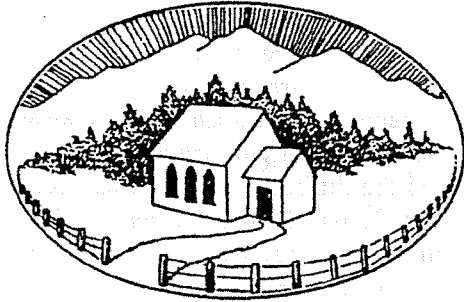


Rural Network News



No.16

September 2000

A palm tree is a delight to look at when my belly is full. When I am hungry, it feeds me.

Pacific Wisdom

Rural Network News aims to share ideas for good rural ministry, create a sense of belonging to a unique group and encourage one another.

Te kaitiakitanga, te manaakitanga, te kotahitanga.

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

Comments on any material are always welcome.

Our Mother, the Earth

Each spring, as the cold and darkness of winter fades, my sense of vitality is restored. The awakening starts as the hours of sunlight lengthen. I receive a special boost when I smell the earthly dampness of fresh spring rain. My awareness is tweaked with the appearance of the earliest of spring flowers.

I watch the cows with their calves, I listen for the over flight of ducks and marvel at the unfolding saga of nature.

Think about our connectedness with the Land. Some call us "earthlings". The ancient Hebrews referred to us as *Am Ha' Aretz* - grassroots people. The Chinese talk about humans as the *hsin* of heaven and earth, and *hsin* is written as a pictograph of the human heart. In this simple way they seem to be saying humans are the "understanding and heart of heaven and earth".

From the Hebrew legends come stories of our source. *The Lord God took some soil and formed a human: he breathed into its nostrils and the human began to live.*

In real life, my dad showed me God's handiwork as we worked and fished together. One Grandmother shared her love for garden flowers and the other her love

for her cattle. An oldster discovered a sermon text in a handful of soil. A child opening her first pea pod helped me marvel at mysteries hidden away. I will never forget the sound of awe in the voice of a friend who told me "Yesterday's sunset was so beautiful, I just had to stop the car and have a cry!"

The Earth is our Mother. It is from her that we were created. It is in her that we are rooted. It is out of her that we draw nourishment. It is into her that we shall return.

To her we give thanks!

Joyce Sasse, Pincher Creek, Alberta, Canada

All of us suffer from "foot-in-mouth" disease from time to time, writes Ralph Milton in a recent Rumors email newsletter:

This fellow who met an old school chum on the street. To make pleasant conversation, he inquired after the woman's spouse. "Oh," said the friend, "Didn't you know? Harry died and went to heaven."

"I'm sorry," our hero responded. Then, thinking better of it, he said, "I mean, I'm glad." That didn't quite cover the subject either, so he corrected himself. "I mean, I'm surprised."

© Ralph Milton.

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Pilgrimage of Grace

For some years five or six Catholic and Anglican Southlanders have met monthly for prayer, shared faith and company. A year ago they decided to prepare for the Millennium by going on pilgrimage – in space and in time.

At the end of June 1999, 15 of us gathered in the tiny, beautiful Anglican church of St Mary the Virgin in the remote township of Waikaia (population 91). There we listened to the words of the *Acts of the Apostles* telling the story of the first Pentecost and the birth of the Christian church. We walked up the road to the Presbyterian church to listen to stories of martyrs and church leaders of the 1st Century. This was to be the pattern for succeeding months.

We visited 15 other tiny rural church communities in all: at Riversdale, Balfour, Garston, Athol, Mossburn and Lumsden. On the last Sunday of each month we went to one of these country towns where the local community had prepared a presentation focussed on one century of the Christian era. It was a progressive journey through two millennia. We moved from church to church finishing with supper in a parish hall. By December the group had grown from 15 to 60 people.

Some examples. The Anglican church of St Alban, in Balfour, was robed in darkness as we approached. Sunk into logs of wood were tiny candles which guided our footsteps up a winding pathway to the church door. In the tiny foyer, larger lights led us into the body of the church. Here literally dozens of

candles of all shapes, sizes and colours were haphazardly scattered. Hooded figures quietly guided us to our places, having first greeted us with a mug of warm soup and a service sheet written in Old English lettering.

