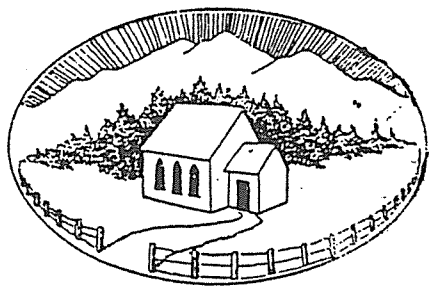


Rural Network News



No.12

June 1999

We gather in your house, shepherd God,
shepherded here by compelling love,
the place to be,
where new maps are drawn,
new configurations of our world are formed,
new structures for life are framed.

From *Grant Us Your Peace: Prayers from the Lectionary Psalms*
by David R. Grant, p.33 (Psalm 23), Challice Press: 1998

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

*Comments on any material in this newsletter
are always welcome.*

Family Farming: Facing the Future

Who can answer that question!

It's a question that took centre stage in the sermon at St John's, Methven back in March when the lectionary and the weather had us thirsting for water with the Israelites and a number of people present decided to take the issue further. I used examples from history - NZ pioneers and Bible accounts of struggle and survival - alongside stories from other places gathered through national and international church contacts (including a letter from the Presbyterian Church USA to President Clinton on the plight of the hog farmers that eventually made its way into the hands of our local MP, the PM!). The examples and stories gave a broader perspective to local concerns, like different "windows" through which to view our current situation and get some new ideas.

So plans were made for a Discussion Evening at the end of May, with the goal of not so much getting answers from experts as offering a forum to raise questions and express concerns in a supportive environment. Perhaps we could decide on some strategies for action together, encouraging co-operative efforts among these rather independent individuals that are NZ farmers, but one aim

certainly would be to plan strategies for future support for one another. Also it was on neutral ground, that is, independent of any political, financial or business interests.

Some of the questions on people's minds were:

- *Do our young people want to go farming? Do farming parents want to encourage them?*
- *What is needed to make a go of farming now? Education? Personal commitment? Money? Is it the last mentioned that calls the shots?*
- *What is happening in the marketplace? (e.g. internationalisation, monopolies, "ticket clippers")*
- *What is happening in science and technology? (e.g. intellectual property, terminator genes, GMO's)*
- *Will farmers of the future be independent producers or just piece rate contractors?*

Also there is the big question of coping with the "uncontrollables", for example, the weather, the markets and the government. What can we do something about and what needs to be just accepted and adapted to as best we can?

The gathering on the night exceeded our wildest dreams and expectations. Given permission to "grumble", on the pattern of our pioneers and the wilderness Israelites, the twenty six farmers present were soon engaged in lively and open small-group conversation. A sheet of starter questions was provided and in the plenary that followed a variety of views and data were gathered, although large doses of humour put paid to it being a totally orderly or exhaustive process.

The meeting was held in the church worship centre. It was a real delight to those present to be in that place talking vital farming issues together. The church can be a relevant *safe place* for people. We'll meet again in July to discuss Farm Succession.

Robyn McPhail

Copies of introduction and starter questions are available if anyone is interested; also articles reporting the event in the local newspaper: just send envelope and stamp to me at 9 Jackson Street, Methven 8353.

Women at the Well

'Women at the Well' conjures up two pictures in my mind: one of the well as a 'meeting place', a place of social interaction; and the other (based on the John 4 account of the woman of Samaria) as a place of spiritual refreshment and renewal.

With these two aims in mind - social interaction and spiritual refreshment - 'Women at the Well' groups were formed in the Awatere district.

There are four 'wells' (two in homes in isolated areas and two in the townships) where women meet once a month for between one and a half and two hours. Over a cuppa or BYO lunch all manner of topics are discussed.

Opinions and experiences are shared, and questions asked in a completely non-threatening environment. Laughter and tears are a natural part of meeting. We delve into God's Word for insight, and short, shy and stammered prayers are absolutely acceptable.

