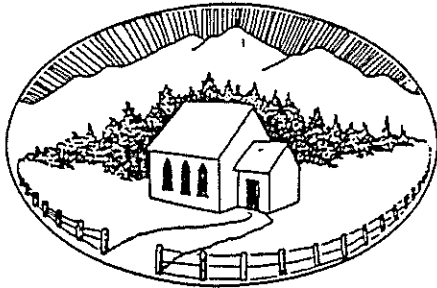


Rural Network News



No.6

August 1997

In God, our deaths are not the final word, our moments of crisis are part of eternal possibility, and our weakness is taken up into the courage of God.

The Glory of Blood, Sweat and Tears,
Dorothy McRae-McMahon

Please share this newsletter with any folk you think may be interested. Please feel free to make photocopies.

Pastoral Care Country Style

Recently I was involved as the rural voice up front at a pastoral care workshop in Christchurch. A lot of the things that come to mind I am sure are not confined to our rural context, but somehow our culture, our values and the way we relate to one another sharpen up a lot of pastoral issues for me.

Rural communities are naturally caring - it's something that seems to go with the environment. The church certainly does not corner the market for caring, as established networks based on families, common-interests and schools do a great deal. The church has a role here in encouraging these networks and resourcing them by offering good pastoral training to our visitors and others who might be interested. But the church also has what is called a prophetic role. The natural networks are good but they don't include everyone. Rural culture tends to be based on traditional ideas, for example of families, and not everyone fits that. We need to challenge the status quo when it is harmful.

How we offer care makes a difference to how caring it is. When we want to help other people, why do we want to? It's an important question. Do we want to be the fix-it people? Rural communities are very caring, but sometimes that means that they are so much

like a sieve that everybody knows when something's wrong and everyone wants to help. For me, the church has a role at times in plugging that sieve, respecting people's boundaries, allowing them privacy if they want it. One effect of this is that they feel in control of something at least. Crisis and trauma inflicts a huge sense of powerlessness and it's a great strength for people to give them choices in how people will care and help.

Also a positive in rural people is how clear we are about right and wrong - you could say that we wear our values on our sleeve. But if they stay on our sleeve when we go to help in a crisis, we risk bringing a feeling of judgement in anything we say or do. Jesus would have us offer something different - acceptance without judgment.

These are some of the things that stand out for me, one who is *almost* a local but not quite. I grew up in a rural area, but as a minister in my current community I know I am here just for a time. Also I'm not related to anyone! I love rural community life as much as I get frustrated with it, with its sieves and its judgment. But basically the caring is there and it's genuine. The church's role is to nurture it and challenge it to include everyone in its network and everyone on their own terms.

Robyn McPhail

In Christ, our humanness is touched with divine life, our tears are mingled with the longing love of Jesus, and our solidarity with those who suffer is joined by the divine presence.

The Glory of Blood, Sweat and Tears,
Dorothy McRae-McMahon

The Future of the Family Farm: Some Responses

A number of comments have been offered in response to the extended article "The Family Farm: where to from here?" in the May edition of *Rural Network News*. The article was based on a Workshop for South-East Victoria and South-East South Australia's Rural Counselling Services. We published it because we sense that there was some common ground, but not necessarily all things in common. Is the global economy affecting farming in New Zealand in exactly the same way? How much does the different geography and climate influence our respective farming situations? How is the family farm faring in New Zealand and is it as much under threat here?

More responses would be appreciated, as this is not an issue that will be suddenly settled. As a national rural ministry network we have the potential to hear

from the considerable diversity of geographical, climatic and economic situations within our own country.

Suggested deadline for next edition: 30 September.

From the Hawkes' Bay Rural Unit

A noticeable feature is the increase in foreign and/or absentee ownership. Also those who own their own farm are relying more and more on outside income. There was a recent article in *Rural News* - 2 June (Issue 180) stating that in the first four months of this present coalition government over 40,000 hectares have slipped into foreign ownership in spite of the Treasurer's protestations before the election. Quite a bit of land has been bought in the Hawkes' Bay for forestry. Some foreign investment has been in dairying and orchards.

Our East Coast Rural Support Counsellor has been fairly well employed (especially in the orchards) and the fund is being well supported as people realise the valuable job he is going. He has been in contact with his counterpart in Swan Hill: there seem to be quite similar concerns there with the financial conditions.

