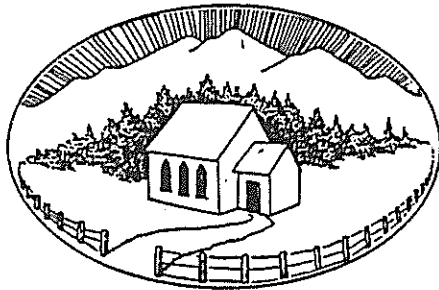


Rural Network News



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Christmas. Dear God, it is timely that we give thanks for the lives of all prophets, teachers, healers and revolutionaries, living and dead, acclaimed or obscure, who have rebelled, worked and suffered for the cause of love and joy. We also celebrate the part of us, that part within ourselves, which has rebelled, worked and suffered for the cause of love and joy.

We give thanks and celebrate.

A Common Prayer, Michael Leunig

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

Rural Pride

Do rural churches feel good about themselves?

It's a matter of due pride in being who we are - gospel bearers to our community and a source of nurture to one another. But I wonder if we get any encouragement to have a healthy perception of ourselves, our faithfulness and the important task we have in the place where we live?

National Radio did a "Country Life" feature on Rural Religion which you may have heard a few months back. It was good for the rural church to be acknowledged in this way, good to hear of some very positive adaptations to change especially in the face of significant depopulation in many places. I was also very pleased that the *Rural Network News* got a good hearing. This network exists to make connections, help reduce the isolation and share stories of hope.

But in many ways the actual radio feature reinforced some old stereotypes and, I fear, may have had a bit of a knocking effect. When we sing in our little country churches, we make a "joyful noise to the Lord." It is very rarely concert quality and, as an organist myself, I know what it's like to hit a bum note every now and then.

It's a good example for how self-deprecating we are inclined to be as rural churches.

The problem is that we've got into the habit of apologising for ourselves - for the lack of numbers, dollars, time people can spare, etc. etc. Apologising for ourselves because we feel we don't measure up to some vague, unquestioned assumptions about what makes a good church.

It is understandable that the radio programme worked from these assumptions because they dominate the church scene. They talk of strength in terms of the institution. The question put to us on these terms is: how are we *maintaining* the church in the face of rural change? *How are we keeping it going?*

When Sarah Willis visited me in Methven we had a wonderful time with one of our parish's many community-based ministries. We went to the local primary school for Religion in Life classes. Sarah taped us talking together and she taped them singing - now that was quality! It was a surprise to me and a disappointment for the children as well that nothing of that was used in the programme.

What I wanted to show was our church finding its purpose - and esteem - by doing gospel-work in the community and not by trying to bring more (numbers, dollars, time) of the community into the church. I believe we exist to announce the kingdom - to get out and do it. Our worship is the feeding place for this, where we turn ourselves back on track with God, encourage the positives in our lives and our work and explore new ventures for doing what rural churches do best - living the good news of Jesus Christ.

Faithful to that, we can be proud.

Robyn McPhail

The Future of the Family Farm: Some More Responses

"The Family Farm: where to from here?" printed in the May edition of *Rural Network News* has continued to draw comments. The article came from the Victoria-South Australia area and we were keen to do some comparisons. Here are some more thoughts on the family farm in New Zealand.

From Mid-Canterbury

We would raise two main points in response to the article.

1. The importance of education. It is vital for anyone who wants to succeed in farming to be well-educated. Farming is a business first and secondly a lifestyle. The advice is that if children want to pursue another career first, take up an apprenticeship or tertiary education, they