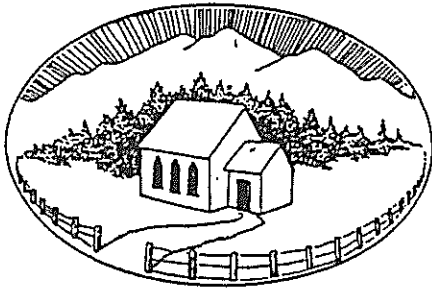


Rural Network News



No.8

March 1998

God give us strength. Strength to hold on
and strength to let go.

A Common Prayer, Michael Leunig

Please share this newsletter with others you think may be interested. Please feel free to make photocopies and excerpt and use articles.

To help build stronger local networks the editor is keen to "introduce" people on this list to one another by sharing names with a contact person in each region. Please get in touch if you do not want your name handed on. ed.

Drought and Frogs

What on earth have frogs got to do with drought? Recently I had a weekend in the deep south and it was the sound of frogs croaking through the night that made me sure I was not at home!

The frogs featured at one point in a drought Management Seminar held recently on a farm in the Methven district. Aoraki Polytech were on the job bringing together a weather forecaster, a bank manager, an accountant and a couple of farm advisers. Heyward Osborne's lesson on El Nino was captivating for the moment. It's interesting to hear how it all links together, air pressure at Tahiti and at Darwin, sea temperatures in the Eastern Pacific. We listen intently to weather forecasters, perhaps hoping they might let slip some sure knowledge of the future. But of course they never do: they are scientists and scientific integrity means they have to be honest. We can never know.

For Mid-Canterbury farm adviser Bob Engelbrecht this is his sixth drought since 1967 and if there's anything worth putting energy into, for him it is promoting further irrigation development. A drought is more difficult than any other adverse event in the way that it is chronic

rather than acute, and you don't know till it's over how long it will last.

Bob's drought management rules make sense:

1. Make tough decisions early and act early;
2. Try to retain base livestock as much as you are able;
3. If you have to sell, try and sell in prime condition;
4. Assess how long the drought may last;
5. Make an accurate assessment of feed reserves;
6. Better to make more decisions than needed, rather than fewer;
7. You can't plan in detail more than two weeks ahead;
8. You can't fight a drought.

An accountant followed with tax strategies (now that was an education!) and a bank rep talking about communication and balance (financial and personal!). And Kerry Dwyer, a North Otago farm adviser, brought it all together under the heading "decision-making".

One theme stood out - *attitude*. All the strategies needed good attitude and that seemed to me to be about taking control where you can, but knowing the limits. It's a matter of being realistic, facing the facts, and therefore wasting little energy on what we can't change to leave the needed energy for what we can. That famous prayer would have fitted in well:

God, grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

There's a danger of a kind of paralysis, when our minds get stuck on the things we can't change, a paralysis that carries over into areas we could do something about, if we could get into gear and do so.

This is where the frogs come in: Kerry Dwyer presented us with a conundrum: There were three frogs on a log in a river. One decided to jump off. How many were left on the log?

The answer is three. The frog made a decision, but has yet to act on it.

Robyn McPhail

New Publication: Opening Up the Future

Opening Up: creative options for church and community in rural New Zealand, the promised publication out of the Consultation at Pudding Hill last November, has arrived.

The Kohuia Consultation brought together leaders from the rural church and the wider community. It challenged them to widen their perspective by listening to the insights of the other. Lincoln University's Neil Gow spoke of sustainability alongside Lincoln University Chaplain Lois Warburton's reflections on a theology of life for rural New Zealand. The relationship between the rural sector and the global economy was explored by Federated Farmers' Alex Wright while Bill Bennett, a ministry enabler from Hawkes Bay, identified signs of

stress and hope for the rural church. Lloyd Vidler of the Uniting Church in Australia proposed strategies for the rural church and Hilary Allison, Regional Manager of the Community Employment Group in the lower South Island, suggested strategies for community in rural New Zealand.

The dialogues that came about as a result offered new understandings which were tested in workshops focussing on options for rural communities, rural congregations and the environment.

Opening Up records these conversations, draws them together and offers some creative reflections on where rural church and rural community may go together. It is part of the rural church's determination to support a community under stress - stress stemming from depopulation, from loss of services, from loss of political influence. The strength of the rural church's response lies in the resolve of church people to cherish and be proud of their communities.