One interesting observation is that farms are investing in scales and other measuring equipment to ensure that they are being paid for what they produce. As a hobby farmer who takes his half dozen lambs to the works, I realise how vulnerable they are at the mercy of the buyer's grading. In Australia a lot more stock are being sold by auction, but even then I am suspicious of collusion between buyers.

On a positive note, a local farmer commented recently that competitions such as the Hawkes Bay Farmer of the Year are beginning to bring home the message that smaller owner operated farms are more efficient. Also stock are looked after better, and small units tend to use contractors or share the ownership of machinery to reduce debt.

Much of our hill country needs to be returned to trees as the recent extensive slipping around Wairoa shows, but I am alarmed by the mono-culture of *Pinus Radiata*. We need to develop other species which do nearly as well, or only plant country which cannot be harvested into other species (natives).

Sustainable farming is an important concern for us now, along with the wider issue of the sustainability of land in general.

Robert Bruere, Takapau

From Central Southland

The writer of this response farms in a partnership involving himself and his wife (who is also the local non-stipendiary priest), and a son and his wife. The son has come back to farming after University and business management

experience with a large multi-national company in Auckland

Firstly as a generalisation I would expect that the economic and social factors affecting the family farm as outlined in the article from Victoria would be very similar in Southland and I guess that would go for the rest of New Zealand.

With respect to the S.W.O.T. analysis I would agree with the strengths identified. The weaknesses identified - some of them anyway - could equally be seen as opportunities. For example, if family farms need improved financial and business management skills then learning such skills could be seen as opportunities; also if scope for improving productivity is seen as a weakness then improving productivity could be seen as opportunity. The same applies to emphasis on quality of product. The greatest weakness is the low profitability of farming and its exposure to cyclical demand changes and climatic variations.

The opportunities and threats identified are probably similar in both countries.

The greatest threat to the family farm is related to the low profitability. That is the ability for transition from one generation to the next without penalising the new generation with an unsustainable debt and allowing the older generation to retire with a fair standard of living in their retirement. Even with the best planning and advice it is difficult for many to put aside sufficient during their farming life to exit without putting an unsustainable burden on the next generation.

From figures from the likes of Meat and Wool Board's Economic Service and from accountants' summaries of clients' accounts the level of profitability varies enormously from the most profitable to the least profitable. The financial and business skills of the best family farming operations would be as good as any other type of farm ownership structure.

I don't, however, see any substantial change in the family farm as the dominant business organisation within our more extensive farming operations. What I see happening is a continuing trend for farms to get bigger as the more profitable farmers gradually acquire the less profitable operations when their owners decide to quit and look for a different life. While this may be argued as being sound economic theory it *will result in continuing rural depopulation and run down in services available in rural areas.*

I see further diversification into dairying and deer and probably more forestry on the harder areas. Some are experimenting with ostriches or emus or buffalos. Some are looking at milking sheep. New cropping options will continue to develop. I'm sure new initiatives will emerge. Not all will be successful!

There was a comment in the article that any farmer who was still doing the same in five years time would be out of business. I doubt that in the N.Z. context. I believe that the majority who are farming successfully today will still be farming successfully in five years time with largely the same type of operation. The business will be a bit bigger and will continue to embrace new technology.

However to put the "problems" of the family farm in perspective I do not see them as being any different from the problems of most other small and medium size businesses whether in town or country.

And I guess the question needs to be asked - *What is sacrosanct about the family farm?*

Garth Stewart, Dipton

Some Comments on Land Issues

In 1973 E.F. Schumacher wrote: "Among the material resources, the greatest unquestionably is the LAND. Study how a society uses its land and you can come to pretty reliable conclusions as to what its future will be."

I read with interest the articles in the last *Rural Network News* on land issues in Australia.

Probably because of fundamental climatic differences and basic differences in how successive governments have addressed land issues, it is difficult to draw parallel conclusions on every point raised in the various articles. However some things are common.

The first would be the gap between prices paid for farm produce and the cost of farm inputs.

Even in dairying which has been the growth industry in both countries, prices received are not keeping pace in real terms with rising costs. This is resulting in units continually increasing in size to make better use of labour and capital, and every trick in the book being used to increase production. This is now having an adverse effect with the total national increase in production being so great as to decrease prices on the world markets.