Some topics for discussion have been: How to be happy, Overcoming failure, Coping with stress, Matters of the mind, Why does God allow suffering? Guidance or guesswork? Cancer, "Sonya Talking" (video), Biblical beauty therapy.

A couple of times a year all groups meet together for a half day 'semi-retreat'. On these days, often under the leadership of someone from outside the area, we immerse ourselves in a theme. One such theme was 'God the Gardener'. Our meeting place was a glorious spring garden. Music and creative visuals are a feature on these days.

Gatherings of 'Women at the Well' work in our area. We women look forward to them, we invite our friends to them, we come away from them empowered as women and strengthened in our relationships with Jesus Christ and with each other.

Miriam Taylor, Ward, Marlborough

TransAlpine 99

From May 18 to May 20 the Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit held a Rural Ministry Training Event entitled TransAlpine 99. Fourteen of us participated in this three day event, along with a number of one day participants.

This forum allowed for the insights from a broad cross section in three different rural communities: Springfield, Moana, and Whataroa/HariHari. Participants were billeted in the homes of local church members, providing further insight into some of the dynamics of the participating communities.

I found this event to be a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the uniqueness of rural ministry and the importance of place and context in how we are in ministry together. Participants were provided with a number of background readings and encouraged to relate learnings to one's own context. Questions for reflection included: What is my/this congregation like? What is my/this community like? and How do congregation and community fit together in God's scheme of things? The event was also an opportunity to further strengthen the rural ministry network, something which continues to be important as one considers the issues of isolation which were raised at each of the locations.

Each of the three days was different both in terms of content and the community issues which were discussed. There were, however, some common themes throughout. These included, insider/outsider dimensions, effects of severe weather experienced recently, schooling and issues

related to services in places of low population density and the need to be ever adaptable to ongoing change.

My experience began in Springfield in Canterbury where we met in the local school. Graeme, a sheep farmer, shared his experience of moving up the road from Darfield to Springfield. Despite the relatively short distance he noted many striking differences. He also spoke of the harsh economics and stresses in the aftermath of the recent drought. We heard from the two teachers at the school, Judith and Pip, who gave insight into social structures and insider/outsider dimensions. Serious questions around local schooling were also raised as the school faced the loss of one of the two teachers due to declining enrolment. Throughout the day the importance of place was underlined.

The second day was at Moana on the West Coast where the two participating groups and a number of others met to hear from a cross section of the community. Terry from the District Rural Health Unit noted the tensions between the lower income permanent residents and the holiday bach community. He underlined the importance of community efforts and the church's role in these. Particular problems highlighted included the great distance to services, family stresses due to a changing economy, a lack of place for the next generation and the isolation of the elderly. The importance of considering all aspects of people's lives as one is in ministry was emphasised. Diane from the Rural Support Unit spoke of the devastation of too much and then too little rain. She told of the support unit's role in responding to crisis and ongoing needs in terms of shifting population and isolation. Murray, a dairy farmer, shared his own story of the struggle to maintain a balanced lifestyle in full time farm work. Bev, a local Estate Agent, spoke of the financial pressures and the growing number of farms for sale, increasingly difficult to sell. She reflected on the manner in which she found herself in the role of pastor as she went about her work. Chris told of his experience of moving his importing business from Auckland to Moana and the need to help people deal with change.

The third day was in HariHari where our group visited a local dairy farm and heard of the effects of flood. We also heard from Jules a newcomer to the community who shared her experience of moving into the community from elsewhere. Charles, a long standing member of the community, spoke of the changes experienced over the years and the challenge of these along with the ongoing problem of isolation.

Throughout each of the days, reminders came of the importance of sharing and hearing stories from our places of ministry. In many cases the church remains as one of the few places where this can happen. A part of our role in ministry involves being enablers in the face of the stresses and strains of change as well as providing a hearing for the sometimes still small voice of rural

communities. It was clear from this three day event that there are many gifts in each of these communities which need to be valued and uplifted.

