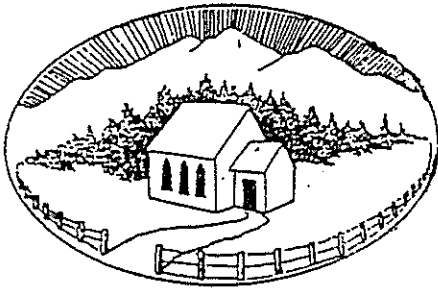


Rural Network News



No.10

October 1998

Years ago our Elders said, 'It is God who drives away flies from the tail-less animal.' The same God touches each of us with the Spirit of power to cope and overcome, to drive away fears and anxieties, to help us to walk through life in the fire of faith.

Moderator of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Ghana

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

This edition features a special guest editorial, from the grass roots. In fact it's even more basic than that - a voice often left voiceless in our more human-centred than God-centred view of issues. Listen this time to the land...

Thirst Ahead?

I'm a timeless land. Broad landscapes and cathedral ranges. Fences, roads and letterboxes the occasional signs of human habitation. Year after year I live like this. Change comes slowly with me. Just the wear and tear of time and weather.

But this year I sense a big struggle ahead, a coming season of thirst, with me longing for quenching rains or even just the occasional flow through water races. In the winter I was already too dry.

I remember last summer. Day after day of skies with no sign of rain. Hot nor-westers dried me out completely. My water table is now so low that I sometimes wonder if it's still there.

Irrigation can help me and in some places they began to irrigate in August. But will the water last through? Last season there was just stock water from the Mt Ida race, nothing at all for me. In the winter since there's been very little snow on the mountains and hills. Such a mild winter! Good for grass growth, so that stock haven't been hard on me.

Later and second sowings of winter crops did at least get going, after the bad early start. I had whole paddocks of crop seed that didn't come through back then in early autumn.

I hear the humans talking as they walk over me. They are worried. "Fighting for survival," they say. Wool prices, meat prices poor, fears of world recession. They're fighting for survival. *I'm fighting for survival.* I need days and days of rain to get rid of that parched feeling.

The only happy comments I hear from the humans are when they're talking about rabbits. Oh, yes, I'd agree. I do feel better now without so many rabbits' feet pattering across me. But I felt the death when the virus hit. I couldn't help feel it. I'm connected to everything that lives with me.

So I'm connected to those humans too. Do they realise it? I need them to care for me, if they are to be part of my timeless existence.

"The earth is full of the glory of the God" - those are words some humans speak in faith.

They are my words too.

The Earth, Maniototo

P.S.

The following message came through from a Central Otago contact shortly after this was written:

Wonderful rain - 10mm to 20mm of it - in some of the drought-stricken districts from here through the Maniototo at the weekend! Spirits lifted. But things are not good in the sheep sector and worse for many in fruit. A 20-acre producing orchard with reasonable house at Ettrick went in a "fire sale" the other day for a rumoured \$60,000. Several other properties have been sold by mortgagees at the value of the houses alone. So the owning families are effectively culled from the community; the employment situation goes from bad to worse: AND THE LAND IS PROCLAIMED BY THE MONETARIST ECONOMY TO BE WORTHLESS!!!

P.P.S.

Please God, let some of that West Coast rain move east. The Coasters and their earth have more than enough!

"Just Future"

This was the challenging title of a conference held in Dunedin from August 30 to September 2. Sponsored by the Presbyterian Synod of Otago and Southland as part of the 150th celebrations, it took on the task of facing the future with all the resources of our faith and with commitment to the land in which we live. The following were two rural contributions.

A Politician's View

National list MP Eric Roy was among the invited speakers. He described himself as "by history, habit and location - a rural person... I have long been associated with the local Presbyterian Church, of which I have been an elder for about thirty years... [and] for the last five years I have been a Member of Parliament, with involvement in the wider fabric of New Zealand Society."

