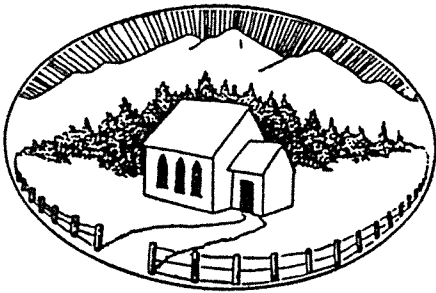


Rural Network News



No.4

December 1996

*May you have the gladness of Christmas which is hope,
the spirit of Christmas which is peace,
the heart of Christmas which is love.*

John Redmayne

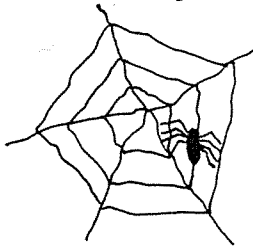
Within a Wider Web

If this rural ministry network is like a spider's web woven across the country and linking diverse and scattered people, just recently your "spider" had the delightful experience of being part of weaving even more challenging webs.

I attended "Doing Theology in Oceania: Partners in Conversation", a conference held in Dunedin in November to celebrate 50 years of the Faculty of Theology of the University of Otago. Participants came from Vanuatu, PNG, Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, Niue, Australia, Aotearoa NZ plus a visitor from Malaysia.

In claiming the title "rural parish" or "rural ministry" and by linking together in this network, we are endeavouring to do theology in our own context. There is always the risk in such a focussing that we get narrow and parochial. We concentrate so closely on our own particular web that we don't notice it's part of something bigger.

But not if we get into conversation and link into the wider web. And that's exactly what "Doing Theology in Oceania" enabled a number of us to do. As people from our distinctive rural context we joined in



conversation with people from other contexts around the region called Oceania.

"Partners in Conversation": what a conversation it was! Over the previous weekend a number of us women had been together at an event hosted by the Women's Programme of CCANZ, so we were well engaged in the process of weaving our stories, of listening and talking, and dancing too.

Through the week as partners we listened to hard things as well as happy things, the minuses and pluses of missionary movements. This wasn't a time to argue points, but to do theology together, to listen and speak with the goal of linking ourselves together first and foremost as church - as God's people in Christ. Differences are okay because of what we have in common. We do not have to make ourselves one - in uniformity - because in Christ we are one - in our diversity.

Some snippets from the conversations:

A Psalm of Lament at Worship: "By the waters of Waitangi, we lay down and wept for what might have been."

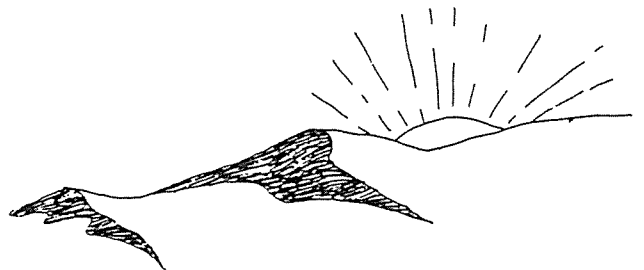
Risatisone, a young man training for ministry: "To most New Zealanders I am different - a Samoan New Zealander; to Island people I am different - a NZ-born Samoan. I have treasured the story of the ugly duckling, but for me it does not have the happy ending. Swan I may be, but a swan that quacks!"

Upe, a Tongan woman studying in Fiji: "In our language there is exclusivity. The royal family are named 'the future of the soil'; the rest of us are termed 'eaters of the soil.' That is what the words we use mean!"

Dr Anne, who spoke raw pain and outrage on behalf of her aboriginal people, to Tangata Whenua: "Please sing me one of your prayers: they are so healing to my heart."

Two recent occasions have shown me the real joy of dancing - with the children of Lyndhurst Primary School teaching us adults their folk dances and with women and men of Oceania worshipping with a circle dance. We really did "leap for joy"!