Participants concluded the event by sharing in written form their response to the following questions: What new understandings do you have about your rural ministry? What new insight do you have into your rural parish? and Do you have new insights into the ways in which your congregation(s) and your rural community belong to each other in God's scheme of things?

From responses received it was clear that this event was of value to those who participated. The event served to enlarge views of rural ministry underlining the importance of connections between the church and the wider community. It also offered a fresh perspective on the context from which each of the individuals came.

Personally I came away from the three days with a reminder, yet again of the importance of ministry in rural locations.

Kevin Logie

Kevin is a rural minister from Central Canada, currently on a one year exchange at St Margaret's Parish, Christchurch.

The next edition of *Rural Network News* will contain an extended item on Orientation to Rural Ministry in Kevin's home territory of Southern Ontario.

Northland 2000

The four-yearly Trans-Tasman Rural Ministry Conference is on track for 10-14 April 2000 Northland, Aotearoa—New Zealand. The emphasis at this consultation will be on meeting with local people to discuss local issues.

The visitors will be divided into three groups and will be hosted on a local marae for one night and with local people on the others.

Each group will visit three different local communities, moving between centres on two days by bus tours which will include significant sightseeing. The whole consultation will come together on the final day for reflections, worship and celebration.

Intending participants should plan to be able to travel north from Auckland no later than 8am Monday 10 as it is a matter of cultural sensitivity not to arrive late for a marae welcome. People arriving at the airport on Sunday can be met and offered hospitality for the night. They are urged to add at least the weekend of 15/16 to their time in the country to take advantage of touring and hospitality offers that are being arranged.

The Far North is an area of vast contrasts. It is one of the most undeveloped parts of the country, featuring major problems of communication and terrain, massive unemployment, skeletal rural townships, small

congregations most of whose members tend to be personally and theologically conservative and a marijuana economy that is worth more than legitimate agriculture. Yet it is also the 4th destination for visitors to NZ and boasts spectacular scenery and visitor opportunities. Not far from communities where 85% of the population are totally dependent on government benefits there are trendy seaside and secluded bush retreats for the famous. Alongside traditional farming there is a growing trend to alternative rural and economic activities. The entire night-time electricity demand of the Far North is met by a unique geothermal generating station which is totally automatic and returns all its waste heat and water to the subterranean resource.

In this complex situation the churches of Northland have been greatly challenged. The economics of traditional styles of ministry have meant that mainline clergy are now rarely found in many former parish centres.

- In South Hokianga (home of "Opo" the dolphin) the 13 congregations that required two stipendiary clergy a couple of decades ago are served by a staff of 6 part-time Anglican and Methodist ordained ministers.
- Bay of Islands Uniting Parish has had a Lay Ministry Team in place for nearly seven years and has sold its church house to erect two flats, primarily for stressed people needing "time out".
- Anglicans throughout the Waimate Archdeaconry are moving into Local Shared Ministry on the "Nevada" model.
- Catholic congregations are licensing many people to lead worship and are providing for sacramental ministry in more flexible ways than before.
- Many conservative Christian groups have been more flexible in terms of ministry and demonstrate a lot of vigour but they are probably doing what they have always done if doing it as well as ever.

Yes, you will be offered at least three different beds in the five nights and yes, there will be a couple of bus trips as well as some lengthy "commutes" in host cars. But we think that the mix of experience and the contact with people will be memorable and worthwhile for you and for us. The Committee invites participants in this consultation to interact with Far North geography, townships and congregations as well as with the issues that have traditionally engaged their attention.

REGISTER YOUR INTEREST and we will send future communications directly to you.

Registrar: Laurence Malcolm,
Showgrounds Rd, Waimate North,
R D 2, Kaikohe
Ph 9-405-9757 Fax 9753
LaurenceMalcolm@xtra.co.nz

Dave Mullen, Paihia



Do It Yourself Hymn Writing

Earlier editions of this newsletter have shared examples of hymns put together by Doug Grierson, when he was minister in North Otago (his 'dry' period) and now that he is on the West Coast ('wet'!). Doug offers some comments by way of encouragement to all of us to give it a go and offer worship with local words to sing.

