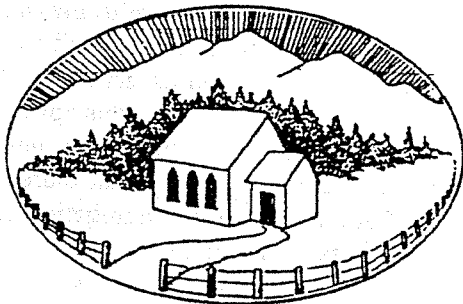


Rural Network News



No.17

February 2001

We do not, and cannot sing solo.

Anne Primavesi, *Sacred Gaia*

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.

Awatere Boxing Day B&B?

Traditionally Boxing Day is a lazy day when leftovers are eaten and people enjoy relaxing with the family. We were looking forward to a family coming and staying over night that we had not seen for a few years. Well there was not too much of that in our district. When the fire sirens blared it was the start of a very long day. I started off fighting the fire down in Ward and it was only when we were sent up to Welds pass that I started to appreciate the scale of the fires. As we came north the glow of the fire lit up the sky. In Seddon cars (500) were parked every where due the road block. As we drove through Seddon I thought with so many people stranded and the fire, the church should be doing something. Then I thought well I'm here in the fire appliance going to the fire with others. I bet there are already people organising food for not only the fire fighters but also those stranded not to mention all the other things that were done. Yes the church was doing something - the church is not a building, nor is it a select few, it is a part of the community.

Jesus said "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that

you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."
John 13:34-35

The road stayed closed till the next day and it was 36 hours before we where retired from the fire ground, once it had been effectively brought under control. I saw our guests for 5 min, luckily they were from down south and they passed through again later in January.

Fire Fighter Rev Martin Harrison, Seddon

Lord, make me like a crystal, that your light may shine through me. Amen.

Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923)

Watch this Space!

A creative new ministry is about to commence in the Presbytery of the Central West (NSW).

Three former parishes, comprising eight congregations or faith communities, will share a staff team of three specialist ministers. Each minister will focus on a specific field of ministry rather than on a geographic area.

The aim is to reverse the self-fulfilling perception that the rural church faces inevitable decline.

The emphasis will be on growth and energy and vitality.

Called the Mid Lachlan Mission Area, this innovative ministry will cover the area of three former parishes. The idea of a Mission Area is to bring the right kinds of gifts together so staff can play to their strengths.

In the Mid Lachlan Mission Area the twin goals are to gather new people and to refocus the traditional congregations. To do this a New Congregations Worker, an experienced Minister and a person with a passion and vision to develop rural Christian communities are needed.

The vision for this project was born in the fertile mind of Central West Presbytery Minister, Terence Corkin, who says:

"There are many congregations who say they want to attract young people and families. The quickest way to do this is to start a new worship service in a style that is attractive to them. When new people are gathered they are often different to the current attenders - having different priorities and different ways of making decisions. For this reason a new congregation is often better than just a new worship group.

"However, it is difficult to start a new worship service where most people in the congregation like what is already on offer. Sometimes this issue creates tensions as some people feel they are missing out. It is also true that not every minister can cover both a contemporary style of worship and a traditional style.

"When traditional congregations are well led they can achieve a great deal. However time is short, and while we must work for the resurgence and renewal of established congregations, we have to work fast in

gathering new people. Contemporary forms of congregational life, worship and mission are the key. If we can do both simultaneously then we have the best of both worlds.

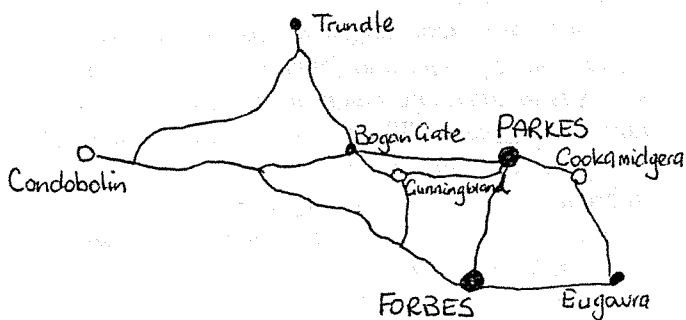
"The Mission Area approach gives the best chance of creating a "critical mass" of work that will enable the specialisation to take hold and achieve their best results. All the while the parts can rejoice in the success of the whole."