This community was representing the monastic tradition of the 10th Century – their work ethic and hospitality. In the dim light we sat and listened to stories of monastic life and of the place the monasteries held in the social and educational life of that remote time. All this was prepared for us by a regular worshipping congregation of eight!

In Garston the Catholic and Presbyterian chapels are separated by a small space occupied by the common cemetery, on a terrace overlooking the main highway. Both were built 100 years ago and might accommodate 50 people: from the road they look like twins. We arrived there on a September evening for the Welcoming Rite in the Presbyterian church: the gentle Elder of mature years was deeply moved by the crowd of people who had arrived to praise the Lord together.

Starlight guided us across the cemetery lawn to the bright red door of St Thomas', its Catholic neighbour. The local Catholic community had prepared a Morality Play, written by themselves which told the story of the Black Death in the 1340s, and how the people and their priests were ravaged by the terrible plague. The presentation concluded by a reading from the *Shewings* of Julian of Norwich, the mystic anchoress who lived at that time.

We then drove 20 minutes to neighbouring Athol for a more scholarly talk on the late Middle Ages: the more scandalous abuses of the papal Court were mentioned but, charitably, not dwelt upon! For we saw ourselves as one family of faith with a common history, tolerant and forgiving of the unfortunate or divisive aspects of our past history.

The last Sunday of October is also Reformation Sunday, and we celebrated the 482nd anniversary of Martin Luther nailing his 95 Articles on the church door at Wittenburg. But we were in the Anglican church of the Good Shepherd, Mossburn. A play about the life of St Teresa of Avila was written and performed, highlighting her influence then and now. From there to St Joan of Arc's (Catholic) to listen to the story of the new religious Orders working in hospitals and schools, and the missionaries of all denominations carrying the faith of Christ to a New World across the oceans.

Finally onward 100 metres to the Presbyterian church to celebrate the glorious song-writing of Isaac Watts, John and Charles Wesley. We sang vigorously of Jesus Christ 'the Church's One Foundation' – until the tiny packed church rocked on its own foundations!

By November our revisiting the Christian story had brought us to the arrival of Samuel Marsden in 1814 to found the first Christian mission in the Bay of Islands: at Christmas of that year he proclaimed the Gospel for the first time in Aotearoa. And we had arrived at the Knox church in Lumsden, built in 1892. At St Michael's

Catholic church round the corner the importance of the Vatican Council especially to ecumenical dialogue was explained with clarity and precision. Finally to the Anglican church to follow a review of all the outstanding Christian men and women of the 20th Century: Martin Luther King, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Nelson Mandela, Bishop Belo were among the many names remembered.

In spite of rural decline we found that all the 17 churches we visited were beautifully looked after with love by their tiny congregations. We reflected how the church will manage to flourish in rural areas. Perhaps one church in each town will come to replace the ageing buildings, and the different traditions can continue amid mutual respect. Jesus Christ is the centre of all our lives, and Baptism is our common bond. In each place the church needs to be open each Sunday, no matter how small the congregation, for it is a living sign of God's presence in that community.

During the extended pilgrimage we asked that a large rock or stone typical of each district should be selected and brought to Lumsden by mid-December. And there we arranged for a Memorial Cairn to be built as a permanent reminder of 2000 years of the Christian church.

So, at 5.30 am on New Year's Day 2000, over a hundred people gathered in Lumsden from the whole district for the dedication and blessing of this cairn. It stands at the junction of State Highway 94 (from Dunedin) with the main road, Highway 6, going north from Invercargill to Queenstown.

There we greeted the new dawn and the new Millennium, filled with awe and gratitude at the way we had opened up new ways of looking at what church is truly meant to be:

A people united with one another in communion with Jesus Christ.

Mary Ryan, Waimea Valley

Reprinted with permission from *Tui Motu – InterIslands*

Religion is not what human beings do when they are alone, but that which human beings do in the presence of what makes them wonder, that which fills their heart, and that which makes them feel it is beyond all reason.

Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*

Setting Aside and Mixing

As a layperson preparing a Sunday Service, I got to thinking that it is rather like breadmaking. The gathering together of specific tools for the task; the combining of essential ingredients to a particular formula; then setting aside for a certain 'working' to take place; going back to it after a space of time to manipulate it for a better combination; and repeating this until the final presentation.

My own initiation to the art of breadmaking took place when our family lived in the Outback of North-

Western Australia. Cook and diners alike frequently thanked God for Helen during our first season of running a buffalo-catching team there. A large aboriginal woman with velvety black skin and a wide white smile, Helen graciously taught me all about bush-tucker cooking.

Making damper of course was a daily deed and easily accomplished even by our young children. But turning a round, golden, crispy loaf of bread out of the camp oven was always considered special. Helen showed us how to start the fascinating "working of the yeast" – a dip of the little (washed) finger into the pannikin would tell if the water was "just warm enough; cover and set aside for an hour; then tip 6-8 pannikins of flour through the sifter and into the breadmaking basin, add flavouring for variety such as dried fruits, cinnamon or spices, make a well in the middle and pour in the now frothy yeast mixture."

During this time spirit breathed into it...

She effortlessly integrated it all with voluminous hands and equal good humour. The smooth mound of dough was covered and set aside in a favourable spot, i.e. warm and sheltered from any breeze. During this time spirit breathed into it, we were told seriously. An occasional curious peek showed the knoll of dough expanding out and rising evenly. After about an hour it was ready to "punch back". So it was sloughed out onto the floured board where it wheezed and coughed as air was pushed and pummelled out. The kneading process was repeated another couple of times over the next two hours, then finally into the camp oven which was lowered into the hole in the ground that had pandamus-nut coals glowing at about the right temperature. Quite a lengthy process from decision to delivery but the aroma alone was most rewarding as the steaming golden loaf finally "hit the deck". Rewarding too were the muffled oohs and aahs as it was "wolfed" down, still warm and dripping with golden syrup, maybe with a slab of cold buffalo meat, or used to soak up tasty stew.

So it is with preparing a Church Service. Firstly, the desire to give of one's talent in this way, then the decision of when to fit it into the scheme of things and what the flavour/topic will be. The idea rests with us for a while and under favourable conditions the mind works through different concepts as we sift through our resources. The first draft of the sermon is best left awhile, for on returning to it I'm amazed at the adjusting and rearranging that happens. I have come to the conclusion that, given a chance, the Spirit has been quietly doing its valuable work too. So the work 'cooks' for a while. Songs are chosen with utmost care for special flavouring as these will often say more than we can and the rest of the format is juggled around a bit to create a variety of delivery. Finally it's all brought together as a whole, then presented to any who are hungry in spirit, to digest as they choose.

Carol Eaton, Rakaia

A melody in F based on Luke 15:11-32

Feeling footloose and frisky, a feather-brained fellow forced his fond father to fork over the farthings. He flew far into foreign fields, and frittered his fortune, feasting fabulously with faithless friends. Finally, facing famine and fleeced by his fellows in folly, he found himself a feed-flinger in a filthy farmyard. Fairly famishing, fain would he have filled his frame with the fodder fragments.

"Phooey! My father's flunkies fare far fancier," the frazzled fugitive fumed feverishly, frankly facing facts. Frustrated by failure and filled with foreboding, he fled forthwith to his family. Falling at his father's feet, he foundered forlornly: "Father, I have flunked, and fruitlessly forfeited family favour."

The faithful father, forestalling further flinching, frantically flagged the flunkies to fetch the finest fating, and fix a feast - fast! But the fault-finding frater frowned on the fickle forgiveness of the former foleal. His fury flashed, but fussing was futile, for the far-sighted father figured, "Such filial fidelity is fine; but what forbids fervent festivity?"

For the fugitive is found! Unfurl the flags! With fanfares flaring let fun and frolic freely flow!"

Failure's forgotten! Folly forsaken! Forgiveness forms the foundation for future fortitude.

Fank you.

Quite understandably, anon!
From RUMORS newsletter

Rural New Zealand - here we come! or "Sharing the Good News Country Style"

We, the OSP* students, gathered at the end of a long hard semester for a Rural Ministry module. Robyn McPhail, who led the module, must have wondered at times whether we were all there! I must admit that there was just a wee bit of exhaustion around.