Copies are available at a cost of \$12 (incl p&p) from Rural Ministry Publications, 7 Owens Terrace, Christchurch 8004. Payment can be made with the order (cheque to "Rural Ministry Publications").

Strong NZ Group for Durham Conference

The themes of the International Rural Ministry Conference to be held in Durham, England in August are Rural Culture and Rural Spirituality. Thirteen New Zealanders have registered to attend.

Brian and May Carrell from Palmerston North began their ministry in a rural parish in the 1960s (Hororata). Their current area of oversight is a central North Island swathe from Kapiti to Ruapehu to Taranaki. The convenience of this Rural Ministry Conference both in location and timing following the Lambeth Conference attracted them and connected with a commitment their Anglican Diocese has to the rural church and the need to find a theology and a structure that matches this sector of society. Another favourable factor was an awareness of the contemporary relevance of Celtic Christianity. Brian is Bishop in Palmerston North for the Wellington Diocese.

Joyce Crawford is vicar of St Luke's Te Kuiti. She is taking study leave this year and will be in England at the time of the Durham Conference. Her interest in rural ministry stems from the rural nature of her parish and her role as chairperson of the Waikato Diocesan Ministry Council. The Council has set up a loose rural ministry network to try and respond to the downturn in rural areas as the creep of forestry brings depopulation and reduction in services in small communities.

Doug and Anne Grierson who now live on the West Coast where Doug is minister of the Greymouth Uniting Church. The Trans-Tasman Conference in Myrtleford in

1996 gave a considerable boost to Doug's rural ministry experience, as did a follow-up weekend in Kurow and the visit last year of Lloyd and Una Vidler. Durham proved to be a possibility and he and Anne will also attend the Fourth Music and Worship School of the Iona Community in July. It's back to the Celtic roots.

Hugh McCafferty studied theology in Strasbourg and trained as a Social Worker in his native Britain. He worked in that field for twenty years many of them in Dunedin until taking a mid-life career change and becoming University Chaplain and ordained to the Anglican Priesthood. The Durham Conference appeals because many of the exciting changes in ministry locally are happening in rural areas. Also he is interested in land based (Maori and Celtic) spiritualities and, he says, "it is time I touched base with my native land."

Sue McCafferty is vicar of Green Island Parish, small in numbers, but with a large geographical area. The parish is similar to many others in the Dunedin Diocese who are struggling but have found a new lease of life with Mutual Ministry. Most of these are in rural areas, so Sue is interested in the conference from that point of view. She is also interested in Celtic Spirituality and what that has to offer in Aotearoa New Zealand. She hopes to run workshops in New Zealand on that particular subject in conjunction with the Womens Programme of CCANZ.

Bill and Beth Strang farm at Waimatuku, Western Southland and are involved in their local community and parish. Their parish, Limestone Plains, has three congregations and is facing changes brought about by depopulation and change in population type. In serving the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand at local, provincial and national level they have developed an interest in the Rural Ministry Network. To learn from others they attended the Trans-Tasman Conference at Myrtleford, Victoria in 1996. It has been their long ambition to attend an International Conference and when they learnt of the Durham Conference they were keen to register. It is also an opportunity to visit their daughter and son-in-law who are living and working in North London and to see places of interest to them.

Malcolm Wall is a Presbyterian minister working part-time in two separate rural parishes, 75% with Te Kuiti and 25% with Kihikihi. The two parishes are separated by Otorohanga Parish. Malcolm will be attending the Conference as part of his study leave on seeking additional resources for rural ministry. He will be accompanied by his wife *Helen*, who will be attending the Conference alternate programme and they will also be visiting rural parishes in England and Scotland.

Lois Warburton is ecumenical chaplain at Lincoln University and came to this position after six years in a rural Hawkes Bay parish. She had a key role in the Waipawa Trans-Tasman Rural Ministry Conference in

1992. For Lois, the Durham Conference appeals in being an international gathering. She wants to explore how rural New Zealand has developed in a separate and distinctive way from rural England. The very old history of the area also attracts her.

Garth Cant is a Methodist layperson and a Geographer at the University of Canterbury. He is a member of the Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit and is eager to network with counterparts involved in rural ministry in Australia, Canada, South Africa and the United Kingdom.