Rev Tom Stuart, the "New Congregations Worker" will have three principal tasks:

1. work with the established contemporary worship group in Parkes;
2. develop a "new faith community" alongside the existing congregation in Forbes;
3. identify and minister with unchurched people in Condobolin whilst supporting the existing small congregation.

Rev Alan Palmer will minister with the traditional worship group in Parkes and fulfil the traditional ministry roles in the Parkes community. Alan's role will NOT be maintenance ministry: the emphasis will be traditional ministry exercised with excellence so that the congregation will be energised to grow itself.

A third minister, yet to be appointed, will be a "Rural Congregations Specialist" who will be based in Forbes, and minister with the existing Forbes congregation for 60% of his or her time. Again, the emphasis will be on growth, not maintenance. The aim is to develop a vital, lively "big rural town" congregation that engages the community. That congregation will encourage the development of a parallel new faith community and be energised by the experience. The other 40% of the Rural Congregations Specialist's time is allocated to the four small village churches scattered across the region – Trundle, Eugowra, Bogan Gate and Cookamidgera. This time will not so much be 10% in each of those congregations, but rather 40% time to really focus on how to revitalise small village congregations.



Although the initial vision for this project came from Terence Corkin, the detail was developed through a process of dialogue between the Strategy Committee of the presbytery and representatives of the congregations. Funding for the ministry team is supported by reserves of the congregations and a substantial grant from the

Synod Mission Resource Fund. It is anticipated that offerings will grow as the vitality of the congregations grows.

The Presbytery of the Central West is determined to address the (erroneous) perception that "the church is withdrawing services just like the banks and the government".

What the church is trying to do in this presbytery is to give the congregations the tools and the resources to achieve resurrection. That does not mean that rural congregations will magically return to the glory days of the past. We cannot turn back the clock in the face of massive changes in every other aspect of rural life.

What it does mean is that this presbytery has confidence that there IS potential for new life and vitality for rural congregations. That there is hope for village congregations, and for congregations in medium sized and large rural communities.

Reprinted from Ruminations, Journal of the Uniting Church NSW Rural Ministry Unit.

An atheist was spending a quiet day fishing when suddenly his boat was attacked by the Loch Ness monster. In one easy flip, the beast tossed him and his boat high into the air. Then it opened its mouth to swallow both.

As the man sailed head over heels, he cried out, "Oh, my God! Help me!" At once, the ferocious attack scene froze in place and, as the atheist hung in mid-air, a booming voice came down from the clouds, "I thought you didn't believe in me!"

"Come on, God, give me a break!" the man pleaded. "Two minutes ago I didn't believe in the Loch Ness monster either!"

from Ralph Milton's RUMORS, a free Internet "e-zine" for active Christians with a sense of humour. To subscribe, send an e-mail to: Rumors@JoinHands.com with the word SUBSCRIBE on the subject line. Don't put anything else in that e-mail.

'Where they serve tea'

Squeezed in between the Food Hall and the toilet block, people attending the Royal Show, England's premier agricultural event, tend to know where the Arthur Rank Centre is! They may even have enjoyed one of the thousands of cups of tea served there during the Royal, and deduced from the large cross on the wall outside that the Centre has something to do with the Church. As to what happens in the building when the Royal is over and the last tea bag is disposed of however, well, that tends to be a different story.

Opened by Her Majesty the Queen on 5 July 1972, the Centre is the result of a vision shared by the late Lord Rank, who funded the building, and Rev. Peter Buckler, its first Director. Their vision for a Centre that would serve 'the rural community and its churches' and provide a chaplaincy base for the NAC has largely remained unchanged. Indeed, it is reflected in the five 'planks' on which the work is now based:

- Town and Country Relations.
- The Rural Community.
- The Rural Church.
- Agricultural Ethics.
- Rural Communities overseas.

Run as a collaborative unit by the Churches, the Royal Agricultural Society of England and the Rank Foundation (all of which are represented on its management committee), the Centre has been responsible for a number of major projects regarding the rural community and the rural church. The magnificent work of the Rural Housing Trust for example (which builds affordable housing in rural areas for local people) originated at the ARC whilst the Day of Prayer for the farming community and the Green Ribbon Campaign, both of which were supported by thousands of people last May, were co-ordinated from the Centre.