The Rural Scene

In many ways, the farming community is working its way through an identity crisis. After being hailed for years as the most important financial organ of the New Zealand economy, and having enjoyed an unparalleled support system in terms of subsidies and assistance, the rural community has been totally restructured on the "cold turkey" programme of the mid-eighties. The products which were regarded as the prestige exports of New Zealand have come under attack from a wide range of consumer and health advocates as being "unhealthy" and "unsafe". On top of this, the farmer who was the undisputed master of one's personal domain is facing a barrage of controls, environmentally driven, which many feel impinge on their liberty and freedoms.

Whilst most younger people accept this challenge, there are a number in the rural community who resent what has happened and feel threatened. The average age of landowner farmers has continued to increase and is now in the mid-fifties.

Since the removal of subsidies, the erosion of values of commodities has hit home with more effect. The trend has been around for as long as commodities have been traded and there is no reason to believe that it will stop at any time in the future.

Without any alternative input, this is causing considerable adjustment in rural communities. There is constant pressure to restructure land holdings. There is a changing pattern of land tenure - corporate farming, foreign investment, leasing and share farming are increasingly more common in an environment where the family farm was the norm.

Technology and efficiency, better equipment, more contract work and the move to easy care stocks, along with rationalisation of farm size, has led to a considerable decline in rural population.

There is also a much more fluid approach to what is the appropriate land use. When once subsidies influenced more traditional uses, there is now much more variation. This is sometimes seen as threatening, particularly where the changes adds to the depopulation, for example where land that was pastoral goes into forestry, with people remaining often left quite isolated.

Reduced incomes in real terms create their own pressures. Often when no alternative income streams are available pressure is put on relationships.

There are, however, some positive trends in rural communities. Because of the degree of difficulty in pursuing a career in agriculture, those entering it today are highly motivated and quite skilled people, most of them with the benefit of some form of tertiary education.

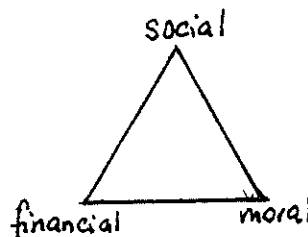
The Church in New Zealand

The trends in my local parish have reflected those of most small provincial/rural mix parishes. Attendance levels have fallen, both proportionally and numerically as both rural and provincial towns populations have declined, and a reduced number of those remaining choose a commitment to worship.

Once church on Sunday was one of the leading social events in a district. It could be argued that those who persist with church involvement today do so for more 'appropriate' reasons - they are involved for what they get from it, rather than because it is the done thing, and they are there because they find relevance.

Society in General

It is my view that for more than two decades the major focus of successive governments has been on reform and modification of the financial sector, with little or no meaningful interaction with the wider community on matters moral and social.



If we had spent as much time and energy on reforms of social and moral issues, then the axis of this triangle would be in the centre. Most would assess that the emphasis currently is in the financial corner.

It is a concern of mine that fundamental issues, like the stability of the family unit, take second place to individual rights, financial purity or economic priority.

Eric Roy, Te Tipua (Eastern Southland)

Social Responsibility

Elspeth Ludemann is a journalist and farmer from North Otago. Her contribution to the "Just Future" conference was a rural perspective in the session entitled 'Social Responsibility' (a phrase coined by the conference planners before the government's proposed code came out). The following is excerpted from her address.

I'm not sure what a typical rural person is but I know that I'm one of the more privileged ones. I don't mean this just in terms of advantages which can be measured like education and income. I'm thinking more of less tangible things such as the support of extended family, friends and neighbours.

A couple of decades ago that would have been the norm. I don't believe it is any more.

In the past most people in the country worked locally: as farmers, farm workers or in businesses providing

services to them. People's lives followed similar patterns, they worked and socialised together.

Now with more people working away from home and an increase in the number and frequency of property sales it's harder to establish and maintain relationships in the community. Neighbours don't necessarily have much in common anymore and if someone's in town all week and everyone's busy with work, sport or whatever at the weekend you have to make a real effort to keep in touch.