'Ruminations'

There are a few subscriptions still available in the current bulk order of this New South Wales Rural Ministry magazine. *Ruminations* is published four times a year and is available on subscription through the Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit at a cost of NZ\$15 for the year. Please send your subscription request, with payment, to Robyn McPhail, 9 Jackson Street, Methven 8353 and make cheques made payable to "Diocese of Christchurch".

Macrina Wiederkehr on Luke 6:27-38

Blessed are those who are emptied of all that doesn't matter, those for whom the riches of this world just aren't that important. The reign of heaven is theirs.

Blessed are those who wear compassion like a garment. For they too shall receive comfort.

Blessed are the creators of peace, those who build roads that unite rather than walls that divide... those who bless the world with the healing power of their presence. For they shall be called children of God.

Blessed are those whose love has been tried, like gold, in the furnace and found to be precious, genuine, and lasting... those who have lived their beliefs out loud, no matter what the cost or pain.

From the weekly newsheet of the Geraldine Anglican Parish

Did we see you at Elephant Rocks?

North Otago, Sunday February 1 1998

I was amazed at the elephant rock setting - huge rocks set in a natural sloping arena that could hold thousands.



We were blessed with a lovely sunny day and a breeze that kept things pleasant. Sun umbrellas, tents, sunhats and sun glasses and picnic atmosphere made a wonderful

setting for the service that began the festival. The service was based on an elephant theme as well as God's wonderful creation (evidence was all around us).

The service included a story about an elephant going on a diet, the background story about the formation of the rocks, a conversation about elephant characteristics, as well as prayers, readings and songs.

The musical festival began after lunch and included a great variety of items ranging from solos, choirs, bagpipes, family groups and the Christian dance group. The children spent the day climbing all over the rocks while the adults could sit back and enjoy the music, or go for a walk, or catch up on friends, but still hear the music with an excellent sound system.

Over \$1200 was raised. Sponsorship just about covered expenses and three local women working as missionaries will benefit from the event - Rebecca Albiston in Romania, Robyn Couper in Haiti and Sandra Meikle in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

A video was made and is being offered for hire - for a donation towards the appeal.

It was a great ecumenical event, and perhaps we will repeat it in two years' time.

Judith Milmine, Waitaki Valley

A Response to 'Unleashing the Church'

Ron Schepers' book review in the last edition of *Rural Network News* put a city-based book under the scrutiny of his rural experience. His response was thoughtful and provocative and we invited responses from readers, to the book and to the review. One reader sent in her comments. Remember, comments on any issues in *Rural Network News* are always welcome. The forum is open.

I live not far from Winton and am aware of the good work Ron does but must disagree with him on the 'rural people think small, don't like diversity' argument. As a rural person who grew up with city values I get particularly frustrated when someone assumes I must have a pre-ordained "rural psyche". Many Southland farmers wives come from other parts of the country and the world with a tertiary education. The farming business scene would not survive if it stayed in a think small, don't change mode. Nor would sporting organisations, schools and many other groups. From where I sit Presbyterian churches are the only organisations in rural Southland not prepared to adapt to a more regional mode.

May I assume that Ron and other church professionals get their ideas on rural people from church attendees and from other ministers? Do they have much to do with the majority of rural leaders in various fields who respect the church but do not attend regularly?

What I would like to see is this:

1. Employment and support of church ministers and workers on a regional basis. A single church 'employing' a minister leads to timidity and often failure in relationships with church members. In particular I have known church leaders who listen to only one side of a family or community dispute and then give an opinion (judgment) without due regard for the other party. The provision in Genesis 2:24 for married couples to function independently of their parents is often ignored in discussion regarding family farms.

I believe all church employees should be subject to the Employment Contracts Act. People familiar with the Act's provisions will be aware it provides greater fairness in personal grievance procedures than exist under stipends, etc.

2. People on church committees who do not have a practical or elected purpose for being there should be challenged as to their present and future (not past) function in the church. If they cannot respond, voting and speaking rights on that committee could be removed.

My challenge to church professionals is to get away from church buildings and committees and see God working in the rural community.

Lynette Fowler, Ringway Ridges, Southland

What we might sing - if we were honest...