The ARC's work with rural churches is fully ecumenical, and the denominations' National Rural Officers based at the Centre operate as a team. Jeremy Martineau, the Church of England Officer and Jenny Carpenter as Officer for the Methodist and United Reformed Churches both have their offices in the building, whilst Graham Wise, the Officer for the Baptist Church, works from home. Their complementary skills enable them to support each other and resource rural congregations. The Centre's core administrative staff is headed up by the Director, Gordon Gatward, a Methodist minister and an agricultural ethicist, with a long background in rural ministry and agricultural chaplaincy.

The magazine *Country Way* is a major feature of this part of the Centre's work. Edited and published 'in house', it provides stories, ideas and resources that churches and communities can adapt and use.

In representing the concerns of the rural church and community, the staff frequently relate to government departments and political parties and work closely with other rural and agricultural organisations.

Other areas of work include:

- A grant-making programme to assist new rural church-based youth work.
- Training for clergy moving into rural areas.
- The co-ordinating of the national network of agricultural chaplains and rural officers.
- The Living Churchyard Project to help congregations use the churchyard as an environmental resource.
- The National Churches Tourism Group.
- Rural Churches in Community Service; an initiative that has provided advice and grant aid to congregations adapting their buildings for community use.

One of the major projects remains Arthur Rank Training. Using converted farm buildings on the showground, young people are given training in a range of careers as well as in personal development. The adapting of redundant buildings for this purpose and the

programme's focus on the problems of the rural young means that it is now a model that others visit and copy.

The Centre also houses partner organisations which are directly concerned with the Centre's aims. These are:

- Farmers World *network*
- Rural Stress Information Network
- Rural Minds

It is ten years since the report from the Archbishop's Commission on Rural Areas (ACORA) was published. The ARC has embodied many of the recommendations of that report and ten years on continues to be a resource for communities and churches of rural England.

Gordon Gatward (Director ARC)

An invitation from Gordon: anyone interested and who is visiting the UK to give us a ring and to come and see us. We're always pleased to receive visitors and where necessary can provide overnight hospitality.

Sign in a Veterinarian's waiting room:
"Be back in 5 minutes, Sit! Stay!"

Discussions about sustainability can seem to have an air of urgency about them. Often this is indeed the case. But the discussion can be taken over by technocratic busyness and hasty, well-intentioned, regrettable action.

There is also a case for reflecting, consulting and taking time. Sustainable living requires elements of leisure, and stillness, and wonder.

Neil Darragh *At Home in the Earth*

(As shaky as a) Fiddler On The Roof

Do you remember Tevia, in "Fiddler On The Roof"? For him, as he started to tell his tale of life, one word said it all - TRADITION!

"Because of our tradition we all know who we are and what God expects us to do ... And without our traditions our lives would be as shaky as a 'Fiddler on the Roof'."

Tevia tells the story of his little Jewish town in Russia. In the telling, while certain traditions dictate a lot of the day-to-day aspects of life, there are also many problems. Traditions don't always provide ready answers for evolving situations.

With Tevia, the marriage of each of his daughters gradually brought his frustration to the boiling point. His people had time honoured traditions for arranging their daughters' weddings. But Tseidel insisted on marrying a poor tailor, Number Two daughter fell in love with a young revolutionary from Kiev, and the third daughter fell in love with a Christian.

With each occasion, he argued with himself, and before God ...

"On the one hand, papa could make the proper arrangements ... On the other hand, when they come for

his blessing ... maybe he could bend a little ... just to keep the balance ... like a Fiddler on the Roof."

But this third time, it was very hard. He agonised. "On the one hand, can I deny everything I believe in? On the other hand, can I deny my own child? ... On the one hand, can I turn my back on my own people? Marry outside the Faith? ... Can I turn my back on my own daughter? ... If I try to bend too far ... if I try to bend too far I will break! ... How can I ...? **NO! NO! There is no other hand!**"

How many are caught in the same dilemma today - trying so hard to live with our traditions intact in a world that constantly insists on change.

"On the one hand" we try to hold tight to what we know ... what we understand ... what we believe ...

"On the other hand" we are bombarded with compelling arguments for why we should move away from our traditions.

How far can we bend? Where? When? Is there a breaking point? When do we say "No! No! There is no other hand"! Will this be the year? Have we been driven too far? What are our alternatives?

Rural and agricultural people need to heed Tevia's words. There comes a time when we must take a stand in places that count. We must find a way to declare what we believe.