The depressed state of the sheep and beef industries has also led to a very large upsurge in the use of land for dairying and the building of hundreds of millions of dollars of new processing plants.

In common with Australia these things are having a marked effect on rural populations, the most marked effect being the lack of young people taking over the family units. Even in dairying, because of the large amounts of capital required to get established, fewer young men and women are aspiring to land ownership, opting instead for jobs as herd managers.

Long term this has to have the effect of changing the pattern of rural living with corporate ownership becoming more common.

But answering the question "the family farm where to from here?" requires a large amount of crystal ball gazing with very little of substance on which to base one's predictions.

Since 1984 we have seen a complete turn around in economic strategy in this country with the free market economy ousting the planned economy of previous times. Most have accepted that in 1984 change was necessary for national survival, but opinions still differ as to the degree of change and the need to temper economic goals with social concerns.

History has some hard lessons to show what happens when free market dogmas are allowed to prevail, unchallenged by concern for people and for the environment of which land is an integral part.

In this country we have a clear dichotomy between Maori people, who regard land as something more than just a commercial commodity, and Europeans who are more pragmatically inclined. And other factors which could have an influence on land use is the advance in communications technology which enables work previously done in large city offices to be done from the home.

Other influences could be the desire of a proportion of urban people to escape the pressures of city life for a more relaxed rural lifestyle.

But two factors overshadow all others in determining the future pattern of land use. The first is the drive for ever increased production which has been built on the foundations laid by a number of brilliant agricultural scientists during the 40s and 50s, such figures as Sir Bruce Levy, A.H. Cochrane and the inimitable Dr McMeekan of Ruakura. Very little has been added in real terms to what they have achieved. Extra production has only been achieved by fine tuning what has already been done.

So the big question is, are there any new thresholds to be achieved so that dramatic new levels of production can be gained? Without going to the high cost production methods of heavily industrialised countries it is doubtful whether under New Zealand's low cost structure big production gains will be made.

In short, the question is, can New Zealand farming survive without continual production increases? The second, and more important question is, can we afford to allow land to be regarded as a purely commercial commodity to be exploited and traded for capital gain? In reality land is a communal asset which needs to be preserved from one generation to the next.

These are philosophical questions probably divorced from commercial reality but it is my view that commercial pragmatism has to be tempered with philosophical altruism as a matter of long term survival.

I am sure Schumacher was right when he stressed the vital importance of wise land use. The big question is, have we enough collective wisdom to take this lesson on board?

John Pemberton, Winchester, Sth Canterbury

In the Spirit, there are no boundaries on the dream, there is no end to hope, there will be a world beyond our seeing and we will never live beyond the cherishing of God.

The Glory of Blood, Sweat and Tears,
Dorothy McRae-McMahon

From My Kitchen to Yours

The winning speech in the WDFW National Conference competition (Lincoln, July 1997)

Ladies and Gentlemen -

My kitchen is typical of most kitchens, warm and cosy with an aroma of coffee and baking.

But yesterday, while reading the newspaper, headlines leapt out - three arrests for murder, the trial of a pedophile, two schoolboys suspended for the severe beating of a teacher, another for peddling drugs, an elderly woman raped in her bed, and streetkids suspected of arson.

I was angry and disgusted, then struck by an overwhelming sadness. I shivered as I pondered the whys.

Apart from breaking the law, these offenders had one other thing in common. A mother.

Sure many offenders would deny the existence of a mother, and conversely, some mothers may have washed their hands of them long ago.

But I thought of mothers in other kitchens that morning nursing broken hearts, burdened with guilt.

Put yourself in their shoes. Aha, I hear you say, it couldn't happen in my family. And it probably won't. Our daughters will rock the cradle that nurtures a future leader in the community, our sons may be good upright citizens. Both will have had the benefit of a warm cosy family kitchen where morals and values were discussed, and experiences reinforced those teachings. But maybe further down the track they might commit a crime, for there is no one socio economic level from which our offenders come. A widow whose life savings have been defrauded by a pillar of society might feel as badly as if she had been raped.

From every kitchen each day go people into our community. Businessmen and builders, parsons and plumbers. How we send them off in the morning will often influence their decisions round the board table,

affect their workmanship, or even how they drive their vehicle.