I Surrender Some
Fill my Spoon, Lord
I Love to talk About Telling the Story
Take My Life and Let Me Be
Onward, Christian Reserves
Where He Leads Me, I Will Consider Following
Sit Up, Sit Up for Jesus
A Comfy Mattress is Our God
Oh, for a Couple of Tongues to Sing
When the Saints Go Sneaking In
Pillow of Ages, Fluffed for Me
All Hail the Influence of Jesus' Name
When Peace, Like a Trickle
I'm Fairly Certain that My Redeemer Lives
Blessed Hunch
We are Milling Around in the Light of God
Spirit of the Living God, Fall Somewhere Near Me
Blest be the Tie that Doesn't Cramp My Style

Passed on through an email network

Pathways Radio

"Pathways" is a name now familiar to residents of the Maniototo as a fortnightly programme on our local radio station, Classic Gold Radio Ranfurly.

The idea for the programme was conceived by the Rev Yvonne Smith, Presbyterian minister in the Maniototo at the time, and Jack Rutherford, local resident and clerk of Central Otago Presbytery, who had independently come

to the conclusion that the church should be using the local radio station to reach out into the widespread rural community. They believe that a programme could be put out to illustrate how people of faith carry out their own form of ministry simply by going about their everyday lives. The Maniototo Presbyterian Church and the Synod of Otago and Southland listened to this mission statement and agreed each to pay 50% of the cost. The programme is ecumenical in content and subject matter.

A team of six presenters was put together, a list of possible subjects agreed upon and a format devised. It is more than two and a half years since it began and each of us now take it in turn to host a programme and be responsible for liaising with the guest in advance, arranging the content, including their choice of music. We have gained confidence in our presentations and feedback indicates we have drawn out some interesting "faces in the tussocks"... with quite a few still to go!

Christine Cleugh, Maniototo

An Idea for a House Group

Do you find it hard to get country people enthused about attending a House Group? Are you a parish leader who wonders what to do at a House Group? What do we talk about that is relevant and worthwhile?

Two things have been the basis for study groups in small communities in the Greymouth District Uniting Parish. These communities are "farming pockets" 50 and 60 km out of town, whose main contact with the town is to bring their children to High School. If I offered Bible Study I would be straining for relevance. So what we did was look at sections of the "Four Seasons" video* and we've talked over articles from *Rural Network News*.

They've not just enjoyed it, but responded to it. It has opened up discussion that has had them expressing strong feelings and identifying their own situation.

It is a House Group that definitely has a life of its own!

Doug Grierson, Greymouth.

A Parish Story

The South Otago parish of Popotunoa is enjoying a measure of success. When quite a few rural parishes are not able to afford ministers this parish is still viable.

The area has known at times heavy rain, drought (not as excessive as further north) and heavy dosings of snow.

Popotunoa parish includes the township of Clinton (pop 400, between Balclutha and Gore) and has three preaching places, two fortnightly and one weekly. Signs

* TVNZ video *Four Seasons in the Shadow of the Torlesse Range*, available for hire from the Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit.

Drought Help Sheet

What can you do when crisis hits your community?
What can you do when crisis hits elsewhere?
Followers of the Christian Way just can't sit back
and do nothing. But what is helpful? What can
make a difference, a *real* difference?

Some Stories

Lead us beside still waters...

"Hearts leapt at the patter of rain on several occasions last week, but our relief evaporated as quickly as the few drops of moisture. And so the drought drags on... Even holiday makers would hardly deny farmers a decent deluge at this time, especially in the region of Marlborough," wrote the Revd Brian Thomas of Geraldine in his weekly newsheet at the beginning of February. The drought had reached crisis proportions in Marlborough so Brian wrote to Archdeacon David Hastings in Seddon. The Geraldine locals suggested they offer tangible support to the harder-hit farmers by sending them some fruitcakes or the like: "it *proves* that distance is no barrier to neighbourly caring." A local company, Lynn River Products, paid the courier charges. Some of the home-baked cakes came from farmers hardest hit by the South Canterbury drought, an indication of the rural spirit. News of the gesture made it into *The Press* alongside Martin Harrison's own drought initiative:

Prayers on drought

A drought church service held on an Awatere Valley farm asked God for rain and stamina.

The Vicar of Seddon, the Rev Martin Harrison, said churches of all denominations gathered in a paddock yesterday to support farmers in drought-stricken Marlborough.

He said farmers had done well so far in the drought by being prepared and acting early. People prayed that they would have the stamina to continue.

The aim was to bring the farmers out of their gates and encourage them to talk and share the problems they were having.

The church was also planning a light relief dance in March.