That is what I like about what the British Columbia Agriculture Council is trying to do. They want more people to be aware of agriculture's contributions, so it started a campaign to tell urban folk and politicians how agriculture contributes to daily life.

The Council set up a web site, www.AgAware.BC.ca, as a focus for communication, and they are using a wide variety of public communications opportunities to get their message out. They have named four specific outcomes they are striving for:

- a public that overwhelmingly demands **support for agriculture**
- a public that recognises the **positive contributions** that agriculture makes to the economy
- a public that firmly believes that agriculture provides **net gain to the provincial economy**
- a public that strongly encourages more **people wanting to be part of the agricultural and agrifood business.**

Surely there are others across the country who need to stop bending and declare who they are, what they believe, and why this way of life is important.

Joyce Sasse, Pincher Creek Canada

Posted on www.agri-ville.com on January 1, 2001

I would add - "others across the world". Yes, indeed, we who live with the land here can declare what we believe and why this way of life is important.

Thank you, Joyce, for your "talking before God" about something that is at the heart of faith and life for our place too. (ed.)

Another sign in Vet waiting room:

"All unattended children given free kitten."

In a different category?

I was invited to attend a gathering hosted by the Ecclesia Project entitled: 'Discipleship and Divided Loyalties'. One among 30 participants from across the US: lay, clergy and scholars; men and women; small church and large church; urban church and rural church; and from many different denominations. We were gathered to engage in conversation around the issue of feeling we are somehow in a different category.

Each of us had been invited to this event because we have expressed the feeling that, as leaders in the Church today, something is wrong. The best description of what is wrong is simply to have the feeling that there must be something *more* to Church that what is currently experienced.

We were offered a chapter from the book *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, by Aloysius Pieris, S.J. entitled, "To Be Poor as Jesus Was Poor?" in which the author summarises:

I submit that in the final analysis there are only two basic concepts to be distinguished: voluntary poverty, which I have been discussing so far [alluding to Jesus' choice], and forced poverty, which engages my attention here. The first is the seed of liberation; the second is the fruit of sin. The kingdom of God can be viewed in terms of a universal practice of the one and consequent elimination of the other. (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, 1988. p. 20.)

Regardless of rural or urban or an other distinction, the question is: can a Christian be other than one who chooses as Jesus chose - to be poor?

The Church has accepted the ideal that our clergy and other religious should accept a vow of poverty (though I have colleagues whom I would guess have never considered such a vow) and therefore, the laity are relieved of such a requirement.

Is this really true? If not, then what is the relationship of voluntary poverty and the Christian Church? What are our "divided loyalties?"

Let me press the point further: we have available to us many devices that we would not give up (at least not rationally) even if we do take this vow of poverty seriously. For example, ask a farmer in Kansas to give up the combine in his wheat farming enterprise. Or ask a farmer in Ohio to give up the tomato picker in his vegetable farming enterprise. Suddenly the request of voluntary poverty seems absurd. The use of our devices enables us to feed more people: isn't that a good? Or what about our cars? What about computers? Here I am using a device to communicate with people whom I haven't nor may ever meet face to face: is my device contributing to the body of Christ? Or am I allowing my devices to further separate me from the body?

This retreat brought together people who feel strongly that the Church is more than our device-oriented world has shaped. On the contrary, those of us who gathered at this event were expressing our frustrations that the Church seems to be shaped more by or device oriented world than by the Word of God.

There are people – clergy and lay - who consider themselves in a different category, people who sense that the Church is not what God is calling it to be.

The phrase that I keep working at is: *from what . . . to what*. If the Church falls short of truly living as the body of Christ (as in the example of voluntary poverty) by being influenced more by the cultural context in which it finds itself (as in the example of our device oriented culture) what must the Church learn to truly become the body of Christ in the world?

If what we are talking about is transformation: *from what state of behaviour and mind* must the Church leave and *to what calling* must the Church respond?

There are leaders who do not 'see' the need to change. "The right programme or the right attitude and behaviour of the congregation will make the Church grow (*sic*).” Yet there are leaders who feel like they are floundering outside of the box. I am one of them and I continue to meet more and more who, like myself, have a deep sense that not all is right with the expectation of the role of clergy as programme administrator. That is, the often times expressed expectation of rural clergy who are to be 'out there' always visiting and yet at all times available at the Church office; never missing Sundays, even for vacation; the one who brings the congregation new members to fill all the empty pews; etc.