Children will either arrive at school happy and receptive or belligerent and intent on carrying on their private war.

That's quite a responsibility.

Think of the young mother, whose dreams of a happy home have turned into a nightmare. Trying to teach her children right from wrong, when she has little positive experience to draw on, with no extended family for support, or encouragement. Her kitchen may be permanently cold, with meagre rations, and her love may not be sufficient to prevent a child from petty thieving for an added luxury - a handful of peppermints or a packet of biscuits. But where will it lead?

On the other hand, her kitchen may be well stocked and warm, but there is no love, only fear and arguments which drive her child to seek love and attention elsewhere. But where?

Social agencies are under resourced. Schools do their best, but often the emphasis is on achievement. The lonely and unloved can be in no man's land.

As women, we share in the anxiety of all mothers struggling to come to terms with an errant child, whatever their age. All of us could say, there but for the grace of God go I.

It might take just a simple gesture like offering to babysit, giving a plant from our gardens, giving a ride to a carless family or a word of encouragement, little tokens which say I care, and you're OK. Could be that stitch in time?

My challenge to you ladies and gentlemen, from my kitchen to yours, let us join hands and become a loving, caring human fence at the top of the cliff.

Bev McCaw, Kurow

Thank you, Peter!

Peter Williams' job as Ministry Educator for the Christchurch Anglican Diocese has developed over the years, particularly in a rural direction. Peter is finishing in this position to take up a city parish ministry position and had some interesting reflections to share.

Peter's rural responsibility was initially described as rural ministry training and he made significant developments in that area by working with the ecumenical Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit.

The pattern developed of always meeting in Peter's office at Church House, so the Unit had ready access to Anglican office assistance for a lot of its work - minutes, material for events and now the newsletter. his role as a personal link has been very important.

In his earlier ministry Peter had been at Waikari parish in North Canterbury and made contacts at that

time with wider rural interests at the mini-consultation at Courtenay and the consultation at Waimate. He saw the value of these gatherings as wonderful opportunities to sharpen up one's ability to see and understand what was going on in the rural community. Quite clearly Peter brought this enthusiasm to his time as Ministry Educator.

Like his colleagues in other Anglican dioceses Peter has had as one of his main foci the development of Total Ministry. The rural network has been very important in this process and it has been valuable for the ecumenical Unit to have his experience fed into our discussions.

In the Job Description for a new diocesan educator the rural role is very clear and we look forward to continuing strong links between the Canterbury Unit and Church House. For now we say to Peter, thank you and God bless.

Rural Prayer Resource

Wonderful! A prayer and liturgy book for our Aotearoa New Zealand rural situation. *Listen to the Shepherd: Whakarongo ki te Kupu* by Bill Bennett is the kind of book that can be drawn on regularly by people leading worship in rural settings, and some urban ones too. It is also ideal for personal reading and devotion. As one reads of people, events, struggles, joys, one is drawn in to be there too and the natural response is prayer.

Here is what the publisher "Church Mouse Press" says about the author and the book:

Bill Bennett has been Anglican vicar of several parishes, each with a large rural component. He set up the Hawkes' Bay Interchurch Rural Ministry Unit in 1984 and convened the Trans Tasman Rural Ministry Conference at Waipawa in 1992. Now as Ministry Enabler to the Diocese of Waiapu he assists many rural parishes restructure towards Total Ministry.

In Listen to the Shepherd he has provided an invaluable resource for clergy and lay ministers in search of prayers that reflect the needs, the hopes and thanksgiving of the rural community in a lively New Zealand idiom.

In addition there are seven rural liturgies, celebrating different aspects of country life and the farming year which can be used separately or as part of a Eucharist.

The urban parish will also find in Listen to the Shepherd many prayers which refer to needs shared by both town and country. Especially they will welcome the seasonal prayers which give a New Zealand perspective to nature and the church's year.

Copies are now available in bookshops, or from Church Mouse Press, 38 Joseph Street, Palmerston North. \$15 plus p and p \$1 (\$3 for 3 copies or more).