During the super wet season last year phrases like "bogged by rain our best intentions" and "Arched the rainbow, hearts uplifting" were helpful adaptations to a Jean Halloway hymn. With the millennium and Pacific waters in mind the lakeside Jesus of Luke 5 becomes (tune: Morning Light):

From hills of home to lakeside, bright waters, dancing waves,
the prophet comes from Nazareth to speak of faith that saves,
of trust in deeper waters and doubts to overcome,
of catch 'til nets are breaking and partners there are won.

To launch us on our journey he comes aboard as guide,
then out to deeper waters he sounds a flowing tide
of Wisdom and of workplace where 'mazing things belong;
to make of us disciples, our gifts and skills make strong.

Reflecting on Luke's story, on waters far away...
Pacific isles and peoples, millennial hopeful day:
keep us from empty netting or looking elsewhere for
the Lord who stands beside us, each day his treasure store!

Where I left my heart:

Collaborative Ministry Symposium, San Francisco, March 1999

I've noticed that when Kiwis get together at international gatherings we have a cohesiveness of thinking and doing that identifies us. We are able to reflect the diversity of the cultural and social life of our nation with surprising ability. Larger nations, like Australia and the US, find this a little harder to do. Large distances, considerable ethnic variety and emerging views on their nation's histories are real factors. At San Francisco NZers were able to present the symbols and images that reflect our Treaty diversity. We taught everyone NZ music from both Pakeha and Maori religious traditions.

This particular conference was all about Mutual or Collaborative Ministry (also known as Total, Local Shared or Every Member Ministry). It is emerging in several places internationally, especially within the Anglican Church. There were representatives from Australia, Canada, USA, England, Scotland, New Zealand and one each from Europe and Uganda - over 80 in all. We gathered in gracious surroundings, the Mercy Centre, SF, which is also an Order for Catholic nuns, known for being progressive and socially radical.

It is apparent Mutual Ministry has been a response to several factors:

- * the decline of rural parishes and the inability to sustain salaried professional ordained clergy;
- * the crisis generally in ministry challenging people to search for other forms of ministry to sustain a Christian presence;
- * a fresh awareness of the validity of Christian Baptism as the focus of all Christian ministry;
- * the insights of men like Roland Allen pointing to the local congregation as Christ's people called to serve to the wider community;
- * a growing recognition that the "traditional" church, and the way we have rested in its certainty, is fast becoming outdated and irrelevant to a society that finds few points of contact with the Good News as we proclaim it.

In some places, for example England, the term Collaborative Ministry means that a parish includes lay and ordained (Stipendiary, Non-stipendiary and Local). Creating a Team is tough work, especially if the incumbent Vicar is loathe to give up his/her 'power'. But in the NZ context the Ministry Support Team has the role of helping the whole congregation minister to the wider community. Ordination happens to be just one of the forms of ministry within the life of the Team and congregation.

In NZ Mutual Ministry is chiefly a rural phenomenon. Our experience of San Francisco indicated we are part of the leading bunch. Things that struck me were:

- * we are moving from a survival mode towards mission, i.e. parishes have proved they can exist - now they must hear what their community is saying, and respond to those concerns;
- * we need to keep evolving our own distinctive theology of Mutual Ministry which mirrors our common journey, culture and hopes;
- * the strong wish to continue international dialogue, particularly through email and websites (e.g. <http://maffin.net/june/>);
- * Mutual Ministry is as much an urban opportunity as it is a rural one;
- * how ordained stipendiary clergy might handle a change in their status.

Does payment bestow power? Without this security what happens to leadership? (These are issues most current Ministry Support Teams have worked through in one way or another.)

In a Team in Liverpool the local garbage collector was ordained a Local Deacon, then Priest. He was well known in the community, in fact essential to its well-being. Since his ordination he has been finding people have been attaching prayer requests to their garbage tins and rubbish bags, especially for the sick. He finds these as he makes his collection runs during the week. All this has happened because he has built up a

sense of trust in the community over many years. This is community ministry in action!