I have only recently learned to challenge these expected roles of the pastoral office while at the same time raising the question: *What does the Church of Jesus look like if it is to be faithful in the current cultural context?*

I have become excited about a growing number of clergy and lay leaders who cannot settle for the 'We've Never Done it that Way Before Church.' That no-change attitude holds on to patterns of ministry that once were effective, but now are ineffective and worse. They in fact dishonour our ancestors who struggled to meet their changing, developing patterns of ministry in an attempt to be faithful and effective in ministry. Should we not struggle through the change, too?

Brian Arnold, Ohio, USA

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>

The Church is abandoning the bush!

Some rural church members complain that, like the banks, big business and government, the churches are "withdrawing services" from rural villages and isolated towns because they are "unviable". The comment can

be heard: "we close down churches in the bush because they 'do not pay'".

The perception that the church is abandoning the bush misunderstands the nature of church. It assumes that "church" is a consumer commodity that is purchased from outside the immediate community.

It assumes that "church" is something that is supplied by someone else from somewhere else.

That's not how it was at the time the inland of Australia was being settled for farming and grazing and mining in the late 19th and early 20th century. In those days, as communities began to form, some people experienced a spiritual hunger. There were people within those communities who felt a need to worship, who felt a need to pastor and be pastored, who felt a need to bring a theological perspective to the issues and concerns of their community. Those people sought one another out and began to meet together.

They worshipped as best they were able, they cared for one another, they shared their theological perspectives. When a person died, they offered a burial service to the best of their ability. When a couple married they celebrated the union, and when a child was born they acknowledged that gift from God.

Some worshipping groups gained enough members so that they could actually employ a minister - to lead their worship and baptise their children and bury their dead.

And, in my view, that's where the rot set in....! That's when we began to buy our religion!

From the time a congregation began to pay for religious services, religion began to be seen as the role of the "professional" not the people. The priest did the baptising. A "proper" wedding required the services of a minister. A funeral could not be performed unless there was a professional to say the right words and sanctify the occasion.

Regular worship revolved around the sermon of the trained and educated expert. Theological reflection was the task of the minister. He was the one who decided what the correct theological perspective was, no matter whether he actually knew anything about the particular issue.

The people no longer had to care for one another, because "*that's what we pay the priest for*". The people no longer had to participate in worship because the minister delivered the worship, packaged and sanitised for human consumption. The people no longer had to think through their own theological perspective on events or issues.

The minister thought for them -and told them what to believe.

Over the last 40 or so years, the population trend has gone into reverse. The number of people in many rural and remote communities is in serious decline. Some towns and villages have completely disappeared. Others are becoming smaller and smaller. As that

happens, the number of Christians in such communities also declines. Each denomination declines to the stage where they can no longer afford to pay the cost of their minister or priest.

It is not surprising that, when faced with the loss of something that has been around for two or three or more generations, we feel hurt and abandoned. Our grief finds easy expression in blaming "the church".

Perhaps the hardest thing is that we are being forced back on our own resources - at a time when we feel we have no resources. Our forebears were independent resourceful people. They knew that if they wanted something to happen, they had to do it themselves.

Maybe we have become soft! We expect resources to be provided by government or business or big community organisations?

IT DOES NOT HAVE TO BE LIKE THAT!

Just look at the way some communities have got together to set up a multi purpose health centre when the local hospital was threatened with closure. Look how some towns are setting up a community bank.

And - look how many small rural churches have discovered new life as they liberate themselves from tyranny! The tyranny of seeing themselves as consumers.

They have discovered that they don't have to "buy in" all their religious services. They have discovered that they can provide sacramental worship from within their faith community. They have discovered that they can provide pastoral care to one another and to their community.

And, best of all, they have discovered that they don't have to "park" their brain as they enter the church. They have discovered that they are quite capable of bringing a theological perspective to the events and issues of their community, their nation and the world.

When we feel dis-empowered and demoralised it is so easy to blame the Bishop. But "the Bishop" - be that a person or a presbytery or a synod - knows that encouraging greater dependency is the least effective way to empower people. The least effective way to improve morale.

What I see Bishops and presbyteries trying to do in the bush is to help small struggling congregations discover new life. Rather than foster dependency, they try to resource small congregations to become again caring, worshipping, theologically articulate communities.

Bruce Irvine, Narromine, NSW

Bruce Irvine is the editor of the Uniting Church of Australia NSW Rural Ministry Unit's Journal Ruminations

Sign on a fence:

"Salesmen Welcome. Dog food is expensive."