However, the material soon woke us up and we had interesting and lively discussion during the four days of the module.

We started from where we were, by looking at our hopes and dreams as well as the blockages and then we looked at some of the stories of hope from various rural communities around the country.

The highlight of the module - once we had our boots on so to speak - was getting a taste of life in the country. We went on a trip to the Maniototo where Alan and Rachel Judge are in ministry. The people of the parish very generously hosted our visit, billeted us and answered all our weird questions so patiently.

We heard a little bit about ministry in a community, and not only from the ministers and people of the parish, but also from the local constable, community nurse etc. The programme gave us a good picture of life in a rural setting. From the 24-hour job of the farmers and how

* Ordination Studies Programme – the Presbyterian Ministry Training Programme at the School of Ministry, Dunedin.

that affects the gathering through to the effects of the seasonal rhythms through to how the church is very much a part of the whole community.

Perhaps the biggest item to take away is that last one. And for those of us who will have the privilege of doing rural ministry we take this gift with us, and those of us that go to urban ministry - well, perhaps we can take this gift with us too and help build healthier congregations. But wherever we are we will share the Good News within our communities.

Rilma Sands, Dunedin

Science cannot tackle the environmental crisis alone, but neither can religion:

- ◆ Religion needs technical expertise and verifiable facts from science
- ◆ Science needs biblical affirmation, motivation and values from faith

Kim King, Animal Ecologist, Waikato University

Sabbath-Keeping

When my wife, Althea, and I retired from schoolteaching we decided that we would replace helping teenagers to grow with helping plants (and as it turned out birds) to grow. So we bought a small house on 10 acres of land 3km up the Clutha River from Alexandra. The land slopes down to the river and had been highly modified by goldminers in the 19th century who sluiced off most of the soil. It was mostly rocks, thyme, briar, gorse, broom and rabbits. The climate is severe: the coldest temperatures in NZ in winter and the hottest in summer. Precipitation is 300mm p.a., while evaporation is 750mm. Things have to be hardy to survive, water being the main necessity.

We set to work making water available and constructing pockets of garden using materials found on the property for walls, etc. Shrubby plants, bulbs and trees we soon found to do best. Gradually the trees have grown to give shelter and, using muscle power only, we have modified the land so that about half the section is now garden. There are also about 40 'wild' ducks on a pond with a pair of coot, numerous wild Californian quail, 24 or so white pigeons, three guinea fowl, two bantams and 32 species of wild birds.

We made a conscious decision not to commercialise the garden. It was to be a labour of love, not a chore. But we found that with so much to do it could very easily have become a chore with us becoming addicted workaholics. So we decided to set aside fixed times when we would wander around and enjoy what we were achieving. And we have found that not only are we helping plants (and birds) to grow, but that they are helping us to grow. We are growing in our enjoyment of caring for the garden, and in our appreciation of its response to our concern for its welfare: creators and creation reciprocating.

We think of the creation story when the Creator rested after six days so as to enjoy what had been created. Which is surely the meaning of the Sabbath.

Don Morrison, Alexandra

Spirituality and Economics

Continuing from previous editions of this newsletter, with responses made on RFD+, a US based email group, to host Brien McGarvey's comment:

I am convinced that we cannot talk about spirituality in this age without talking about work and finances.

...I find that most of the hopes described by my parishioners are tied much more to possessions desired and financial security for the future than for the delayed gratification that heaven offers.

What do you think? How does your Bible and your experience address faith in the context of a consumerist society?

Early comments were on Jesus' concern for material well-being, his opposition to wealth, contemporary consumerism and the exploitation of human and natural resources and Joel Turrell's sense of "a profound difference between wealth and abundance."

The comments continue:

Fifteen students and I went out to North Dakota last week and got into a rip-roarin' conversation about economics, trade policy, farm prices, corporations, etc. Somehow theology flew out the window of our conversation. At first I thought it was the utter segregation of the two that was unnerving me, and then I realised that it was the lack of a systematic, traditional way of relating the two.

In class, the question became: where does one place one's hope? In what frame of reference does one place economics? What has priority here? And then we read Mark 3:31-35, where Jesus talks about who his real sisters, brothers, and mother are. Who is our family? What are the parameters of the community that the economy is in the service of?