The Rev Harrison said fruit cakes sent from a Geraldine parish had been much appreciated by farmers, and letters of support were well received.

The Christchurch Press, 16.3.98

Some Ideas from the Wairarapa

Rural people were not caught napping by the climate, but slow spring growth was beyond their control. Even after the weather has turned to rain the effects will be with us for

two or more years and could well be reflected in food prices. Rain that is too heavy all at once and/or too little followed by more hot, windy weather could be highly destructive of soil structures and the grass roots left in them. Some streams have dried up. Mature trees are shutting down for an artificially early autumn and many may die. The outlook is not cheerful.

Given that the bulk of our people in the Wairarapa live in towns, we wondered what help we could give to family and friends most severely affected by the drought?

* Listen: not only is it supportive, it will build your understanding of the situation.

* Pray, using that understanding; organise a prayer vigil as well as praying alone.

* Help: there are some very practical things we can do, e.g. carry buckets of water, e.g. to establishing shelter trees; do the laundry of those short of water; invite people to dinner with the use of your bath as part of the offer; lobby your MP for appropriate assistance; *ask* rural people what help would be most useful.

Rob List, Masterton

Kurow and Crisis

This story features in the new publication *Opening Up: creating options for churches and communities in rural New Zealand*, a story from a few years back but a story waiting to be echoed in all sorts of crisis situations.

Beverley McCaw told a story from the Hakataramea Valley, devastated by Rogernomics, by flood and by drought in the 1980s. The collective energy levels were low but the community rallied and survived in times of crisis.

First came the flood. The small rural township at Hakataramea was inundated when the Waitaki river flooded and burst its banks. The township people lost homes and belongings and the rural people from the Valley provided practical help, support and encouragement.

Then came the drought: sustained drought over a number of seasons intensified by low prices and high interest rates. The farming families felt the full impact and this time the flow of help was reversed. Township families provided support and encouragement for farming families.

The drought persisted and the networking widened. News of the North Otago drought reached green, moist, warm hearted Southland. Southlanders responded with truckloads of hay.

One weekend is now embedded in Hakataramea mythology. Beverley tells the story of the Southland Parish which came in numbers along with the hay and provisions and money for important things like a new toy or a trip to the movies. Over several days they spent time with each family - leaving hay, listening and encouraging. The momentum built up, people came out of their shells and on the Saturday evening party clothes

came out of the wardrobes for a celebration - the first social event for many months and one that remains vividly in memories. Next morning the visitors took the worship service, shared in lunch and said their farewells before beginning the long journey home.

Practical networking continued. North Otago Presbytery released a minister full time for three months to provide skilled crisis support. Individuals and community groups were helped to understand the ways the pressures impacted on them. They were helped to take back control of their lives. What began as a series of one to one encounters was enlarged into ongoing networks of mutual support.

Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and Mercantile Firms set up a fund to establish a Budget Advice and Advocacy Service to help farmers work out options, make decisions and negotiate financial arrangements.

The Kurow Community Centre came into being at that time. Beverley had been billeted at the Trans-Tasman Conference at Kyogle together with a Community Development Worker from Western Australia. The work that she was doing seemed to fit well into the North Otago situation. With the demise of the Post Office, a centre was set up with a Community Worker...

Stories stay in memory. The community networks formed on times of crisis continue in new ways. There is a Festival Committee and an annual week of celebration which incorporates many sections of the community and the larger region. A market day, providing an outlet for the sale of goods, Scouts organise a raft race, the Rugby Club a sevens tournament, Fish and game a fishing contest, Golf and Bowling Clubs fun tournaments, and much more. A Sunday morning of celebration. Myths and memories, celebration and community are alive and well.

Opening Up, pp.83-85

Rural Support Trust

In the latest edition of the magazine of St Mary's Waipukerau, the parish minister Robert Bruere gives some background to this trust and encourages people to go for help when they need it: "Don't be too humble to ask for help." Experience in the Hawkes' Bay has proved helpful for church and community in Marlborough after a few advantageous phone calls earlier in the drought. This is what he writes:

In 1991 the Hawkes' Bay Rural Ministry Unit met with financiers and as a result of the meeting the East Coast Rural Support Trust was set up. This enabled us to retain the services of Tony Bailey who had co-ordinated the relief after the Bola Cyclone. Through private donation a co-ordinator has been kept on the ground. So when a natural disaster such as hail storms strike there are people immediately ready to help. Also they have acted as go-betweens when people have been under threat of being sold up. Recently Marlborough was given a "relief package"

but had to contact our co-ordinator to get help to administer the scheme and set up structures. Through the foresight of some people we are in a much better position to respond to situations such as the present drought than many other areas.

