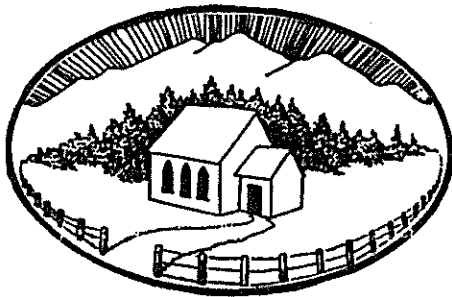


Rural Network News



No.3

August 1996

The Network

Our mailing list now has 105 names, from four denominations and with addresses in Waimatuku, Otematata, Ward, Taihape, Waiuku, Mangonui and all sorts of places in between. We are surely forming a web between rural churches, to connect and communicate.

A recent conversation raised a question of the kind of web we form. With theological differences dominating some if not all our denominations at present a number of networks have formed on the basis of theological common ground. But our rural web has always been intended as something different, aiming to encompass all points of view in order to offer a point of contact for all rural churches. Rural churches are themselves wide ranging in style and views. For this network to be of use we need to represent the range. We need the evangelical and the "faith-in-life" types, and all the mixtures in between these always limited labels.

So please spread the word - this is a network for anyone and any church who call themselves rural. Copy this newsletter and pass it around. And please send in your stories and ideas. Encouragement, challenge, building up - all the "in" words of the current scene - this is what we are trying to do together.

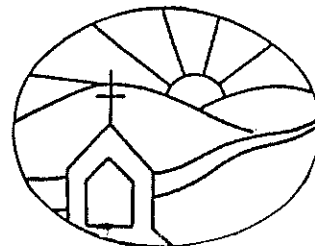
Robyn McPhail

Four Seasons in the Shadow of the Torlesse Range

Watch for this programme coming very soon on Television One: Sunday 8 September at 8.30am.

A study kit (with video) is to be made available through various Rural Ministry groups and will open up a number of themes significant for understanding ministry in a rural context.

Trans-Tasman Conference Myrtleford April 1996



Attending this Rural Ministry Conference in Myrtleford, Victoria was one of those ambitions we often dream about. Coming from a small Southland Rural Parish which is going through changes, the time at Myrtleford was a learning experience and time of affirmation. All the delegates were concerned about rural community life, about ways and means of survival as individuals, as a church and as a community.

Myrtleford is a very pretty part of Victoria where, in days gone by, the priority was to plant hundreds of English trees. In autumn the vibrant colours blending with the grey tones of the gum trees create a kaleidoscope of colour.

With over one hundred out of town delegates attending the Conference the hospitality was unsurpassed with people opening up their homes, providing transport and preparing meals. The Conference Committee had spent many months planning a worthwhile and memorable Conference working round the theme, "An Ecological Vision for the Rural Church". Three workshops entitled Farming, Environment and Community, made the most of the beautiful countryside and gave delegates an insight into the diverse use of farmland in this area. These provided not only an opportunity to do some sightseeing but also to learn several aspects of the way of life and the way in which the Church can be involved, especially in the care of the land. Local people who lived and worked in the district gave up their time to make a contribution to the relevant topic.

Myrtleford was a time of fellowship, making new friends, learning of the similarities of small rural parishes, great organisation, wonderful hospitality and learning to treat the land as "Mother Earth" and not a commodity.

Beth and Bill Strang, Waimatuku

Personal Reports of the Myrtleford Conference have been written by a number of the participants. Copies of these, along with copies of magazine articles, are available on request at a cost of \$2.50 from the Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit, PO Box 8471, Christchurch.

“We Will...”

A constellation of statements gathered on the final day of the Conference sum up some tasks for the future:

Church and Community connections: we will...

- bring the concerns of the community, its pains, struggles, joys, into our churches;
- use the conference workshop model of meeting and listening to our rural communities, to reduce the sense of isolation and fragmentation.

Worship and Liturgy: we will...

- develop locally inspired and relevant liturgies.

Church and Environment: we will...

- affirm and encourage existing Environment/Conservation/Landcare groups or initiate their development;
- encourage, support those working toward ecologically sustainable life.

Theological Education and Training: we will...

- listen to rural realities: rural communities are prophetic, recalling the Church to closer partnership with the people in Mutual Ministry.

Ecumenism: we will...

- implore the Churches to embrace the deeper issues an ecological vision implies, affirming the holistic yet diverse nature in community.

Creative Rural Ministry: we will...

- ask the church to develop models for community-based education and alternate forms of ministry in relation to rural, environmental, and social change.