Robyn McPhail



Our Oceania Context

The Revd Lois Warburton, chaplain at Lincoln University, also attended this conference. She saw it as something very timely, to look at what it means to do theology in our context in Oceania. "There were very rich contributions from Pacifica, especially the women's presentation which tied theology into passages of life... when people have an awareness of something greater than themselves." Lois comments that this touched across cultures. She found the presentation by NZ Pacific Islanders also powerful in the way they externalised their identity in the symbol of the fine-mat. They sat around the mat, they touched it as they talked, we all joined them, and somehow that symbol enabled us to engage in theology together. "It had me reflecting that we can all be asking: what are our symbols? What can link us with our traditions and also have theological meaning that can shape the future?"

Lois observes that at the conference we did not get to the stage of making explicit theological connections. We started - through conversation we could feel the connections between us, but we did not yet name them. "One of the common elements we could have used for all the cultures present was the relationship with the land and the sea and how that shapes our understanding of God." This was not explicit but it was there implicitly in standard Kiwi fashion - in the regular comments about the Dunedin weather! As Lois said, "we all live in island communities. We have all journeyed here." How we relate to this land and our responsibility to care for it is something our conversation as partners has yet to address.

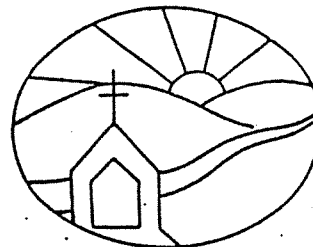
Christianity is a symphony not a solo.

Rural Ministry Display

The national Conference of the Methodist Church was well informed about things rural, particularly about the Trans-Tasman Rural Ministry Conference held earlier this year. Gwenda Welch, a participant at Myrtleford, put the display together for the Methodist gathering in Avondale from 16 to 21 November.

The display consisted of photos of workshops, local points of interest in Myrtleford, photos of the NZ delegation, highlights from the concert, along with some photocopied articles about the Trans-Tasman Conference.

Thank you to those who helped Gwenda in gathering the photos and information. Parts of the display are available should anyone like to use it. Contact Gwenda Welch, Harrisville Road, Tuakau, phone (09) 236 8498.



Myrtleford Conference Book

The official report of the April Trans-Tasman Conference has been published in the form of a book entitled *An Ecological Vision for the Rural Church*. This quality production is edited by New Zealand's own Julia Stuart and contains the text of all presentations along with outlines of workshops, Bible studies and Conference Statements. These statements came out of Exploration Groups and are offered as tasks for the whole church to work on in future months and years.

Copies of the report are available at a cost of \$20 (cheques to "Rural Ministry Publications") from the Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit, PO Box 8471, Christchurch.

Rural Women in New Zealand, 1989

The Federation of Rural Women and the Department of Sociology at Massey University joined forces to carry out a major survey of the situation of rural women and the ways in which they respond to social and economic change. The results are now at last available in published form from the Department of Sociology, Massey University or the Federation of Rural Women.

The Dilemma of a Small Parish

We face a future of uncertainty while we agonise over the possible/probable closure of our church in a time of change.

1. Our clergy are becoming older and thinner on the ground.
2. People travel to larger centres frequently for things other than church.
3. Our church is in a sad state of disrepair and while the community is willing and able to repair it, is there a future for it?

We struggle with the thought of losing our identity as our own, small community. It has been the cradle of faith for the majority of our young community.

But have we the generosity to take the gifts gained from this cradle and offer them to the larger community? Are we willing to join the larger community nearby to keep it vibrant, functioning and moving onwards for our children's children in a relevant way? "Can we move forward on the road which has brought us to where we are?"

A West Coast Parishioner

Life is full and overflowing with the new.
But it is necessary to empty out the old
to make room for the new to enter.

Eileen Caddy *Footprints on the Path*.

Distance Education Opportunities:

Ecumenical Institute of Distance Theological Studies
[offered by the Ecumenical Board of Theological Studies]

Papers are offered towards Licentiate of Theology in the areas of Contextual Studies, First (Old) Testament, New Testament, History of Christianity, Theology, Ministry Studies (including Rural Ministry) and Ecclesial Studies.

Courses are taught using either a comprehensive Study Guide or tapes from lectures at College House Institute of Theology in Christchurch. Each course costs \$225 plus \$50 exam fee.