A generation ago community interaction would have happened as a matter of course - at church, school, meetings or socials and anyone who moved in or out would have been officially welcomed or farewelled at a district get together.

It just doesn't happen like that anymore and there's far less a sense of community.

For instance a neighbour and I were chatting when I mentioned a couple on our road had moved. My neighbour looked blank and when I described when they had lived she admitted she had never met them. We then did a mental tour of our neighbourhood and realised other properties had changed hands without us knowing the people moving out or in.

We decided to do something about that and organised a pot luck tea for everyone in our immediate neighbourhood. It was fun - and we all said we must do this again but that was two years ago and no one has got round to organising another.

All this paints a pretty depressing picture of rural life - but it's not all bad. The changes forced on farmers have led many of them to improve their operations - and subsequently their incomes and standard of living.

The lack of work on home farms for young people hasn't been all bad either. It has encouraged them to look elsewhere for jobs or to seek qualifications so those who eventually return are better educated and have more life experience.

There's also a good side to the arrival of newcomers who are doing interesting and innovative things which have financial and social benefits for the district. Then there's the opportunities made possible by communications technology which enable people to keep in touch from almost anywhere.

Whether the positive outcomes of the changes compensate for the negative ones is a moot point but there is no doubt they have led to bigger differences within and between communities. Some of us are better off than we were before the ag-sag but others aren't and the gap between us is widening.

So what is social responsibility and where does it fit into our changing community?

I asked a number of people what they thought social responsibility meant and the agreement was the requirement to do what we can to look after ourselves and also do our bit to help others. Individual, community

and government all have a role to play and there's a greater need than ever for it. Therefore it's much more important that it's both efficient and effective. Some expanded by saying this necessitated wise use of resources - personal, financial, environmental and social.

An illustration of wise use of resources which is both effective and efficient is in the North Otago Sustainable Land Management group's definition of sustainability: it is the balance of economic, environmental and social factors. It's no use being clean and green if you go broke in the process; it's no good to make money without taking care of the air, land and water while you're doing it and if you get the economic and environmental bits right you'll have healthier and stronger communities too.

By this definition a lot of farmers are more socially responsible than they were before the ag-sag. Then they received hand outs by way of subsidies, paid little if any tax and expected the Government to bail them out of droughts and other crises.

Good farmers have always recognised that they are stewards of the land, looking after it for future generations. The Resource Management Act, marketing advantages of a clean-green image and a greater understanding of sustainability have all helped to reinforce the importance of environmental responsibility in successful farming.

Unfortunately this isn't enough - sustainability isn't a magic wand and there are still great needs in our communities.

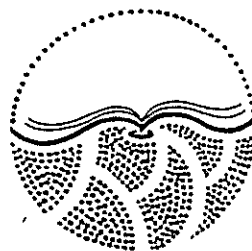
"God gives every bird its food but he doesn't throw it into the nest." (Josiah Gilbert Holland)

Social responsibility means recognising that those of us who fly well must do so, those who could but won't need some encouragement to help themselves - and we must all do something for those stuck in the nest because they haven't yet learnt to fly and maybe never will.

Elsbeth Ludemann, Windsor (North Otago)

Earth Bible Project

A major speaker at the "Just Future" conference was Dr Norman Habel, Professorial Fellow at Flinders University of South Australia and the Adelaide College of Divinity. Dr Habel spoke on *Theological Challenges Today*, *Land Entitlement Models: Biblical Options for Today?* and *The Prophetic Role of the Church: A Big Ask?*



He also introduced us to the *Earth Bible Project: Reading the Bible from the perspective of the Earth*. Dr Habel has been part of a group who have been two years on the job developing this project.

'How do we hear the voice of the oppressed earth?' is the key question of the Earth Bible project and to this point the group have developed six ecojustice principles as a basis for an 'earth reading' of the text.