Turning the World Upside Down

On December 1st 1999, the Order in Council, signed by Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth the Second in Privy Council came into force that united the parishes of St John the Baptist, Ault Hucknall and St Leonard, Scarcliffe, Derbyshire, England into one pastoral unit, and named me as the first incumbent. I don't think the Queen had much to do with it really.

Over the years, the Church of England's historic wealth invested in the Church Commissioners has been covering less of the church expenditure on training, stipends and pensions, and the number of available clergy has been diminishing, causing a rationalisation of parish staffing. Each diocese in England is given the subsidy by the Church Commissioners for clergy stipends on a nationally agreed scale based on diocesan populations and local needs. My own deanery had a retirement in a neighbouring parish early in 1999 and rationalisation lumped the neighbouring parish with mine to make the new United Benefice.

Thankfully, expectations of ministry have not remained the same, at least amongst those with the pastoral oversight of the parish clergy. Lay expectations are a different matter after countless generations of the Vicar fulfilling all aspects of parish ministry. The Bishop of Derby commissioned the report "A Better Way" based on the casual comment of one of his colleagues that there has to be a better way of coping with the necessary changes than to just lump parishes together and expect the clergy to pedal faster to keep up. One of the central tenets of the report was that ministry begins not with ordination, but with baptism. It concerns the enablement of the laity to fulfil ministry at parish level.

How well has the parish accepted this report and its expectations of the laity? There is evidence of very conservative views as to what lay ministry involves and it is hard to enable those not wanting to be enabled because they have a different agenda for ministry: namely (to oversimplify) to get the Vicar to do more visiting to get more people to come to church so that more gets put in the collection so that less has to be raised in fundraising efforts to pay for the upkeep of the cash hungry parish church buildings.

Co-incident with these developments in England, I had been ordained priest for twenty-eight years and I wanted a sabbatical. Studying rural ministry in New Zealand seemed a good idea in an English winter. Many of the issues besetting English ministry have been grappled in New Zealand for longer, maybe with a few solutions. I came here to learn.

The picture I get is patchy, with some pastoral units being further on the journey than others. Certainly, without the Church Commissioners, the church here is very aware of the need for realistic and sacrificial giving. The agendas of laity largely conform to a whole church approach to ministry, ordained or lay, and co-operating across denominations. There have been

reported weaknesses, with clergy insecurity about loss of control with the onset of lay enablement, and there are glaring faults where the number of church buildings in town centres declares denominational competition rather than church unity in the one body of Jesus Christ.

I went to Twizel for four weeks. This may be NZ's rural Nazareth. What good ever came out of it? It had an awful name years ago as a works town. In my humble opinion, they are now further down the road of whole church ministry than the parent churches responsible for overseeing them.

At some time in the future I shall produce my report on my research here which will be primarily for English consumption, but I recognise the New Zealand ownership and interest in my findings. If you are interested in hearing more, contact the editor of this newsletter.

Thank you to all who have extended such wonderful hospitality during my time here. Every blessing on your ministries in Jesus' name.

Tony Bell, Derbyshire, UK.

Real Ministry: outside the church

Barbara Chapman-Woods contracted polio when in her twenties and nursing in Sydney. Many years later, after marriage, the rearing of two children and retiring, she found that she had decreasing levels of energy and other problems. Eventually she found that her increasing health problems were mostly due to Post Polio Syndrome.

Ministry outside the church is your only option when getting around is complicated by having Post Polio Syndrome. It depletes the sufferer's energy levels, forcing decisions to be made as to what tasks must be done today and how to fit them in around frequent rest periods.

While Barbara is retired and a sufferer of Post Polio Syndrome, she is busier than many of us who are still working. Ministry to others outside the church is her business.

For Barbara work is (in her words) "the giving of self in time, physical effort, constructive inquiry, research and/or the imparting of knowledge in such ways that help meet the needs of others and help to equip or prepare them for living." In such pursuits we 'WORK' and 'EARN A LIVING'.

Once while in Sydney, Barbara attended, with other members of Amnesty International, a special meeting to consider the needs of prisoners. After reading more information, she became a correspondent with prisoners on Death Row. Barbara writes regularly to these prisoners, helping to provide them (and often their families too) with a sense of personal worth and integrity, denied them by the treatment meted out to them.

