teaching back to New Zealand.   
In time a model emerged which was not limited to Anglicans   
but also engaged Presbyterians and Methodists,   
especially in some Cooperating Parishes,   
with each denomination bringing particular insights and challenges.   
What developed was a way of being church   
which more or less took responsibility for its own life locally   
according to this vision:   
the whole congregation, all the baptised, seen to be ministers,   
each person gifted by the Holy Spirit in baptism with a ministry,   
some called to be ordained without stipend but never to be the only ones who  
would have training or learning,   
small teams of people committed themselves to leadership roles,   
and the whole focussed on evangelism in the local context.   
A key figure for the local communities   
has been the ordained person from outside who is known often as the Enabler, doing formation and training   
so empowering the local people to be church in their own patch.

**STRAND FIVE – So what makes this heart beat? (SLIDE 11)**This development required a new paradigm.   
There needed to be fresh understanding of context,   
of pedagogy,   
of language as people began to see themselves as church together,   
of decision-making processes especially at the wider judicatory level,   
and above all of theology.   
For the leaders it became important to understand power   
and to develop tools of structural analysis.   
Resources have been shared around the globe.  
There are so many stories that can be told, for example:

i.“The Celebration of Smallness”**(SLIDE 12)** –  
Samuel J. Wylie, the bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Northern Michigan in the 1970s **(SLIDE 13),**   
suggested that the *norm* in style and size for the Christian life is the small community, and others should take on small­ness, or simplicity, as the model. His ecclesiology was based on early Christian,   
radically equal, Spirit-filled house communities   
more than current church structures.   
Wylie wrote: “A saving remnant was what God used to achieve salvation. And the Savior is assigned a stable instead of a palace and Bethlehem instead of Jerusalem for a birthplace, and Nazareth for a home. . . *Small,* for many of us, suggests words like puny, mean, isolated. For Jesus it meant the mustard seed that grew to great and expansive measure.”.   
All faith communities are unique,   
having their own culture and character.   
But the key is to recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit   
in every congregation, regardless of size, geography, or wealth,   
calling all members to ministry individually and collectively   
in their own community and beyond.   
The Diocese of Northern Michigan has much more recently developed its curriculum “Life Cycles”. I greet Lydia Kelsey who has been formed by this theology and practice.

ii.Again from the US,   
there is the mashup that was circulated widely as “The Dream” by Bishop Wesley Frensdorff **(SLIDE 14):**   
  
Let us dream of a church

in which all members know surely and simply God’s great love,

and each is certain that in the divine heart we are all known by name.

In which Jesus is very Word, our window into the Father’s heart;

the sign of God’s hope and his design for all humankind.

In which the Spirit is not a party symbol, but wind and fire in everyone;

gracing the church with a kaleidoscope of gifts and constant renewal for all.

A church in which worship is lively and fun as well as reverent and holy;

and we might be moved to dance and laugh;

to be solemn, cry or beat the breast.

People know how to pray and enjoy it – frequently and regularly,

privately and corporately, in silence and in word and song.

The Eucharist is the centre of life and servanthood the centre of mission:

the servant Lord truly known in the breaking of the bread.

With service flowing from worship, and everyone understanding why a worship is called a service.

Let us dream of a church in which the sacraments, free from captivity by a professional elite, are available in every congregation   
regardless of size, culture, location or budget…”

And so on. You will get a copy of this but I challenge you   
to work with your own congregation to dream in this way,   
of a church, that they would love to be involved with.   
It may be more possible than they and you yet think.

iii) And in Tasmania,   
when economic decline threatened to close the doors of Tasmania's churches including its oldest building,   
a bold new experiment to 'call out' people from the community into leadership proved successful.   
They found new confidence in themselves   
and new trust in God and each other,  
 as well as finding themselves trusted by the wider church.   
They learned to listen deeply to one another,   
as is happening in many small often declining rural communities   
in different parts of the world.