It had been noticed that writers on ecotheology were short on critical use of biblical texts. Also in the background was the challenge to Christianity as the most anthropocentric religion and the accusation of driving the process of scientific and technological domination of the earth which has put its very life at risk. Liberation and feminist hermeneutics have also demonstrated the importance of suspicion and retrieval in reading the Bible, to get beneath the layers of dominant tradition.

The project is now at its second stage of finding ways to read the Bible in the light of the six earth principles. The group therefore seeks a range of people interested in getting involved in reading the Bible anew in this way, exploring the texts faithful and critically and listening for the insights God is offering through the perspective of non-human aspects of creation. Involvement from farmers and others working directly with the land is particularly sought.

The Earth Bible Project can be contacted at Adelaide College of Divinity, 34 Lipsett Terrace, Brooklyn Park, SA 5032, Australia or on email at earthbible@flinders.edu.au.

News from the Hawkes Bay Unit

Norman Habel's analysis of Old Testament theologies of the land are well-known to the members of the Hawkes Bay Inter-Church Rural Ministry Unit. At one of its meetings Robert Bruere led a Bible Study based on Habel's book *The Land is Mine*. In two groups they looked at attitudes towards the land from a levitical point of view and in the prophetic writings. Discussion became very animated!

At the September 1 meeting of the Hawkes Bay Unit Bill Bennett lead a discussion on rural prayer resources. He had asked rural people to respond to the following questions:

1. What sort of prayers in worship have had the most impact and relevance for you?
2. Describe the nature of God to whom you are praying.
3. Describe the sorts of prayers that pick up the needs and hopes of your own rural community most effectively.
4. What sort of prayers (and leadership) turn you off or fail to make connections?
5. What expectations have you of the person or persons leading prayers and intercessions?
6. What books and other resources have you found most useful?

After presenting a paper on the responses to these questions Bill divided the meeting into two groups each

with a prayer writing task. The following two prayers were the result:

1. A prayer for your local church for the Hiko of Hope

Uncomfortable God,
you cause division and peace
help us to confront what is ugly and good in ourselves.
Rouse us from our complacency.
Help us to listen to those with whom we disagree,
and to walk in the shoes of the disadvantaged.
As we do so let us be an example to those who hold power and authority, that their policies may be compassionate to those in their care.
Help us to play our part in working for a solution and be good neighbours as we begin to understand the true workings of love.

2. A prayer for the season of spring

God of miracles,
Thank you for the miracle of Spring.
Praise to you for the Spring growth coming after the drought.
Thank you for the wonder of being born and the inbuilt ability of lambs and calves to survive.
Thank you for the instinct to know where to go for that first feed.
Thank you for the innocence and trust of a mother to shelter and provide.
We thank and praise you for the freedom and joy displayed by lambs and calves cavorting around.
Creator God you have provided all this,
let us have the same sort of trust in you.
[Bill Bennett will be leading a workshop on Community Worship at the VisionNZ Congress.]

Effective Congregations Seminar

As indicated in the last newsletter, the Presbyterian Church recently held seminars to encourage the life and work of congregations. Carolyn Kitto of the Uniting Church in Australia led the seminars and in the south we experienced a rather busy three days. Definitely a good challenge for mission and, for a number of us, a very encouraging event.

Cliff Tapper of Cromwell comments:

When we move from asking how to grow the church to asking what does it mean to be the people of God, some very important matters come to the fore. It means we move from an internal look at the life of the church to looking at church as the people of God in mission. The understanding of the mission field to which the church relates has changed. It was one of those occasions when we put doctrinal differences aside and learn together to look forward, to discover the new ways God is calling us to mission - to sharing the good news of God's

generosity that comes to us through Jesus. The ways effective congregations function is as varied as the communities in which they operate, but invariably they are focused on being the people of God in mission.