An advanced course, Scholar in Theology, is also available.

Inquiries to: The Academic Register, EIDTS, PO Box 12-286, Christchurch. Phone 03 338-0363 or 0800 667 969, fax 03 339-0124.

University of Otago Distance Learning Programme

The University of Otago offers an undergraduate course in Theological Studies through its distance facilities. Students can study part-time for a Diploma in Theological Studies or a Certificate.

Papers available in 1997: Ethics, Revelation and Christology, Psalms, The New Zealand Church, Faith and Culture, Prophets.

For further information contact: The Secretary, Theology, University of Otago, PO Box 56, Dunedin. Phone 03 479 8901, fax 03 479 5158, email: Theology@gandalf.otago.ac.nz

Evangelism in a Rural Context

Presbyterian clergy are expected to take an extended period for study every few years and one rural parish minister used his Study Leave recently to follow up some questions parish ministry had triggered regarding evangelism. John Malcolm is in the Pukerau-Waikaka Valley parish in Eastern Southland/West Otago border area and he has produced a report of his work in a very readable booklet entitled "Evangelism".

Two resources in particular had raised possibilities in John's view - *Gossiping the Gospel* and *Contagious Christianity* and his study asks questions about motivation, method and style. John seeks to face up to and move on from the negative connotations of the word "evangelism" -

"For most Christians doing evangelism is a lot like going to the dentist; no one really enjoys doing it, but it has to be done every once in a while." (quoted from *Conspiracy of Kindness* by Steve Sjogren)

- in a way that is appropriate for rural people -

"In the midst of all this [rural life and work pressures] how are we to help Christians in the rural environment to find time for their relationship with Christ, let alone to find time for sharing their faith?" (Malcolm, p.13)

John's report is accessible to more than just his own theological perspective. His personal starting point, and the way he shares his own growth points, makes it something one seeks to connect with rather than debate for or against. He talks about a variety of styles to choose according to personal qualities and gifts rather than a right method to follow in all evangelism endeavours. Also he considers the image of "reaping":

...we need to develop a new perspective on evangelism... We need to release Christians from the guilt and misunderstandings of a solely *reaper* approach to evangelism and equip them for the wider tasks of sowing, watering and, in the appropriate context, reaping. Sowing or watering a seed in a person's life may only be a passing comment about faith, a low key discussion on some aspect of spirituality or some practical act of kindness that is clearly Christ inspired. This process requires time, it insists on having the time to allow God to work. Such a view of evangelism might sit more easily in a rural setting where cycles of growth, patience and persistence are a part of daily life. (p.17)

One section looks at the question "who has the most influence on a person coming to faith?" and considers the role of the rural minister as well as family and friends. Another looks at the importance of "loving

service" - "God-activity rather than simply God-talk" (p.24):

"I underline that this needs to be authentic service which expresses God's love, not calculated service. This is a way of living, not an occasional activity. It is a long term commitment to individuals, families and communities in which the act of service is reward in itself, but which also has the wonderful effect of touching people's hearts for God in a positive way." (ibid.)

Anyone who would like to read more of John's report or pick up any of these matters with him, please contact: Rev J.H. Malcolm, The Manse, Private Bag, Pukerau 9700, phone (03) 205 3802.

All the flowers of tomorrow are in the seeds of today

Anon - Philippines



"Four Seasons" Study Guide

The *Praise Be* special "Four Seasons in the Shadow of the Torlesse Range" screened on television in early September. Study Kits are now available both for purchase and for rental through the Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit. The kit includes a Study Guide written by Chris Nichol and a copy of the Video.

The Study Kit can be purchased at a cost of \$50 for orders received before the end of January 1997. Copies can be borrowed at a cost of \$15 per month (previews by arrangement). Contact: Rural Ministry Unit, PO Box 8471, Christchurch. Cheques payable please to "Rural Ministry Publications".