Finally, I thought of Hauerwas' response to the student who asked when one would know that it was okay to have sex with another person. "It is fine with anyone that you were willing to share a joint bank account with."

Anyone who has enough commitment to the wellbeing of other sisters, brothers and mothers to share their economic destiny is indeed a faith-filled disciple. I think, however rough this rendition, it begins to identify whom we are devoted to serve in the long run. Thanks for the question. Right on target.

Shannon Jung

While I agree with Joel's distinction between God's *abundant* gifts and human conversion of it into *wealth*, I want to add a wrinkle - geography. God may provide sufficient abundance for basic survival in food, shelter, and clothing, but unfortunately the Earth's reality has it

unevenly distributed across the lands and oceans. All is fine as long as local life is followed in an indigenous fashion that respects these differences and seeks to revere and adjust to its limitations.

Unfortunately this reverence and respect is not the name of the game today. Maybe, in times past with limited communications, one would not know of the greater "abundance" that other places might share. But in today's age of global communication and travel, it is far too easy to become knowledgeable, and in turn envious, of the apparent "greater" abundance that some areas experience due to climate, soils, terrain, and other physical factors (and which in turn are felt to be lacking where you are). Hence, it is understandable that local economies now want to be like the so-called "wealthy" economies and transform their local abundance to match that perceived elsewhere or that farmers in really dry-climate regions want to match to natural abundance otherwise found in the loess-based, temperate soils (and so add water).

Is God paying Earth favours in geographic differences?

Is God paying Earth favours in these geographic differences? No, just the physical reality of a land/water based Earth that rotates about a solar Sun, in which there are internal forces (such as plate tectonics) that direct the placement of the land masses. But it is a test of our ultimate focus and our respect for natural limits, a test I personally feel we are severe risk of failing in a non-recoverable way.

I appreciate Hauerwas' description of a faith-filled disciple being one who participates as a joint partner in the local economy. Wendell Berry offers 17 guidelines for community sustainment (reproduced in several of his essays). These guidelines emphasise the participation and priority of the local (and nearby regional) economy, resources, and jobs, over any outside transfer of money. Now if only I can figure out how to get rid of all these advertisement banners that have become prevalent on almost every Web site I visit these days, plus stop all these mortgage companies and lawn care providers from calling me - all frustrating, daily reminders of the expectation that we will participate in this consumer-based wealthy economy. After all, it means jobs, so I'm told....

Kevin Anderson, Rock Island IL
RFD+ is a Rural Ministry Discussion list provided by CHASSIE and the Center for Rural Church Leadership Access RFD+, the Center for Rural Church Ministry and all the CHASSIE pages at: <http://ruralchurch.org>

God's love is like background music that is always present.

Bernard Lonergan, quoted by Nancy Ault
God's love is like the background radiation of the cosmos.

Nancy Ault, lecturer in Practical Theology,
Murdoch University, Perth

Family Sunday School

The concept of Naseby Family Sunday School was born out of prayer. The age old system was not working.

At the 11th hour God gave us an answer. It is the only time I've clearly heard his voice speak out to me, and the words were: "You will hold a once a month Sunday School for two hours and invite the parents to be part of it." Neither I, nor the retired couple teaching with me, had ever heard of anything like it. They didn't hesitate, but said, "That sounds right. You lead and we will be there to help."

We began in March 1979 with 15 children, 4 parents and 3 teachers. The roll rose rapidly with families coming from all over the Maniototo. The following year saw attendances of 48-58 children and adults.

The rural population dwindled and in 1994 Naseby School closed as only 9 pupils remained. However our Sunday School roll continues to carry over 40 names.

For 21 years God has faithfully led us by his Spirit. We open with prayer and songs relevant to the lesson. An action song lets everyone stretch before the lesson, the majority of which is illustrated with hand made flannelgraphs. A song follows and then any notices and the all important birthdays and the offering. This first hour is followed by a morning tea break where adults chat. Babies crawl round our feet or play in the playpen in the aisle and children select books, videos or cassettes from a well-stocked library. There is also a library for adults.