A primary message for me was the link between effectiveness and healthiness in our congregations or in any groups who work together on the gospel. Strong, healthy congregations can be quite small, and stable in numbers. Effective congregations do not have to be big and growing bigger. From this I infer that the question of viability as a community of faith is better answered, not by looking at membership numbers and financial statements, but by asking "what are we doing for the gospel within our community?"

Carolyn spent some time looking at how a mission approach can transform financial matters. She encourages a change from a "Line Item Expenditure" budget, which suggests churches exist to pay for a minister, maintain buildings and send money away to a national body (that's the usual order in which items are listed, with local parish mission work following after) to a Mission Action Budget, in which the parish plans its expenditure under its own chosen mission headings. These may well include everything on the traditional budget list, but they can be readily identified - and valued - in relation to the parish's mission plans.

Another practical area we explored was something Carolyn Kitto calls "Community Worship". It involves the church offering itself to the wider community as a place for worship, on their terms. It is a matter of focussing on events and areas of interest for us all as members of our community and offering an opportunity to celebrate, honour and offer connections with God and the spiritual in the experience of all who are present.

This kind of worship is already happening in different places around New Zealand: ideas abound. If you have enjoyed a worship event that has inspired your congregation within your community, please tell us about it.

Robyn McPhail

The Duntroon Story

St Magnus Church, Duntroon is part of the Waitaki Parish. We ceased services there for six months when the numbers of regular local attenders became really low. At the end of the six month period we had a congregational meeting.

There was a good attendance of older and younger folk at a frank and honest meeting. Past hurts and misunderstandings were aired and then the young families had their say. They found "traditional" services boring. They wanted something they could bring their families to - they didn't want them to miss out on something

important. Lively music with guitars etc., activities more focussed on families, pew sitting not an option: they wanted to be more involved.

The result: services are now held once a month, planned by a team of young families who meet after play group with the local elder as co-ordinator. They are grateful for the support from Linda Cowan, with resources and helpful ideas for children's activities, and minister Graeme Munro, who has lent heaps of prayer books etc.

The planning begins with a brainstorm, then once the theme is decided the fun begins. The emphasis is on simplicity, enthusiasm and participation. Planning generates excitement with no shortage of ideas (in fact, we have to prune) and no shortage of volunteers. Confidence is growing and new folk are encouraged to have a go.

Keen singers lead the singing; instruments we didn't know about are being dusted off; a young lad plays music at the beginning of the service and another has played the bagpipes! The piano is being used instead of the old organ and we have a mixture of old favourites and new songs to learn. There are always some action songs and we hear of pre-schoolers practising them at home with all the family.

We've tapped the talents of elder John Hore with his art, with some feature of our theme hanging up the front each time. The kids' drawings around the walls have transformed the church to a colourful happy place.

After each service we evaluate it: what worked well, what could be improved, which age groups were catered for, which missed out.

For a Family Communion service the children helped "set the table" and handed out the serviettes. Earlier in the service we used a candle for the children to focus on during the prayers and they become amazingly quiet to "listen to God".

This month we celebrate Spring. The parable of the sower is the theme, using Joy Cowley's poem and talking about growing our garden in the community of Duntroon - sharing our dreams for the church. We plan to go out of the church holding hands, singing 'He's got the whole world in his hands', and form a big circle around the Memorial Oak Tree for the Blessing.

Our young families are enthusiastic about inviting others to worship. Having the Play Group use our Sunday School is a good contact point and the services are being talked about in the community. Worship is relevant, the congregation is actively involved and families are pleased their kids are happy to come back. There's always morning tea after the service. Maybe the moral of this story is: cease services for six months and then see if the community is prepared to become actively involved.

Judith Milmine, Duntroon

VisionNZ Congress

Waikanae 17-22 January 1999

"Igniting 2020 Vision Together" is the theme of this Congress and among its aims is casting a wide vision as we approach the next millennium. It also aims for enhanced networking, co-operation and partnership in the Gospel across New Zealand.