"Welcome to our Community"

The idea of a "Welcome to our Community" kit was picked up from a recent edition of CCANZ's newsletter *Ecustics*. Our Ecumenical Committee took it up with enthusiasm. For newcomers, especially in a rural district, it is often difficult to get to know the 'who', 'what' and 'when' of the community. Local knowledge is not necessarily public knowledge. We approached local business people to sponsor the printing of the folder. A local school pupil has designed the cover. Information in the kits consists of crisis contacts, schools, churches, medical centre, Plunket, milkman,

pre-schools, and any organisations that wish to advertise. General information is given on town rubbish day and tip times, where to buy stamps, pay phone and electricity accounts, car registration, etc. Each contributor is asked to share costs by providing copies of their own pages in A5 format. 50 copies are being made initially and these will be given to newcomers using church pastoral care networks, as well as through the schools and other appropriate community outlets.

Denise Williams, Methven

Spotted in a Parish Newsletter

(adapted for ecumenical use)

CARDBOARD CHRISTIANS

We are writing to inform you about our latest product. Following upon the success of our cardboard policemen and policewomen to deter shop-lifters, and our cardboard police cars to discourage speeding, we are pleased to announce that we now have cardboard clergy.

The cardboard minister is invaluable to the hard-pressed clergy seeking a holiday and who cannot find a locum. It is life-size and comes in evangelical or liberal, traditional or contemporary models. It can be stood in the pulpit or placed near the door at the end of the service.

Field trials have proved more than successful. Cardboard clergy were placed in parishes during the minister's absence without parishioners being told. 40% of those questioned later had noticed no difference, while 25% said there had been a considerable improvement.

Our cardboard congregation is also selling well. Its response to the sermon is indistinguishable from the real thing. In addition it has the positive advantage that when volunteers are requested no one makes a dash for the door. Choir leaders are said to have noticed an improvement in the singing.

Anon [I guess you'd need to be! ed.]

The editor of *Rural Network News* would be very pleased to receive copies of parish newsletters on either an occasional or a regular basis. Please highlight any bits you would especially like to share.



Small Church Stories Shared

Attending two events in the USA in September 1996 was an opportunity to reflect on small church (and mostly rural church) ministry here and there. Three of the Anglican Ministry Educators from NZ participated in these events: LAND 29 (Leadership Academy for New Directions in Ministry) near San Antonio, Texas and SYNAGOGY, a long-weekend conference near Indianapolis.

LAND is a training event which has sought for 25 years to give new directions for ministry (and new hope!) to small and isolated Christian communities, using the insights of Roland Allen. The stipendiary clergy based ministry model of mainstream churches has always excluded small and isolated congregations from the fullness of Christian ministry, and increasingly it is being recognised as not even serving bigger churches or their ministers well. We found that in NZ and the USA particularly, but in other places too, there are an increasing number of congregations who are applying an alternative model of local shared ministry which gives them back their responsibility and power, and revitalises them and their mission.

Tim Morris, the Anglican Dean of Edinburgh, has been in the USA and NZ during September-November looking at these experiments too. He remarked that these congregations are so joyful, having changed to a paradigm of ministry that actually works for all. While a recent report on NZ small churches published by the Christian Research Association warns us of the growing crisis in small congregations as the traditional ministry model slowly strangles them, it is regrettable that it was not aware of these wonderful new enterprises in ministry that are giving life to many congregations that adopt them. It would be sad if people in small and rural congregations were further discouraged. My experience of the last couple of years is that they need not be.

SYNAGOGY was a wonderful gathering of people from isolated and unusual small churches, from downtown African American ghettos to Native American Reservations to churches in desert cafe shops. They had been assembled by invitation and at no cost to themselves, in order that they could tell and hear their stories. So much struggling and so much joy!

Small and isolated churches do have and deserve a future, but to do so, they must take responsibility for their own ministry in their own way, and the greater church must resource and support them appropriately.

Above all, trust is required: trust of themselves as bearers of the Holy Spirit's gifts, trust of each other as communities of those baptised into Jesus Christ, and to whom them wider and official church will entrust the fullness of the church's resources - Bible, sacraments, ministry and people.

Peter Williams, Christchurch

New Publications

Passing on some information received at the "Doing Theology in Oceania" conference...

Looking Into the Depths: Dimensions of Spirituality in New Zealand Short Stories by Nancy J. Burgess.