For stipended clergy to take on a new role as enablers of the ministry of all   
rather than functioning as providers of ministry to and for the people   
is essential and has brought new energy for some.   
There is a pressing need now for churches to shift deliberately   
from the unhealthy, and sometimes deadly, dependency-co-dependency trap that many are locked into.      
The role of the Diocese, or Synod or Conference or Assembly   
is key in this, to ensure that the structures and training and ongoing support are in place to make local ministry a success.   
Yet of course there is more hope for any kind of shared ministry   
than waiting or nudging the wider church to take action.   
It’s time to examine what does it take for Shared Ministry to flourish and be sustainable.  
 **WEAVING THE STRANDS TOGETHER (SLIDE 15)**:  
At the end of telling this story in 2018, there is some sadness for me.   
Part of the life of Shared Ministry is that over time   
it has become seen as a failure:   
threatening to those who can understand church ministry and sometimes power in terms of the traditional models, too often in small places  
the faith community was seen to be not growing,   
and the people who were sharing ministry were too often   
not thinking about sustainability   
nor discovering what it means to be radical for Jesus.   
Yet there may be some real lasting legacy of LSM**.(SLIDE 16)**   
Ministry is for and with all; training is to be open to everyone;   
Christians are called to engage with their context.   
But it would seem to me that the biggest thing that has rubbed off   
is the baptised now know they/we are called to discipling and discipleship. Some of us have become deeply aware of the importance of protecting and nurturing emerging ways of being church, whatever the names or the places. God’s Spirit is always calling the followers of Jesus into newness.   
And some of the strands are indeed out there. **(SLIDE 17)**   
Last year the Church of England received “Setting God's People Free”, a Report from the Archbishops' Council.   
Key points about this report:

* It calls for a shift in culture – not a narrow, centrally driven strategy.
* It looks beyond and outside Church structures   
  to the whole people of God at work in communities and wider society – not to ‘fixing’ the institutional Church.
* It seeks to affirm and enable the complementary roles and vocations   
  of clergy and of lay people, grounded in our common baptism –   
  not to blur or undermine these distinctions.
* It proposes steps to nourish, illuminate and connect what is working already in and through frontline parishes –   
  not to institute a top down approach.
* It aims to see confident involvement,   
  engagement and leadership of lay people wherever they are called to serve – not to devise lay alternatives to clergy.

I am convinced that while Local Shared Ministry   
has not now got the prominence that it had in the Church of England 10 years ago and did not feed formally into this report, it would seem that some of its legacy is in the thinking that produced such recommendations.

So for Shared Ministry to purposely be grown and really produce harvest **(SLIDE 18)** I believe there must be, in ever- increasing amounts:  
1.Engagement of the energy and passion of all the worshipping community  
2.Each one knowing they have a ministry, from preaching to praying to teaching to playing, and beyond.   
3.Roots deep into the local community, its stories and its life  
4.A culture committed to trust  
5. Some kind of support from the wider church.  
6. A long-term commitment to the new paradigm.

Earlier this morning we heard from Rosemary on “Living and Dreaming God’s Vision for Our World”.   
I want to ask how much our own church’s requirements and structures   
enable or block shared ministry   
as a vehicle for moving towards God’s dream?

I also want to ask and how those in positions of authority   
can be encouraged to see themselves as permission givers rather than gatekeepers.   
Local people CAN find ways of developing a shared missional life   
but wider church support is vital.   
People at all levels trusting in the Holy Spirit is key.   
Trusting that Jesus lives in us today is the most exciting thing I know.   
Bringing all the strands together remains God’s work.  
So **(SLIDE 19)** “Let us dream of a church

with a radically renewed concept and practice of ministry

and a primitive understanding of the ordained offices.

Where there is no clerical status and no classes of Christians,

but all together know themselves to be part of the laos – the holy people of God.”

You may like to read more about the ministry of all the baptised in Aotearoa in my Doctor of Ministry Studies thesis *Towards a Radical Political Theology of Baptism: A critical investigation of the significance of baptism as the key element in the ecclesiology of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia*, available online at <https://repository.divinity.edu.au/936>. It was published as *A Radical Theology of Baptism*.

**Ki te kahore he whakakitenga ka ngaro te iwi -***Without foresight or vision the people will be lost.*That was said by the first Maori King ***Tawhiao Potatau te Wherowhero***, to show the urgency of unification and strong leadership for the good of all the people.

**(SLIDE 20)**

**Further reading**Bill Bennett *When the Tui Calls* (Wellington: Philip Garside Publishing Ltd, 2017)  
Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook and Frederica Harris Thompsett *Born of Water, Born of the Spirit* (Hendon, Virginia: The Alban Institute 2010).  
Dave Mullan *The Cavalry Won’t Be Coming – Strategies for local shared ministry by volunteer teams in small congregations*. (Bay of Islands: Colcom Press 2004).  
Kevin Thew Forrester *I Have Called You Friends – an invitation to ministry* (New York: Church Publishing, 2003).