The Congress features a number of distinct streams including a rural one. The goal of the Rural Stream is to find Good News for rural churches in rural communities. Beginning with hopes and dreams - tuning in to God's Dream - it will identify the blockages (bad news) for rural churches and for rural people and communities and explore ways and means for understanding ourselves, digging deeper for the hurts that need healing. A selection of workshops will introduce 'on the ground' examples and resources and enable each person to make a work plan to take up in their own context. It will conclude with the beginning of it all - tapping the ongoing source of energy and inspiration in worship.

Are there any readers who would like to go to this Congress and be part of the Rural Stream? Robyn McPhail, the editor of this newsletter, has the task of leading the rural stream and she is keen to involve as many people as possible. If you want to know more, get in touch with her, or with VISION NZ, Box 45 004, Auckland 8, ph/fax 09 834 5610, or Brian Hathaway on email BrianHathaway@compuserve.com. Further information is available on their web site: <http://www.vision-nz.co.nz>

On Becoming Prayer

The following taken with permission from "Malkuth: Parable of Community and Land" by Boyd Wilson and was first printed in his parish magazine midway through his study leave on which the book "Malkuth" is based.

I've a confession to make. I'm not spending every waking minute of my hermit's life at Roxburgh in formal prayer and academic study. Today, I have also dug post holes for a new fence.

Digging post holes, I submit, is a prayerful pursuit in which there can be deep learning.

You might have judged me neither prayerful nor studious if you had heard what I had to say when the crowbar met an immovable rock at three-quarters of a hole's required depth! But, when I calmed down and began a new hole, it occurred to me that the rock had every right to be in possession of the spot I had abandoned.

My knowledge of the truly local geological story here is a bit hazy, but I assume that the slope on which our little home stands under Mount Bengier was pushed up in the Pliocene era, over a million years ago. Two million

years is a brief period in geological time. The stuff of my rock had, of course, been around in other forms and places for a lot longer. But two million years of occupancy must surely confer some rights even to a rock.

If that irksome bit of stone was in place two million years ago, it has been part of dramatic changes to the shape and climate of this Teviot Valley. It has been ice age and the building up and breaking down of mountains. It has seen how species and relationships within this ancient tussock habitat have adapted, evolved. It has seen moa and other strange and extinct species come and go. Of its 2,000,000 years, 1,998,000 elapsed before the birth of Jesus, about 1,999,000 before the first human feet walked this way, 1,999,850 before Pakeha came with our sheep, rabbits and gold fever.

In all of that time, in every event, both tiny and cataclysmic, God was fully present; dancing not only in and beyond the cosmic arena of God's creation but also in the most intimate things happening in and around my rock.

Do not think for a moment that God couldn't arrive in Aotearoa New Zealand until the missionaries! The fullness of God has been pleased to embrace our hills and valleys from the dawn of time, and will still render this and every place holy when the first two Christian millennia seem to those who reflect upon them as far in the past as the time of Sarah and Abraham seems to us...

...Of course, the rock in my post hole has never been able to reflect on such things. But if it had been able to reflect on changes happening in and around it, it would often in its two million years have had reason to suppose that its world was ending - breaking up, freezing over.

Well, the end hasn't happened. Life on this planet cannot last for ever (in that sense, life has always been lived in God's end-times), but I suspect that we - the species charged with a special stewardship within the web of life, and the faith community charged with making known the creative, redeeming God's saving, life-giving presence - will not escape our responsibilities that soon or easily. We will, I think, be called and equipped in the work of healing and hope and worship in covenant with God for many, many generations yet.

An Australian farmer was walking through his yard. A bush fire had swept through the dried grass, burning hedges, the implement sheds and all their contents. The farmer felt devastated as he pondered the physical and financial loss. He kicked a hen that lay burnt to death.

Suddenly three live chickens ran from under their mother. The hen had sacrificed her life to save her chickens. Such is the grace of God for us in Christ, crucified and risen.