This book invites engagement with the spirituality of the everyday. It is a book for those who look from the 'more' in story and a resource for contextual, indigenous theology. Fr Edward Farrell, Professor of Prayer and Spirituality in Detroit, USA observes: "The author has not only shown rich and deep originality but has exercised a new and welcome 'boldness' in transcending a narrowed 'perfectionist' spirituality to rediscover and relocate spirituality in ordinary life." Joy Cowley writes: "In this book Nan Burgess explores the spirituality of the New Zealand short story, holding up a mirror to show us an image of a nation not seen elsewhere."

Published by ColCom Press, 6 Albert Hall Dr, Red Beach, Orewa, orders can be made directly to them enclosing \$29 per copy.

Te Tangata: the human person by Michael P. Shirres OP

This is a book that enhances and promotes Maori understanding of spirituality. Sir Hugh Kawharu writes: "In his acknowledgements Michael Shirres says 'I have written this book, but the author is the Maori people.' It is in fact a distillation of attempts to grapple with the meaning of life from a Maori perspective." Pa Henare Tate comments: "This book meets an urgent need. As a teacher of Maori spirituality and theology I am aware of the lack of resource material... I highly recommend this book to all who are involved in seeking or providing matauranga as a means of enhancing and restoring the tapu and mana of our people."

Order from Accent Publications, PO Box 68 450 Newton, Auckland (phone 09 358 2255, fax 09 358 2393) or watch bookstores after February 23 1997.

Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral.

Paulo Freire

Father Mark Kraushaar-Moesbergen Parish Priest of Darfield

*The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the
oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour...*

(Isaiah 61:1-2a)

One month ago, on November 12 1996, Father Mark Kraushaar-Moesbergen, Parish Priest of Darfield, was fatally injured in a road accident. His tragic early death has left many people stunned - it seems wherever I go, there are people who knew him.

Mark was well suited to rural ministry. He was a man who believed in the people around him and had the ability to speak to anyone and make them feel welcome. He was firstly a priest of people - a man who knew that the word "community" meant all people deserved to have their rightful place in it. To call yourself a member of the Church (both lay and ordained) required of you, in Mark's eyes, to be open to any person, no matter their situation.

Rarely have I seen a man who "lived out" the gospel with such integrity and conviction. Quietly determined, his commitment was to anyone who was searching, to anyone who had been unfairly wronged, to anyone who sought to find their voice in the world.

Mark had a cutting edge to his ministry and an analysis of situations that commanded absolute respect. He had a passion for learning, and truly believed that information was the key to empowering people. He would spend hours searching, processing, reflecting, praying, in order to be part of the process that enabled people to get ahead in their lives. His willingness to share his wisdom and knowledge, especially with young people, seemed to flow from a limitless bucket.

Mark took seriously his own growth and development as a follower of Christ - he challenged himself, as well as anyone he came in contact with who he thought needed it!

I think Mark himself would have been overwhelmed by the people who came to farewell him over the days following his death. To the people of Darfield Parish,

to Joan and Marie, our thoughts and prayers are with you as we mourn together this kind and loving friend and colleague.

Clare Brockett, Amuri Cooperating Parish

*For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it
to spring up,
so the Lord God will cause
righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.*
(v.11)

Stop Press

Just received: a copy of a Study Leave report by Revd Robert Bruere of Takapau. It is entitled "Listen to the Land" and relates to Robert's period of Leave that began with, and carried on from, the Rural Ministry Conference in Myrtleford, Victoria.

The report covers this Conference, Adaptations in the Australian Church to Rural Population Decline, Emergency Services, Land use and abuse and the Landcare movement, and Learnings from Church Surveys and Australian Sociological writings.

If you want to know more, please contact the author at The Vicarage, 37 Nancy Street, Takapau, Central Hawke's Bay.



Gracious God...

Let all be partners in shaping the future
with a faith that quarrels with present
for the sake of what yet might be.

A prayer from Taiwan, in *Living Prayers for Today*,
compiled by Maureen Edwards, Birmingham: IBRA, 1996,
p.134

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Diocese of Christchurch, PO Box 8471, ph 03 343 0519, fax
03 348 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.