Spring Weather

Sometimes, O God, it's a guessing game:
will the weather fine up just enough
to get that urgent job done?
Will the unseasonal spring rain and cold
stop for a few days
to let the sun and wind dry out the ground a little?
Or will there be just enough moisture
for breaking up the soil and planting that crop?
God of every season,
we can be very demanding.
We want fine weather
just as our neighbour needs rain!
We listen to the weather forecasts,
And then, with rural wisdom,
make our own judgments about the weather.
Help us, God, make the best
of whatever comes our way.
Thank you for the resilience of extremes
that all living things possess.

From Listen to the Shepherd: Whakarongo ki te Kupu

A Load of Bull?

Bull sales are not for delicate souls. Bulls are fearsomely big critters, for a start. They're also perpetually mucky - and one quick flick of a tail is just as efficient as the proverbial fan. First lesson at a bull sale, then: stay out of the front row.

With Parish Treasurer Murray Ramsay as my "minder", I chalked up my *first* bull sale at Orari Gorge Station recently when nearly 30 Polled Herefords went under the hammer. Murray is an old hand at bull sales, and he wisely settled me about three rows back. He also gave me some pointers to a good buy: a wide, heavy rump (where the best steaks reside), straight hooves (that will carry the beast's weight), a thick coat of dark red hair (for ardour?) and not too much white.

You won't find sensitive, new-age guys hanging around bull sales. The declared purpose of stud bull is SEX - on demand - and the patter of the auctioneer reminds us constantly that "*this one's a good fella - ready for work!*" The crowd smiles, knowing full well that nothing in the whole world is more useless than an stud animal with an aversion to "work". Anyway, each bull's vital statistics are listed in the catalogue, including his semen count. There are no secrets among bulls. Indeed, I am reminded of a famous newspaper defamation case in England, where an editorial artist painted out a prize bull's private parts for fear of offending the sensibilities of women readers. The bull's owner sued the newspaper - and won, on the

grounds that he and his bull had been turned into the laughing stock of the county.

But back to Orari, where the bidding for each beast starts at around \$1500 and climbs over \$4000 for prime specimens. Station owner Graham Peacock is perched above the bull ring, next to the auctioneer, and he peers at the crowd over his reading specs, then returns to his papers. His face betrays no emotion, but he must be pleased: his best bulls are fetching good prices, from buyers from all over the South Island.

Murray whispers to me the intricacies of the auction, and I nod to convey my understanding. Just then, one of the auctioneer's spotters sees my head move and fastens his eye on me, waiting for confirmation of a bid. Good grief! Where would I put an 800kg stud bull? In the vicarage back yard? I bury my head and thankfully the bidding passes on.

A bull may look ungainly but his hind legs are lightning quick. Halfway through the Orari sale a young beast is startled and he kicks out a floor light, sending slivers of plastic all over the ring. It happens so quickly that I hardly have time to duck. Murray Ramsay shakes his head knowingly and recalls being kicked fair in the kidney by a bull. Murray is a veteran of stock-yard brawls, yet he never saw the hoof coming; only his heavy clothing saved him from serious injury.

At the end of the sale, the crowd drifts across the bull paddock (*mind how you step over the electric fence!*) to the magnificent wool shed where another Orari tradition is unfolding: a drink of whatever-you-fancy, a bowl of hot soup (vegetable or beef) and a barbecued steak that would do justice to the ParkRoyal grill.

As local boy scouts fetch and carry the food, I am struck by the fact that this gathering is as important as the bull sale itself: it's an opportunity for the rural community to take stock of itself. Far-flung neighbours "catch up", perhaps for the first time in months, and friendships are replenished for the long, cold weeks of isolation which lie ahead.

I would never call this gathering a substitute for Church; I'd be doing myself out of a job if I did. However, there are similarities insofar as both bull sale and Church meeting points for community. Both are opportunities for laughter and dialogue. And both provide food for the journey of life.

Thanks be to God for Church and a load of bull.
Brian Thomas, Geraldine

Church and Community Celebrations

Been involved in any church and community celebrations lately? Mackenzie Country people had a busy time of it in May and June celebrating in a variety of ways - all at church: Fairlie Cottage Crafts 20th

Anniversary Thanksgiving, a Thanksgiving Service for the Fairlie Lions Club 25th Anniversary Change Over Night and an extra special Guide Parade in recognition of the retiring District Commissioner of Fairlie Guides and to commission the new one.

Thanks to vicar Michael Kerr for news of these events. This is definitely *evangelism* - church mixing it with community and, in a way that people can catch on to it, the good news of Christ being shared.