Advocacy: we will...

- listen to and stand with rural people/groups in need;
- explore and develop effective relationships with media, rural representatives, decision-makers and service providers at all levels.

Future of the Rural Church: we will...

- share stories of different ways of being a Rural Church that gives hope.

Networking: we will...

- share information through local webs, newsletters, further Trans-Tasman Conferences and the Internet/email.

Interpersonal Support: we will...

- encourage each other to take our faith into all that we do, and find, name, and share the faith connections;
- start up family clusters.

Church and Community Organisations: we will...

- help congregations and organisations to work together;
- explore how the church can support rural counsellors. from the Australian Rural Women's magazine *Network*

Conferences Important for Host Communities

On June 30 a combined service at Darfield turned attention to the Trans-Tasman Rural Ministry Conference. The Revd Lois Warburton spoke and Sister Joan Kinney led the prayers. Reference was made to the time this conference was held at Darfield. For some this presentation brought back fond memories of their involvement and the people they met at the conference. Lois was Vicar of Waipawa when the 1992 Conference was held there. The importance of hosting these conferences on rural ministry in rural communities was noted.

Leaders' Consultation in Benalla, Victoria

In the weekend following the Myrtleford Conference a number of people from Australia, USA, Canada, England and New Zealand, gathered down the road at Benalla. Your NZ representatives were Garth Cant, Murray Mills, John Murray, and Robyn McPhail. We were together to share ideas that can “pioneer the future” as someone put it. We are not alone in our endeavours to keep being the church as numbers and money shrink, or rather in our endeavours to be the church in a way relevant to our communities.

We heard about solar heating and housing schemes in Alabama involving at risk young folk alongside church volunteers, “Clusters” of congregations, “Cooperative Ministries”, and a thoughtful approach to community, church and family.

The key factor is that the church is the local people working together to discover and respond in a gospel way to the needs of the wider community.

A number of resources detailing new patterns for church cooperation and leadership in Victoria, West Virginia, and in the United Methodist Church, USA were brought back by those who attended. Copies of selected articles are available on request at a cost of \$8.00 from the Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit, PO Box 8471, Christchurch.

Rural Ministry Network at Kurow

Around 60 people from parishes from Balclutha to Rakaia were offered a programme including report-back from the Trans-Tasman Rural Conference at Myrtleford and much else of local character.

Garfield Hayes presented a Kurow story extending from Maori origins to Depression years, dam building and social security origins, emphasising the energy and commitment of the trio of Dr MacMillan, Rev Nordmeyer and headmaster Mr Davidson. It was a fine opening, leading to a consideration of evangelism in relation to people's real needs by Rev Dr Robyn McPhail.

The Friday evening dinner speaker was Arch Lowery who had personal acquaintance with the area at many points, including boyhood in a boarded tent on the dam construction site of the 1930's. He concluded with a plea for a faith that refused to be narrowed in its outlook or limited to one's own experience. There is a specific need for sharing through fellowship and interchange.

Numerous initiatives that have arisen out of rural responses to changed circumstances were outlined by Dr Garth Cant of the Rural Ministry Unit.

A range of workshops were offered on handling emotions, ecological visioning, faith journeying, and worship resources and these were well received.

A bookstall, including the launched resource for rural settings *Gentle Rain on Parched Earth*, was a phenomenal success with \$1200 sales.

Doug Grierson, Oamaru

What's Wrong with Beef Farming

First, to clarify some terms: a breeder runs cows and sells their offspring; a finisher buys them, keeps them 6-12 months and sells the finished beast to the meat trade. This is a very simplified scenario: there are many varied options.

Two years ago an average weaner steer sold in the saleyard for approximately \$350, and was worth about \$650 when finished 6-12 months later. Mr McCawber would have approved: income in excess of expenditure.

One year ago the finished beast was worth approximately \$350. The weaners purchased 6-12 months previously had not increased in value at all, in spite of finishers' work and financial inputs. So next weaner sale, the finisher will not pay \$350 or anything like it. The breeder has run and mated his cows for 12 months and incurred all the work and cost for no real return.

These are the victims of the beef downturn. Agents still receive their commission, though a reduced one, meet workers get paid, wholesalers and retailers operate much the same. Perhaps the customers receive a good deal at the counter, but how much better than two years ago?

Many farmers have few other options, with the sheep industry also in a depressed state.

The reasons for this price drop seem many and varied, depending on which "expert" you listen to, but all agree it won't improve in the immediate future.