Source unknown

Book Review:

Malkuth: Parables from the community of land

by Boyd Wilson

Published by DEFT

Reviewed by Rob List

Who does theology? With whom? Where do they do it? What stuff of their lives do they use? Does anything lie outside the business of theology? Is 'theology' the correct word to be using any more? These are some of the questions that Boyd Wilson's little book (144pp) suggested to my little mind. The suggestions were strong enough for me to keep on thinking and even to change some of my next sermon.

The book has a second subtitle (if Boyd has grasped something of God's extravagance with life the least he can do is pass it around) viz. "Reflections during study leave, 1997". Four different strands have been worked together, but each can be used alone. The first section gives the book its title and uses much the same technique as did Jesus with his parables, though these are longer stories. The stuff of a quite particular environment is used to tell a story and from it you may extract a further understanding if you care to do a little work. Having committed a certain amount of sheep work in my own dark past I found both levels of the stories accessible. The first story strives to establish a sense of perspective across a span of time beyond our easy grasp. If it inspires you, try John Hanson Mitchell's *Ceremonial Time*.

As it happens, I'm also reading Norman Mursell's *Green and Pleasant Land*. It describes the changing patterns on the Eaton estate of the Duke of Westminster. Imagine running 12,000 acres in the Waikato as a rough equivalent. When we consider such a life-shaping business as how we relate to the land, and how different that can be from one place to another, and how different are the cultures which emerge from these contexts, then surely we must pay more attention to doing our own theological work as Boyd Wilson requests.

I approached Part II: 'Kopua - Journal of a retreat' with caution. Reading someone else's retreat journal might be voyeuristic and possibly boring at the same time. Not so! Honesty is a great aid to communication. A quote from Walter J. Burghart grabbed me. "contemplation not of abstractions but as 'a long, loving look at the real.'" I've been doing some praying with a macro lens as a consequence. Maybe there's something else there for you.

Part III: 'Process thought informing mutual ministry' looks at the thought of Alfred North Whitehead and those who follow on from him as a basis for sorting out how we do our Christian thinking in the real world we find ourselves in. There is stimulation without pretension about the author being up there soaring effortlessly with

the philosophical eagles. Some study leave reports have that problem and leave the reader confused or at least amused when the eagle gets sucked into a jet engine. Boyd Wilson keeps his feathers.

Part IV: 'The Local Story - Notes for group reflections' is what it says it is. Try using it in your context and see what comes out. That's the idea of it.

Malkuth won't give you a set of measurable steps towards a popular, wealthy parish, but if you read it, chew it over, adapt it to your setting, you might have begun an honest community of faith in a real place.

Book Review

How to Keep the Young People You Have and Get More
by Stan Stewart

Published by PCANZ

Reviewed by Allan Paulin

Do you want young people in your church? If the answer is "Yes" this book is for you.

It probably also means that your church is from the mainstream denominations and of traditional flavour. About 70% of all NZ churches are like this and probably even a higher proportion in rural areas.

Practical steps you can take to make your church youth friendly abound in this book. It is not loud music and expensive equipment that is required. Rather it is respect, relationships, accessible leaders and life-centred sermons.

This book is written in an easy style with a direct manner and sharp conclusions. It may take an hour to read and then the changes we need to make are known so that our churches don't create barriers but welcome young people.

The evidence is collected from the relevant research and from frank interviews with 120 young New Zealanders. The analysis is written in a direct front-up manner with good lay out and visuals.

You may think that young people all leave your district but this book is not only about late teenagers. It is about all adults under 40. There are plenty such people in your district.

This book outlines steps to be taken to have them in your church. Cost: \$15; available from Presbyterian Courses and Resources, PO Box 9049, Wellington.