Liturgy for a Machinery Rally

The Vintage Farm Machinery Rally in Central Canterbury last Easter opened with liturgy led by Hugh Paterson. It so impressed those present it appeared in the next Massey Harris newsletter. Hugh has kindly agreed for it to be printed here also.

Welcome:

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, WELCOME... Welcome to New Zealand, Welcome to Canterbury,... Welcome to Aylesbury, Welcome to Marilyn and Bob's home and farm;

Welcome to Mt Hutt, the Benmore, Craigieburn, Torlesse and Oxford ranges;

Welcome to Rakaia, Selwyn, Hawkins and Waimakariri rivers;... Welcome to the dome of sky above, Welcome to the Canterbury Plains below that stretch from the Pacific Ocean to Malvern Hill from Amberley to Timaru.

Welcome to the playground of the nor'west, easterly and southerly winds;

In the name of the Holy Three, you are all WELCOME, WELCOME, WELCOME.

Let us pray:

For the inventors, engineers, craftsmen, assembly workers who designed and built the tractors and farm machinery that removed so much drudgery and heavy physical work from farming

WE THANK YOU LORD GOD

For salesmen and servicemen, of varying degrees of reliability, who made the machinery available and helped keep it working,

WE ARE GRATEFUL LORD

For farmers who took the risks in trying the new machinery and reaped the reward; but endured the maddening monotony of long hours in the blazing sun and noisy machines that cost many their hearing and wrecked the backs of many others, so that we may have cheap abundant food.

WE THANK YOU LORD GOD

For the loving devotions of old codgers who spent and spend hours re-making, re-painting, restoring until the old machines appear better than when first produced.

WE MARVEL O LORD

For this chance to get together, to swap yarns, show off, admire rare machinery, and tell many tall stories

WE ARE SURE YOU SMILE O LORD

We are grateful to all who will provide us with food and drink, hospitality and entertainment and will keep us well and safe during this rally

WE THANK YOU LORD

We thank you Lord for the generosity of the organisers of this rally in supporting the Cancer Society's appeal for Davidson House, Christchurch.

May we all have a safe return to our mountains, hills, rivers, sky, plains, winds and homes.

This we pray in the name of the Holy Three, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

AMEN

Blessing

May the God of all creation bless you;

Blessings of the mountains above;

Bounty of the hills below;

Blessings of the sun above

Bounty of the grass, grain and flowers below.

Blessings of the wind and rain from above;

Bounty of the Cattle, Deer and Flowing Sheep below.

Blessings and bounty be yours from the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

AMEN

Doxology

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,

Praise him all creatures here below,

Praise him above angelic host;

Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

International Conference: Durham 98

Preliminary details having arrived about the **International Conference on Rural Ministry** to be held in England in 1998. It will take place at Ushaw College, Durham from 10-14 August and the two main themes will be Rural Culture and Rural Spirituality.

The publicity comments:

The first is due to the universal "clash" between those who have been nurtured and have developed their lives in rural areas and those who have been able to move into those areas. The church's mission has to be undertaken in such a divided context, to help shape the values held by the wider community....

The second theme will be quite relevant as we are holding the Conference in an area rich in church history and close to one of the focal points of Celtic spirituality... It does seem that there are those around the world who question whether Celtic spirituality is rural, or even if there is such a thing as an authentically rural spirituality.

The Conference is open to all who are interested in issues of rural ministry. The costs for the Conference itself are anticipated to be around 190.00 sterling per person.

For more information please contact Dr Garth Cant, 7 Owens Terrace, Christchurch 8004.

A Point of Calm in a Time of Turmoil

Bruce Irvine is a cropping farmer from Narromine, New South Wales, and Editor of *Ruminations*, the journal of the Uniting Church Rural Ministry Unit. On the eve of the Uniting Church Assembly he expressed his "admiration for those saints who - from all points of the spectrum of the sexuality debate - say

I am a member of the Uniting Church, and I will continue to love and participate in this church no matter what the Assembly decides or does not decide about sexuality. I will hang in there, even if Assembly decisions do not encompass my point of view."

From *Ruminations* June 1997

Subscriptions for this journal are available through the Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit, at a current cost of \$15 for four issues per year.