What might happen if our Rural Delivery man or Health Clinic nurse, our stock carrier or local farmer or farmer's wife were doing something similar? My heart would not remain in San Francisco then!

Bill Bennett, Napier

Theological Students Study in the Country

Reprinted with permission from "Ruminations", magazine of the NSW Rural Ministry Unit, September 1998.

Realising that the majority of their students would be appointed to rural parishes, the staff of Trinity Theological College (Brisbane) sought to prepare their students for rural ministry.

In late April students doing their Field Education year assembled at Laidley in the Lackyer Valley for a Short Course on Rural Ministry. The students were billeted with rural families.

The content of the course was built around the Coolamon College course on Rural Ministry. Reading relating to the course was distributed to students several weeks prior to their departure for Laidley.

During the time at Laidley particular attention was paid to:

- The structure of rural communities
- An approach to a Theology of Land
- Some Aspects of the Rural Church and
- Some Dimensions of Pastoral Care.

In addition to these cerebral engagements, which in teaching style were interactive, the students engaged in:

- A Community Survey
- Attendance at Anzac Day Services (in order to observe the community rituals) and
- Discussions with members of Laidley Congregation.

At the end of each day students were committed to write a reflection on the day's activities and learnings. These were shared on the next day. On the final day of the course an extensive debriefing occurred in which learnings were crystallised. Following the completion of the course students were required to submit a 1500 word essay for assessment.

Participants recognised the transition that they would have to make from living in a metropolitan centre, attending a theological college, to becoming ministers in rural parishes.

They say that they would have to develop a new language, build up a new wardrobe and adopt a new lifestyle.

They began to identify with the hardships of rural life, perceive ministry as being to the whole community and recognise that in rural areas ministry was dependent on relationships.

A connection was made between God, land and God's faithfulness. The challenge of being both pastoral and

missional was discussed. Students wrestled with the task of linking Trinitarian theology with land, work and culture.

Although previously doubtful, a number of students at the conclusion of the course were able to affirm that there was a place for them in rural ministry.

The course was also valuable for the congregation of Laidley. As they described the life of their congregation, dialogued openly with each other and the students, they became more aware of their strengths.

Laidley parish was an excellent environment in which to experience the life of the rural church. The leadership in the parish was affirming, the worship was relevant, engagement with the community was real and the hospitality was generous.

Lloyd Vidler, Bowral, NSW

Knox Values Links with Rural Network

Ordinands preparing for ministry in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand (PCANZ) are expected to gain some experience of rural ministry. If they have not been part of a country parish prior to their theological training, they are usually given a rural educational field placement as part of their theological education. Having said that, it is also true that no formal course which focuses specifically on rural ministry is presently offered through the School of Ministry. We see this as a gap in our programme and would be eager to strengthen and facilitate links with the Rural Network which would allow us to give more attention to preparation for rural ministry in theological education.

The School of Ministry, Knox College operates a two year Ordination Studies Programme (OSP) for candidates for ministry of word and sacrament in PCANZ. After completing a foundational degree in Theology, students in OSP focus on integration between academic theology and the practical demands of ministry.

Learning about the structure of farming communities and developing a theology of the land relevant to rural life would provide significant educational opportunities. At the core of OSP is field placement in ministry, which is used as the basis for theological reflection and integration of classroom learning that runs alongside field placement. OSP students, most of whom reside in Dunedin for the two year programme, experience a variety of placements. Some who come to us having barely encountered a sheep at close quarters, have returned in awe from placement in a country parish. It gave them exposure to another world. One student commented on how he felt at home in rural Southland when parishioners felt free enough to joke with him. The centrality of community life reminded him of close neighbour and kin ties in the Samoan village life that his parents had come from.