For 21 years God has faithfully led us by his Spirit.

The children then have follow up class work while parents, grandparents and visitors chat and do the dishes. The seniors (Yr6-8) work with two teachers at a table near the back of the church while 2 year olds to Yr5 work at tables in the vestry, also with two teachers, colouring sheets relevant to the lessons which are kept in a folder they make at the beginning of the year. They also make some novelty to take home and with this activity High School children and parents often lend a hand.

We run our own bank account following biblical principles. One offering a year is donated to a needy cause and is so well supported it is always more than a tithe. The children do an annual project for the Bible Society as a mission outreach.

There are no fancy facilities in our 128 year old mud brick church.

There are no fancy facilities in our 128 year old mud brick church. Water from an outside tap, an um and wash up bowl on a tea trolley, a 'Porta Potty' toilet in a storeroom, but God is with us and there is a real peace and joy of his presence in our much prayer for and very homely church.

Valerie Smith, Maniototo

News about Local Shared Ministry

Today, more and more people are recognising that those who are ordained are present in their midst in the faith community that all are called to be part of the priesthood of Christ. More and more people are recognising their own gifts and talents, exploring new possibilities within the faith community context and discerning gifts within one another.

At the recent AMEND (*Anglican Ministry Education for New Directions*) event held in Christchurch, I learnt that parishes who are exploring alternative models of ministry are NOT second class parishes. If anything they are on the growing edge of the Church as we seek to be relevant in the new millennium.

I also learnt that this model of ministry is in fact NOT a single model, but rather one of a great diversity of ways of being church in the local context. Rather than imposing a particular model on a parish, parishes are encouraged and empowered to explore who God is calling them to be, and how they are to work that out together within the wider community.

This, of course, means no easy answers, no programmes, no diagrams, nor any other quick answers to deeply theological questions. Instead, it means getting to know God, and one another, and oneself better. It means taking chances. It means being willing to change. And above all it means being willing to go on a journey without knowing the destination.

All this is very challenging, could be frightening, but is definitely exciting! And the good news is, we are not alone.

Sandy Neal, Hastings

AMEND for me was a chance to get together with several who were passionate about focusing on the ministry of the baptised rather than the ministry of the ordained. The joy for me was that all these people had a commitment to the church and its Gospel, yet had become aware that 17th-20th century models were limiting the people of God in being the church in society today. The mixture of urban/rural and the range of theological, philosophical and political perspectives only enhanced our resolve to look at the priorities and work together on these things that would make a difference.

Being the only JAFa present wasn't a problem. After experiencing some scepticism from the Deep South, I feel my presence and the nature of St Luke's Mt Albert contributed to the sense that mutual ministry is relevant to all demographics of church life. All in all it goes down as a number 1 life-giving experience

Howard Leigh, just another fabulous Auckland!er!

From deft WORKS 4, with thanks to editor and contributors

The virtuous circle: what we see in Jesus speaks to us of God.

Ruth Page, Principal of New College, Edinburgh

LEARNINGS FROM LICHFIELD AND ELSEWHERE

The Revd Elizabeth Jordan spent February and March in Waiapu Diocese on exchange from the Lichfield Diocese, UK

The two months that I spent in Waiapu Diocese were rich and stimulating.

The Shared Ministry Scheme in Lichfield is similar enough to that in Waiapu for comparisons to be made, though it was the differences that were the most fruitful source of learning. For example, I was impressed by the idea of requiring each congregation to commit itself to learning more about the Christian faith and training for ministry. That emphasises how important it is to recognise and equip every Christian, not just the authorised team. We really need to work at ensuring that the greater involvement in the life of the church for church members does not mean that there is no time or energy for witnessing as a Christian in "ordinary time" outside of church life.

The other idea I want to follow up at home is the appointment of an "Enabler" to a parish rather than a Vicar, as has happened in a parish at Hastings. In Lichfield Diocese we are trying to change the perception of the role of stipendiary clergy in all parishes, so that they are used more as resource people within the ministering community, rather than 'the jack of all trades' who does everything.

We want to promote collaborative ministry as a different way of being a church, rather than as a way of saving money or coping with clergy shortages.