A View of the Durham Conference

A number of New Zealanders attended an International Rural Ministry Conference in Durham, U.K. in August this year. Reports are being gathered as those involved return to work and get time to put their reflections down on paper. At this stage we offer the views of one participant who attended the Durham Conference as one week out of seven in Britain on Study Leave from his work as a parish minister. The report

begins with other Study Leave activity and continues with the conference at Durham.

A short week on Iona during the Community's school of music and worship provided freedom to participate in Abbey Services, walk the island with the warden as a pilgrim group of eighty, enjoy the school concert and revel in the Abbey Shop resources. The concluding Service of commitment was a liturgical highlight and surely a lifetime spiritual experience for all the parish groups involved.

We made a point of staying in farm bed and breakfast accommodation, taking the opportunity to meet with farming folk and open the subject of rural community life. Two family properties in particular, one in Yorkshire and the other in Galloway, offered sport and producer connections, and they were interesting in their commitment to self-sufficiency of plant and operation, which appears to be typical.

Our fifth week brought the Durham Conference, a hundred strong gathering designed to run on the input of those attending. With an intentionally low-key and diverse approach, the opening evening was given to reflection on culture by an aboriginal Australian elder, a young black African and an eloquent woman with native North American background. These people also shared their story with us in terms of spirituality.

Following their presentations we worked in groups of six, each person bringing reflections on their culture and spirituality. My group comprised: a Longreach Central Australian, a South Australian, an Ontario Canadian, an Hispanic American, a West Coast New Zealander and one from Cheshire England. The last mentioned was limited in rural experience to a tidy, traditional parish, "the outsider" he called himself, but unfortunately he was also the group spokesperson. It was somewhat unrealistic for him to be asked to relate to the Central Australian's situation where "the parish is the size of England" or to the Hispanic plea for justice for farm workers.

A day trip to Holy Island Lindisfarne was something of a bonus, getting the conference out of the endless halls and confines of Ushaw College and allowing free time to explore this base of Celtic spirituality - the Community of Aidan and Hilda - and the St Cuthbert's Project. There is much of value to reflect upon in this back-to-our-roots approach to the future, with an appealing emphasis on journeying, place, community and hospitality.

At its closing the Conference seemed to be just getting well started! Someone spoke of the power of people to transform the sense of place. Against all odds at Ushaw, a much-endowed Catholic Seminary of yesterday, this was happening through our conference. The closing worship had liturgical shape, allowing each group to emerge and also feel incorporate. We offered gifts,

including crafted greenstone carried for presentation to the Arthur Rank Centre, as organiser of the conference. I came away with sand in a phial from the Simpson Desert Australia, a speckled stone from the foreshore of Holy Island, a conference plate of English railway pride and Ray Simpson's *Exploring Celtic Spirituality* (for flight time).

The Conference experience gets even better, looking back from this point and allowing a more composed evaluation to happen. Particularly once one regains the setting of parish life and the church amid change.

Doug Grierson, Greymouth

Visit by Canon Andrew Bowden: February 1999

Andrew is the author of *Ministry in the Countryside*, published in Britain in 1994, Local Ministry Officer for the Diocese of Gloucester and Rector for a group of parishes near Cirencester. He is an active member of the Churches Rural Group and was a participant at the recent Rural Ministry Conference at Ushaw College near Durham.

He is planning a visit to New Zealand in February "to see how we do Local Ministry". He is in process of making contact with people involved in Rural Ministry and Total Ministry in the North Island and the South Island.

If you would like to contact Andrew while he is in NZ write to him at: Coates Rectory, Coates, Cirencester, GL7 6NR, England, or telephone 0044 1285 770235.

The Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit would appreciate being informed of any firm arrangements made with Andrew. Please contact Garth Cant, 7 Owens Terrace, Christchurch 8004, ph/fax 03 348 1654, email: garth@geog.canterbury.ac.nz



May the God who shakes heaven and earth,
whom death could not contain,
who lives to disturb and heal us,
bless you with power to go forth
and proclaim the Gospel.

Janet Morley, England

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