Principal Simon Rae is keen to see closer networking between the School of Ministry and the Rural Network. The recent TransAlpine training event for rural ministers is a case in point. With sufficient advance notice, Simon would relish sharing in such an event with the Rural Network, perhaps sending students, or contributing staff with theological input. In future such an event might be developed into a rural ministry module comparable to the short course in rural ministry for students in New South Wales. Staying in touch with the Rural Network reminds us of our need to further develop a more intentional focus on rural ministry within the programmes of the School of Ministry.

Mary Huie-Jolly, Knox College, Dunedin

Rural Vitality: A Report on the Canterbury Rural Development Summit

The Canterbury Development Corporation, the economic development and employment arm of the Christchurch City Council, recognises the importance of strong mutual links between city and region and is aware of the value which healthy rural communities bring to the city and the regional economy. Working in partnership with the Canterbury Regional Council, the National Bank and Wrightson's, they convened a Rural Development Summit which met on Wednesday May 19.

The scene was set by Gary Moore, Mayor of Christchurch, Tony Zwart, Professor of Marketing at Lincoln University, and Allan Freeth, CEO for Wrightson's. Falling commodity prices and changes in traditional markets have put pressures on farm viability and rural employment. With fewer jobs and declining farm equity some communities are suffering as people leave and the sustainability of services is under threat. Participants in the summit worked in small groups and in plenary to clarify the challenges and turn the challenges into opportunities.

Among the highlights of the day were a series of four case studies which give examples of the ways in which rural communities are taking hold of their own future. (They run parallel to stories told to the Kohuia Consultation convened by the Rural Ministry Unit in 1997.) David Wilson, from the Community Employment Group, set the scene by placing the local in a global context and underling the importance of local initiatives. Don Young shared the initiative being taken by Waimakariri Irrigation Ltd in the area between the Waimakariri and Ashley Rivers; Bernard Lynch told us about the ways in which the Clutha Agriculture Development Board is stimulating rural initiatives in South Otago; David West reported on the Ashburton Aquatic Park which is building a multiple-use recreational and tourist facility; Francis Helps told the

story of the nine farmers who have joined together in a commercial venture which offers the Banks Peninsula Track as a significant walkway experience.

Major portions of the programme we given over to Working Groups. In the morning we divided into small groups with a mix of participants in each and identified key challenges faced by rural communities. These challenges were sorted and listed and in the second round of Working Groups (meeting hard on the heels of the stories of rural initiatives) we opted into special purpose groups which addressed each of the challenges listed. Our task at this point: "how do we turn this challenge into an opportunity?"

This Rural Development Summit held in Christchurch was a significant first step in an ongoing series. The intention now is to hold a series of smaller and more localised workshops in other parts of Canterbury. Cities and region belong together; the rural and urban areas of Canterbury are enthusiastic about working together for a better future.

Garth Cant, Christchurch

A Rural Ministry Network?

The possibility of a Trans Tasman Rural Ministry Network has been wafting around in my mind for some time. Personal circumstances then gave me the opportunity to take on a new form of ministry by learning HTML and publishing the Rural Ministry Resource Page: <http://users.netconnect.com.au/~billclrk/>

The Rural Ministry Resource Page is up on my Internet Service Provider (ISP) as part of a free use space for their account customers. The limit is 2Mb, but in practice this is reduced by the need to have space for incoming e-mail. I believe most, if not all, ISPs offer similar service so that a Rural Ministry Network (or any network) could be made up of many pages, all residing on different ISPs, but directly linked via the Internet.

Another possibility is a government funded community net. Vicnet is a Victorian state government funded network, offering free web site space for non-profit community groups. The limit is a full 5Mb (no e-mail space needed), but the site must be registered to a community group (church, sports club, etc.) not an individual. There must be other such free-nets in various Australian states, and in New Zealand, as there are in North America and the U.K. And international Internet companies offer free web sites, but "free" really means the site carries commercial advertisements, which may or may not be appropriate.

One Rural Ministry Network option is based on my observation of various North American groups. CHASSIE <http://ruralchurch.org> has a host page which simply lists the pages/web sites/Uniform Resource Locators (URLs) for individual groups and/or various

focus activities. The individual pages could be on ISPs in different places, maintained by different people for their particular group or activity, but immediately available via the Internet. A truly international network could link various sub-networks such as the North American, Trans Tasman, U.K., etc., with a primarily local focus in each.