A change in the title of the person appointed in a parish, backed up by an appropriate job description and contract, would be a signal that there was something different about that person's ministry.

Bill Bennett went to Lichfield to find out how local stipendiary clergy take to the idea of working in a team, what learning resources are used, what's happening elsewhere in the UK and the Church's ministry in rural area.

The diocese was huge in comparison to ours. It was a great experience. Hospitality was generous and warm. Local Shared Ministry is a strong component of mission in the diocese. The team of advisers are dedicated and enthusiastic-Elizabeth being one of them. Some issues that emerged were:

- Encouraging people away from hierarchical models of ministry.
- How to bring in new blood to established teams (setting time limits?)
- Vocational diaconate and ordination directly to the priesthood
- How to evaluate licensed ministries with expected standards of competency
- What resources we should offer for lay and licensed ministry training as a matter of course
- How often to have the 'call' process for ministry in the parish.

I was impressed by the dedication and commitment of 100's of lay people to learning and sharing. For example, 3000 have studied for the Bishop's Certificate course. This entails a two year programme, six modules, with eight sessions in each module.

From Local Shared Ministry News, compiled by Bill Bennett, Ministry Enabler, Diocese of Waiapu

If St. Paul had been a computer nerd, would the following have been true?

- * He would have networked the seven churches mentioned in Revelation.
- * Spiritual Armor would have included a virus checker.
- * Used "Find and Replace" to change his name from Saul to Paul.
- * Used mapping software to make the Missionary Journeys more efficient.
- * Created a HERESY-CHECK macro for the Word Processor.
- * Made Software Piracy the 11th Commandment.
- * Told us to "Compuserve one another."
- * Replaced the "Christ is the vine, we are the branches" analogy with "Christ is the Network Server, we are the nodes."

From RUMORS email newsletter

Will GM Feed the World?

And do we decide the virtue of something on the basis of an abstract promise? The concrete reality is hunger for large numbers of people. But the reality is also oversupply of food (ask any arable farmer about that!). The issue is food distribution, a matter of justice not technology. World Health Organisation figures indicate that, for the first time ever, the percentage of obese in the world matches the percentage of starving.

This is how Hugh Campbell, a social anthropologist from Otago University, presented the topic at a church-hosted Forum in Wellington recently. Hugh is good credentials for knowing a bit about farming existence - his PhD researched the effects of the mid-80's downturn on 20 Mid-Canterbury farming families. He's a man with a passion for public good driven science.

Hugh argues that GM technologies in relation to food production are answering the wrong set of questions. We need to ask underlying questions about the global agri-food system, particularly why prices to farmers keep falling (food for Western consumers has never been so cheap and plentiful), yet the poor have no means to participate. It is like there are two completely different economic worlds inhabiting the same planet.

And ever since World War 2 our farmers have found themselves on a "technological tread-mill", increasing output to offset decreased returns. The tendency in mainstream agriculture has been to an increased use of supplements and implements on the land - creating a dependency on these costly inputs to provide adequate output. GM proposals come as one more step in this intensification process with its controlled environment

approach to the land. Can land, the living earth, on which ultimately all depend for life's basic needs, survive human attempts at control?

Will it work? That is the concrete question. GM technology is presented to us as an abstract promise, but without details about the mechanism to make promise reality (and without meanwhile stuffing up the earth's own production systems) feeding the world stays a meaningless platitude.

Robyn McPhail, Methven

God's resting is the divine act that builds into the very created order of things a working/resting rhythm... Sabbath-keeping is an act of creation-keeping.

Terence E. Fretheim *Exodus*, John Knox Press

Country Towns

Recently Bendigo hosted a very important conference on the future of Rural Communities. Some excellent ideas and proposals were surely discussed, but unfortunately the only point that got the headlines was a pessimist who said towns under 4000 were doomed to die. Dr Gordon Forth was a visiting academic at the conference and he claimed that small towns faced extinction and nobody could do much about it.

There are various types of rural towns and a Canadian sociologist R. Alex Sim has suggested they could be grouped under the following names:

AGRAVILLE

This is the town that services the needs of an agricultural district. They used to be found every 10 miles or so in fertile country but now they probably need to be 40 km apart to be viable. They will provide machinery servicing, if not dealerships, banks, shops and schools for the district.