Contacts are Bill Cannington, Box 4161, Marewa, Napier, ph 06 835 4559 and Lydia Read, 375 Armstrong Road, RD 8, Dannevirke, ph 06 374 6570.

Information Exchange

It could be helpful to have a means of exchanging information about resources for individuals, families and communities facing drought, and other crises. The Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit seeks your help to trace sources of information, with a view to making available a collated list. Please write in, to the editor of *Rural Network News*, with information and resources that you think should be on this list.

Faith that Relates to Life

One unique thing we do as church is pray. We can bring to speech in the distinctive manner of prayer the way life is for us. When public prayer mentions the things that are really on people's minds it is immediately and intensely relevant and powerful. We therefore have an opportunity to follow Bill Bennett's lead and find our own words, specific words, local words, for the prayers we speak together.

Drought

God of the summer heat
and drying winds,
at this time of drought
we feel the anguish and stress of many.
The dry brown hills
mirror our sense of emptiness.
In faith we pray that rain
will fall gently and revive the parched earth
and ease our concerns.
We confess our deep impatience
at the lack of rain,
for we live in a favoured land.
We pray for those facing crises
with feed and stock numbers.
Give us faith
to take each day at a time,
planning wisely,
yet trusting ultimately
in the seasonal rhythm of nature.

From *Listen to the Shepherd: Whakarongo ki te Kupu*, by Bill Bennett, Church Mouse Press, 38 Joseph St, Palmerston North, 1997, \$15 plus \$1 p&p.

of things to be grateful to God for include an increase in cash offerings; a strong Managers' Court of 15; a parish camp in 1997 with 70 attending; an increase in Sunday School numbers in Clinton including town children; good relationships with the Anglicans and Catholics; an obvious increase in good relationships all round; nonchurch help with church cleaning and generous giving; nonchurch people respected, accepted, appreciated, not regarded as spiritually inferior; newsletter keeps nonattenders in mind as much as attenders; church welcomes infant baptisms and dedications; mixture of hymns and songs; many involved in worship; many have tasks to do.

I have been their minister now for ten years, and for the parish and my family the time is paying off. There is a pastoral emphasis rather than "evangelical opportunism" in funerals, women are respected, there is humour, there are opportunities for lay people to take services, do children's talks, people are encouraged to read, to pray, to start cell groups. The minister is not everywhere, although he is widely known as a character in his own right - the "unofficial second-hand expert" who can find things for people or help out. [I can vouch for that: Ian's second-hand talents featured in a pastoral conversation recently here in Methven. ed.]

What is happening is a linking between 'townies' and country people. It's building a bridge and the church is getting a few more working class people into it. Three successful "Holy Spirit" youth camps have done something good for our teenagers.

I appreciate and love the people and they know it. I haven't changed my car in seven years: I think in some things it is wiser to be constant. I'm in for the long haul and don't make heavy demands or have grandiose ideas. I don't try to be what I am not.

If we ~~expect miracles~~ we'll get them. That includes much larger attendances at worship. I've said this publicly and been laughed at but I believe it is not impossible... if we are *finding favour* - experiencing it and enjoying it.

Ian Haszard, Clinton

New Books

Calling us by Name: Ministry through small or neighbourhood congregations, edited by John Mavor, JBCE Books, Melbourne: 1997.

This book brings together experiences in Australia and New Zealand in being small churches, otherwise described as *neighbourhood* churches. John Mavor's introduction refers to Lyle Shaller's description of different sized churches as cats (up to about 35), collie dogs (around 35 to 100) and gardens (100 plus). "No one owns a cat... Cats are very independent creatures...

Cats have nine lives... Cats already know the answers to all questions they believe are relevant."

Sections of the book include understanding the small church and its potential, the nature of the small congregation, ministry and mission, and the small congregation serving the community.

[Available from Epworth Books, PO Box 6133, Te Aro, Wellington, sales@epworthbooks.org.nz]

Seeking Relevant Churches for the 21st Century, by Christopher Walker, JBCE Books, Melbourne: 1997.