There are a number of other considerations:

- Preparation is obviously part of the normal work of the members of a group or activity, as usually they initiate and coordinate activities, and communicate these within their sphere of concern.
- Publication and maintenance needs a moderately skilled enthusiast - the site doesn't need to be overpowering, as it is simply disseminating information as clearly as possible.
- Domain name is apparently relatively simple to register and inexpensive, but is not essential (although simpler to remember).
- Cost depends on whether there are moderately skilled enthusiasts prepared to donate some time to the initial publication and the regular maintenance, otherwise it could be expensive.

Another option is a site for sharing via e-mail. RFD+ http://www.seorf.ohiou.edu/~xx042/r_ctr/rfd.html is such a format. Although this includes contributors outside North America, that continent is the main area of interest and experience shared, at present.

Whether a local (Trans Tasman) network would allow more local input is a matter for conjecture. Perhaps the international sharing forum offered through RFD+ is more appropriate for breadth of experience and support.

If clustering of congregations in cooperative ministry is a step in enabling God's people to be more effective users of diverse gifts for ministry, linking those clusters will enable broader support and encouragement, one for another (even if geographically remote from one another), in that ministry. Feedback invited.

Bill Clark, Ballarat, Vic

Bill was an aeronautical engineer before training for ordained ministry with the Uniting Church in Australia. He served in parishes in Victoria before retiring in 1996. Bill can be contacted at <billclrk@netconnect.com.au> and he hopes others will join him in his enthusiasm for the possibilities of internet clustering.

Book Reviews

Rural Churches Sharing Good News in Rural Communities

VISION New Zealand, Auckland, 1999 42pp.

What I loved about this publication was its hope. Those of us in small rural communities are sick of hearing the depressing stories of doom and gloom which city dwellers predict for us. This collection of true

stories, reflections, prayers, questions and suggestions sings with the hope of the Gospel. It's the sort of publication that makes you glad to be a Christian and to live in the country, and to want to be a Christian and to live rural if you don't already.

I also appreciated the earthy reality of this resource booklet which arose from the Evangelising Rural Stream of the VISION New Zealand Congress, held at Waikanae in January of this year. Attending some training events and reading some books on ministry can be frustrating experiences when you minister in a rural district with its realities of geographical and social isolation, busy farming and sporting calendars and the potential for 'ownership' of the church by entrenched, well established locals. Sometimes it seems as if what we read and learn at seminars is light years away from our experience of several small communities struggling to cope with harsh economic and climatic realities. This booklet, on the other hand, spoke directly into our situation. The true life stories from small communities, a key feature of the book, make gripping reading and spur the reader on to forge their own connections with their own places and people.

It is an invaluable manual for rural parishes and churches in small towns. Another plus is that it's definitely not 'minister-centred', but caters for people at all levels of church involvement. We hope to have several copies available in the different parts of our parish as an encouragement and practical guide for the rural church in this time of challenge and change.

I am grateful to those who were part of the rural stream at VISION New Zealand this year for opening up their experiences and sharing them with the rest of us. The task statement they developed as a distinctly rural stream expression of the VISION New Zealand Mission Statement is holistic and straightforward:

*To take the Whole Gospel
to the Whole Community
Building Relationships*

to Foster Reconciliation of Land and People.

They then discern that our task when we worship together is:

*To discover God in the midst of life,
give room for the Christ among us
and catch up with the Spirit at work in our place.*

For a well-spent \$10 you will be inspired, reassured and encouraged by the depth and creativity of this new rural ministry resource.

Rachel Judge, Ranfurly

*Address for orders: VISION NZ 426 Queen Street Auckland
An order slip is enclosed with this newsletter.*

**Lord, please make me
the kind of person
my dog thinks I am**

*Rural Ministry: The Shape of
the Renewal to Come*

by Shannon Jung, Pegge Boehm, Deborah Cronin, Gary Farley, C. Dean Freudenberger, Judith Bortner Heffernan, Sandra LaBlanc, Edward L. Queen II, David Reusink
Nashville: Abingdon Press 1998 225pp.