Mission in Rural-Small Parishes

At the conclusion of the recent Presbyterian *Transforming Congregations* gathering in Rotorua a number of weary but enthusiastic rural church folk spent time in informal chat together. A number of people also chatted together at the South Island's event in Pukerau. There was an amazing level of energy to identify the issues and get on with doing something in response. Growth Evangelism Co-ordinator Graeme Murray took down some "jottings" which included the following:

- * How to meld together multiple congregations
- * New ecumenical congregations and community churches: where are they happening? What are the issues?
- * Explore part-time/ tentmaking leadership
- * Using technology for worship events in homes
- * The little family group which meets on Sunday thinking of itself in a new way as the church
- * Develop cells groups plus some larger gatherings
- * Overcome the "poor relation" image
- * Identify how the church contributes to and monitors the heart beat of the community
- * Christendom model of church reigns in rural NZ
- * Evaluate keeping church buildings open and used
- * Challenge insular life of isolated communities
- * Impact of mobility - to be resisted or harnessed?

* Impact of change - newcomers, amalgamation, life-style blocks

* Acknowledge the variety of legitimate responses to rural/small congregation questions

Graeme Murray is keen to hear the experiences of any small/rural communities that have started to grapple with being the church ecumenically, in a practical way that works. One way of enabling this, and of fuelling the discussion potential of this newsletter, would be to send any experiences or responses to the above issues to the editor, *Rural Network News*, and she will forward a copy to the Growth Evangelism group. Brian Hathaway of Vision New Zealand has also been in contact with the editor so some fruitful networking could well result.

So, what is happening in your community that is pioneering the future? Please let us know so that we can share the news.

Landcare Learnings

David Sloane, a Uniting Church Minister in Yass, NSW made these comments after hearing about the success of a Landcare Group in Warrenbayne Victoria. He saw the reasons to be pertinent to the rural Church. For example:

- The group was 'owned' by the local landholders. They made the decisions and set the goals.
- The paid co-ordinator of the group was a resource person who did not dominate.
- All the landholders were motivated people who were willing to share the load and get in and do things, guided and resourced by the co-ordinator.
- The management committee made sure all the meetings and activities were enjoyable and 'fun'.
- People were proud of their community centred group and wanted others to become involved.
- Members of the groups wanted to care for, protect and restore their land... they were also motivated by a desire for financial remuneration for their efforts.
- The group has a grand vision of a restored landscape and soil. They have found that there are no 'quick fixes'. They are in the game for the long haul.

David Sloane comments: "I think the same principles can be applied to the local rural church. We are experiencing erosion of numbers, morale and finances. We need motivated local people who are willing to share the load and get in and do things, guided and resourced by a co-ordinator who does not dominate. We need to make our activities family oriented, enjoyable and fulfilling. We need pride in what we do. We need to serve our local communities - and balance that with spiritual remuneration in worship and fellowship.

"We can learn a lot from the burgeoning Landcare movement - and we can make a worthy contribution to restoring and conserving the environment which God created and sustains and which humankind has messed up."

From *Ruminations*, December 1996, Uniting Church in Australia NSW Rural Ministry Unit, pp.11-12

Stop Press!

Pre-publication offer to readers of *Rural Network News*: \$20 (NZ p.& p. included) if ordered before 31 August 1997 - *Change with Integrity: can we live with metanoia and is it good for us?* by Robyn McPhail [yes, the editor of this very newsletter!]

Why is conversion such a contentious concept when transformation is the heart of the gospel? This book invites readers to join a conversation on this issue and find clues in the conversation itself. (228 pp.)

Orders with payment to: R.McPhail,
9 Jackson Street, Methven 8353.



Optimism of Spring

Gracious God, we give you thanks
for the season of spring.
As nature opens out to herald the coming of
summer,
there is a new vitality and optimism,
a sense of well-being of spirit.
Help us to emerge from winter's chill,
discarding our coolness towards others,
that we may smile upon the colours of spring,
and allow the warming months
to cheer our lukewarm love
and so reflect the joy of creation.

From *Listen to the Shepherd: Whakarongo ki te Kupu*,
by Bill Bennett, Church Mouse Press, 1997

This occasional newsletter is printed and distributed by Diocese of Christchurch, PO Box 8471, Christchurch, ph 03 343 0519, fax 03 348 3827, which is also the address for the Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit.

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