This book presents a combination of theory and practice which seeks to offer grounds for confidence in our purpose as church and give clues for mission that is true to the Gospel and relevant.

The theory is a solid underpinning of theological basics: we are "the people of God - called by God for his purpose", "the body of Christ - his extension in the world" and "the community of the Holy Spirit - chosen to convey God's love and hope".

The practice looks at the church in the changed mission context and, at this point, the book comes alive. Tasks, identity and leadership are the areas covered, drawing on contemporary texts together with local church experience and helpful reflection.

[Also available from Epworth Books]

Rural Congregational Studies: A Guide for Good Shepherds, edited by L. Shannon Jung and Mary A. Agria, Abindgon Press, Nashville: 1997.

The United States base for this book needs a bit of translation, but if that is done it may prove to be a superb text for parish reflection and community mission. Anecdotes, data, sound theology and resources for use in local situations link together to form a process for raising the purpose and energy level in rural congregations. The topics covered include: understanding the rural context; identifying the spirituality of rural congregations; the congregation expressing itself in action; leadership and style; and building community - strategies for empowering rural congregations.

[Available from OCBooks, 4 Dowling St, Dunedin, mcrowl@es.co.nz.]

Reflecting on Rural Ministry

Talofa lava.

I was very happy when asked to be part of the rural network. Because I am involved in rural ministry it is nice to hear the news from other rural communities.

I am now in my third year of ministry in Te Awamutu, one of the Waikato's large rural areas. It is a great part of the country to live in, Hamilton is just down the road, Auckland an easy drive, as are the beaches and the mountains, along with a bit of country flavour.

It was a totally new community for us to move into. We thought that it would take a while before we felt part of the community. However, during my first year I endeavoured to meet and become acquainted with the people of the parish and the community. The time spent visiting families and individuals has been valuable as I have come to know and appreciate some of the differences within the community.

In addition people have shared what they see the church to be, and their role in it.

First and foremost the church is a community of people whose lives have been renewed and transformed by the love of God through Jesus Christ. After this they then go on to minister that love in various ways to others in the community.

Last year, two of our elders and I attended a seminar, with over 100 North Island Presbyterian and Combined church ministers and members, on the subject of "Transforming Congregations". One of the key-speakers stated that "churches do not grow: Christianity is a movement." I think this is true.

Our Mission Statement as a parish is to continue the work and teaching of Jesus in our community, by leading people into a relationship with God and equipping them to do God's work. To take this seriously we must not only provide spiritual nourishment for those who come to our worship services and other activities, but be conscious that the church must move to the needs of people in the parish, and surrounding communities.

The closer we are to people, or to a movement, the harder it is to see changes taking place. Therefore it is good, once a year, to stand back and review where we have come from, and perhaps look at where we may go.

Faafetai lava.

Perema Leasi, Te Awamutu

A Poem for the Cooler Days Ahead

Starlings by Rob List

In winter twilight starlings gather
Filling in all the leaf places
Rounding out the silver poplars
To silhouettes of summer

Sounds of cattle grieving for hay
Closer V8 rumbles from the sows
The rattle and slap of the river
All washed out in bright white noise

By twos and fives and threes and nines
They arrive in thousands from where
They have passed their day gleaning
With no Boaz to apportion success

Simple birds who eat grass grubs
Farmers build them houses

Simple birds who eat good grapes
Vinegrowers kill them

Without communication infrastructures
Without watches or pagers to prompt
Using twilight and starlingness
They gather at their time

It is simply their time to gather
It is also my time to feed the sows
They do not gather at a time on clocks
I like to feed out when they are there

A shock of silence hits the frosty sky
Who tells them the moment for silence
Who tells which flock to move first
What matters is the moving from silence

Undulating skipping wave after wave
Swirling the air to sound with wings
They cover the sky and all things
Keep still and watch and enjoy for ever

Rising falling romping waves flow over
And away to roosts as well-known to us
As feeding places of the short cold day
Familiar as canals of Mars or mind of God

A mere handful hundreds of backwash swirl
And they are gone for this once
Leaving confident ignorance washed clean
To feed pigs and listen to the river

Spotted in a Small Rural Community

"Church here this Sunday 9am". The parish in Southland, like many others around New Zealand, has a number of preaching places on a rotation system.



The special sign - bright red and easily spotted - is hung at the gate of the church that has church next Sunday. A sign that moves - a sign of life!



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