Yes, this is a book with nine authors: not a book with chapters by nine different authors but the result of nine people working together over three years, discussing and reworking to produce this genuine team effort. The book is a conversation which invites the reader to join in. It models exactly what is needed for a new lease of life in rural ministry: collaboration. As the Preface puts it:

We believe that the book symbolizes both our ecumenicity and the optimal future of rural ministry, namely the commitment to embodying a respectful, shared, cooperative, community-revitalizing ministry in the name of the living Christ. (p.9)

This book is produced in the United States but a large proportion of it translates well into the New Zealand context. Its three pressing questions are our questions: Why change? What are our options? How can we move from where we are to where we think we ought to be? (p.10) In response the book describes the crisis that has hit the land and rural communities, outlines a Biblical and theological vision for life on the land into the future and then looks at the strategic role of the church in the process of renewal.

All the way through, this book offers brief snippets of real life, set out in boxed text for easy access. It is a book about the *practicalities* of rural life and the *practice* of ministry. For example:

A Question

How would the ... rural church appear to the local community if, instead of presenting a small group of people intent on institutional survival, it was viewed as a force for community strength and change? What would this say to the community about Christian discipleship?

The writers' hopes for this book is that it "initiates a new beginning... The challenge is to continue nurturing Christian congregations, to be a prophetic voice in the community, and engage in the public arena of discussion." (p.222) These people believe the church can make a difference and that it does not exist for its own sake, but to be God's instrument for the world:

How we together care for the land, for the whole of creation, and for community within our locales *and* around the globe will determine the future of civilization. The stakes are high. (p.225)

In summary, I consider this book is a relevant, up to date and encouraging resource for rural churches and communities in New Zealand. It is available from

OCBooks in Dunedin (Tollfree 0800 8867 226 or email mcrowl@es.co.nz) at \$39.95 plus postage and packing.

Robyn McPhail

A Summer Challenge for Kids

Joyce Sasse in Alberta, Canada, tells of a project that is part of her "Prairie Forum on Church and Community", encouraging children to share their stories and thinking about rural cultural and spiritual values through an Internet connection. The site is a major rural site, sponsored by the Department of Agriculture which makes it a great opportunity to talk about these values alongside other topics. Joyce asks in her "Summer Challenge" letter to the kids:

Would you be interested in sending me some material over the summer, telling what it's like to live in the country, or in a small community?

Stories, poems or songs, cartoons and line drawings would all be appreciated. The theme: What's Special About Being Rural. You might want to talk about the good things. Or you might want to talk about some of the difficulties...

I'm looking for stories about getting along in small communities... for examples of how you've learned about birth, or life, or death... for touches of humour that help us get through the day.

If anyone wants to know more about this project Joyce can be contacted at [<jsasse@telusplanet.net>](mailto:jsasse@telusplanet.net)

Our Heavenly Father	We have had
Too much rain	Not enough sunshine
Lack of finance	Difficulty in finding feed
Suffering animals	Suffering people
Give us more sunshine	Give us hope
God, be there for us	Reduce family stress

We pray because we are struggling to survive.

Who else can we ask if we don't ask you?

We praise you that you are there for us.

That you have got us thus far (surviving).

We praise you for your promise that you will listen when we turn to you.

Written by the congregation at HariHari during the big wet of 1998



This occasional newsletter is printed and distributed by Diocese of Christchurch, PO Box 4438, Christchurch, ph 03 379 5950, fax 03 379 5954, which is also the address for the Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit. Editor: Robyn McPhail, 9 Jackson Street, Methven 8353, ph/fax 03 302 8151, email: chirmac@voyager.co.nz

Thanks to all contributors and to Garth Cant for editorial assistance. Contributions of news, views, insights on anything to do with the rural church, its ministry and gospel mission gratefully received.