A farmer

New Books

Some interesting book titles spotted at the book displays at the Myrtleford Conference (apologies for limited details in some cases):

Beyond Christendom, by Stanley Hauerwas

Food, Sex and Death, by Andrew Dutney, JBCE

The Dream of the Earth, by Thomas Berry (a geoth theologian), Sierra Club Books

A Sense of Place, by Geoffrey Lilburne

A Christian Theology of the Land, put out by Abingdon

God's Earth, by Paul Collins, Dove

To Care for the Earth, by Sean McDonagh

ALSO the new Liturgy Resource for rural, launched at Myrtleford: *Gentle Rain on Parched Earth*, edited by Philip Liebelt and Noel Nicholls, JBCE

Lois Warburton, Lincoln

Visit by David Ruesink

Dr David Ruesink from Texas A and M University visited New Zealand in August. He is a Rural Sociologist with wide experience of the rural Church in the United States. In his role as Manager of the Rural Social Science Education programme at his University he provides education by extension course on the Rural Community, the Rural Church and the Rural Family. He is a member of the Ministry Support Team of the Presbyterian Church of the USA.

Dave was a participant at the Myrtleford Rural Ministry Conference and the Leaders' Consultation in Benalla in April. Following that he was able to visit rural parishes in Manukau South. He returned to Australia in August to run a training course for programme facilitators, and then, with his wife Lou Ellen, made an eight day visit to share rural ministry experience with their contacts in New Zealand.

They were able to visit Bay of Islands and Ruawai in Northland before travelling to meet members of the Hawkes Bay Rural Ministry Unit in Napier and

Takapau. They stayed overnight in Lower Hutt with Rev Paul Dyer of the Anglican Distance Education, Formation and Training Unit before coming south to meet rural education by extension colleagues at Lincoln University and members of the Rural Ministry Unit in Christchurch.

Garth Cant, Christchurch

Towards the Next Trans-Tasman Conference

The next Conference in the sequence of Trans-Tasman Rural Ministry Conferences is expected to be held in New Zealand in the year 2000. Two preliminary initiatives have happened simultaneously.

Canon Wayne Bunny who attended the Myrtleford Conference has written to other New Zealand participants to explore the possibility of a Conference in the lower part of the North Island with Marton as a focal point.

The Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit has identified four areas of the country which offer a range of interesting rural ministry situations and has written to Church courts in these areas: Northland, Wanganui-Manawatu (the area where Wayne is), Nelson-Marborough, Southland.

We are confident that New Zealand will be able to host the next Conference in 2000 and will encourage other interested regions to consider hosting a New Zealand Rural Ministry Conference in either 1998 or 1999. If you wish to be part of these discussions contact Wayne Bunny in Wanganui (81 Duncan Street) or the Rural Ministry Unit in Canterbury (7 Owens Terrace, Christchurch 8004).

Ruminations

Anyone else like to subscribe to this New South Wales quarterly rural magazine?

A bulk order has just arrived and there are still a few spare subscriptions. The subscription cost is \$NZ15, payable to the Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit when the first copy is received. Contact Robyn McPhail, editor of this newsletter.

What do we mean by "rural"?

This is a question that hovers around. Are we really something distinctive? Dave Ruesink (from Texas) suggests defining rural in terms of attitude, as community based on "neighbour operation".

Add an essential connection with agriculture (because some non-agricultural areas have it too, e.g. many small inner-city churches/communities) and I think he's onto something. It's a factor that can account for many of the positives and the negatives of rural life.

Relationships in rural communities stem more from proximity than choice, from sharing a place more than sharing interests. We are neighbours, full stop, and we operate on that basis.

What do you think? How would you define what it means to be a rural church and a rural community?



No person, having put a hand to the plough and looking back
is fit for the kingdom of God.

When we are ungrateful for the rain, the sun and the elements

and forget they are God's gifts to us;

when we are blind to the mystery of germination

and forget it is God's handiwork;

when we are careless with our sheep and cattle and other animals

and forget they are God's creatures;

when we are unkind to people, whatever their background,

and forget they are God's children;

when we are shoddy with our work

and forget we are God's workers;

when we ill-treat the land

and forget it is the splendour of God;

O Lord, forgive us.

from *Gentle Rain on Parched Earth*, JBCE 1996

This occasional newsletter is printed and distributed by Diocese of Christchurch, PO Box 8471, ph 03 343 0519, fax 348 3827

Editor: Robyn McPhail, 9 Jackson Street Methven, ph/fax 03 302 8151, email chirmac@voyager.co.nz.

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