MIGHTHAVEBEENVILLE

The motor car has made some former Agravilles unnecessary, and some will struggle on for years but not provide enough services to remain viable. As the banks and schools leave, the churches struggle to hold on, but "struggle" describes it well.

FAIRVIEW

This describes any town that attracts people because of its natural beauty or other attractions. Towns close to beaches, lakes, rivers or mountains should not die but continue to attract residents. They may need to improve their services, expect seasonal ebbs and flows, and work at increasing their hospitality.

RIBBONVILLE

This term was coined for those towns along the highways from major urban centres that attract commuters who crave a rural setting. Around Melbourne, what are now outer suburbs were once

Ribbonvilles, and now places like Gisborne, Yarra Glen, Pakenham or Mornington boast residents who fill up 3 times a week to get to work. Maybe the name would fit other places where people choose to live and work using electronic or hi-tech commuting, but with a rural school, a rural church and rural scenery.

Most towns fit more or less into one of these types. What this typology doesn't shed light on is the enormous suffering of towns as they experience the "necessary pain of transition into a modern economy". What that phrase means is farms and businesses going under; young people leaving, community institutions dying of attrition and widespread depression.

It doesn't have to be handled as if it is inevitable. We must not shun or shame those whose financial position or decisions causes their livelihood to crumble. Everyone who eats is partially responsible. There is a bigger picture, which recognises that factors outside our community are driving these changes.

We can stand beside and support the struggling. We can share stories of hope. We can look at new opportunities and support those with enterprise.

Some small towns like Daylesford, Beechworth and Lorne have learned to thrive with creative positive thinking, which would benefit other towns as well.

The community begins to hope when it refuses to accept the idea that there are no other options. With prayer for God's strength, and a healthy rebellious imagination", miracles can happen.

Geoff Leslie, Northern Victoria

Connecting with Earth

I am asking for your help. If we were to begin the coming church year with an Advent worship service that connected us more closely with Earth, what could we do? What kind of rite would help us connect with Earth as part of our worship?

The problem is that so many of us who live in the city have become disconnected from Earth - and Earth, after all, is our life source. I was born on a farm, but years of living in big cities has disconnected me from the ground, the soil my father used to rub with his hands - as an unrecognized act of worship.

Before I make my suggestion, I want to refer to a text that I recently read with new eyes as I sought to read texts from the perspective of Earth. The text was Isaiah 6.3 which reads, *Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts. The whole Earth is full of your glory.* This text sings aloud that Earth, rather than heaven, is full of God's glory, God's presence. So Earth is also God's sanctuary; Earth is not only the place where we live but also where God dwells.

So I would like to begin the coming church year by connecting with Earth again. I would like your help. I am suggesting a rite that may help us to look at Earth with new eyes, eyes that see God's glory here in Earth rather than up in heaven.

What if each of us came forward, not simply to be blessed by a pastor or priest, but to have some red clay rubbed on our eyelids or beneath our eyes. I suggest red clay (red ochre) because it is sacred for some peoples. I suggest using clay because that is what Jesus did when he healed some who were blind (John 9).

The pastor or leader would apply the clay and say something like, *Receive the healing clay of Earth.* And each of us would reply, *I receive it from the Lord.* Or simply, *Amen.*

We would return to our seats and reflect on places, beings or objects in creation where we realize that we can see God's glory, God's presence - perhaps for the first time. Perhaps we might write down our ideas on paper.

A procession outside into creation could follow - children included - in which we touch or point to places or things we see that, in fact, reveal God's glory present Earth. And we could sing:

Lord heal our eyes to see your face
Revealed in mountain, bloom and tree,
Earth welcome us back home again
As part of your Earth family.

Norman Habel, Adelaide

If you have suggestions about this idea, please let the editor of this newsletter know and she will contact Norman to work on a form that may be trialled here in New Zealand this Advent.

KANGAROO ISLAND BLESSING

May the Spirit come to you
From above like a dove,
From down under like deep thunder,
But now and then like a blue wren.

Or, a NZ version for the last line:

And her song be heard like a clear bell bird.

Norman Habel



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