Because of her own needs, due to Post Polio Syndrome, the problem of rural isolation and the difficulty of finding information, Barbara began a

support group for fellow sufferers in North West NSW. Through this group, information and helpful lifestyle strategies are shared. This is done by the circulation of a 'Round Robin' exercise book in which each person jots down news etc., then posts on. Barbara also conducted one day meetings each year for this group when her health was better.

Corresponding by phone and letter with many people is another aspect of Barbara's ministry. Many of the people she writes to she has met when travelling on a train or staying in a country hotel, and has struck up a conversation with them. A caring interest in others is translated into support where there is a need. Often, Barbara has become an 'adopted' mother or grandmother.

A special talent Barbara has is writing, particularly poetry. She has published two books of her own poetry and writes many insightful short prose pieces. Barbara's writing encourages and affirms others, as well as provoking thought on current issues.

All Barbara's activities are supported by prayer. She is a great role model of ministry to both the retired and the working.

Written by Faye Haywood

Reprinted with permission from Ruminations, journal of the NSW Uniting Church Rural Ministry Unit September 2000.

This article was one of a series arising from a request by the editor of Ruminations for stories about the faith-in-life ministry that is happening within rural communities.

Are there more stories to be told? Do you know of someone whose story you could tell?

Often it is better that way, as most people I have asked to tell their story have said: "I do nothing special." Others of us may beg to differ on that, and could therefore help get their light out from under the bushel basket! [ed.]

I understand creativity as our power to make connections.

Matthew Fox

Rural Ministry Publications

You can find out about recent TransTasman Rural Ministry Conferences by ordering *Country Conversations* (Northland, 2000) and *An Ecological Vision for the Rural Church* (Myrtleford, 1996). If you are interested in creating options for church and community in rural New Zealand you can order *Opening Up* (Kohua Lodge Consultation 1997). Each of these three costs \$12 including postage.

Copies of publications in the Studies in Rural Change series are also available. Margaret Begg's study of *Farm Women in Piako County* and Richard Christie's *Leaving the Land*, a study of families who left Southland farms, cost \$8 each including postage.

Cheques to be made out to *Diocese of Christchurch* and orders sent to Garth Cant, 7 Owens Terrace Christchurch 8004.

Book Review

Dynamic Local Ministry, by Andrew Bowden and Michael West Continuum, London and New York: 2000, ISBN 0-8264-4996-4, 215 pages.

Andrew Bowden is known to a number of us following his visit to New Zealand in February 1999 to study local ministry initiatives in this country. *Dynamic Local Ministry* includes insights from New Zealand, in the context of Bowden and West's primary focus - their own Church.

This book is English but, with some minor translations (which proved simple enough for this NZ Presbyterian reader), it is surely a helpful and relevant resource for New Zealand parishes exploring new forms of ministry and mission in their local situations.

The subject is Local Ministry, a term chosen by the authors to cover a diversity of types not easily defined. Bowden and West use the recognisably Anglican expression 'the ministry of all baptized Christians' - which they call "a pithy and energizing phrase" (p.xiii) - to identify the essence of local ministry and see its variety of forms and names as ways to both take the local church seriously and keep a catholic sense of unbroken connection with the wider church. Most of all they see Local Ministry as a response to social change, in the circumstances in which church people and communities find themselves and therefore in the needs of the people and communities our churches serve. Traditional structures and methods do not fit any more.

Bowden and West present the facts of the situation for the Anglican Church in the United Kingdom, the pressures and responses which encourage more effective clergy ministry or more do-it-yourself ministry by local lay people or, as a third way, new forms of collaborative ministry with teams of local people, some lay, some ordained.

They then consider the theological pressures that make new kinds of ministry difficult. Alternatively, theology gives the confidence of past history to work for change now: "... 'having a conversation with our past' has freed us up to think radically about models of ministry and the role of the priest" (p.53). Ecumenical influences are also considered, in relation to the English Free Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, before turning to the real heart of this book - stories from people and places involved in these new forms of ministry.

The stories come from Parishes, Priests, Officers (regional resource people) and Bishops. Their stories are told 'as is', with no sense of glossing over difficulties or, from the other direction, emphasising problems. Bowden and West are not crusading here, but rather sharing the fruits, some bitter, many sweet, of a range of endeavours to adapt as church to the contemporary context. They are stories about changing and being changed but, as reader, one feels free to evaluate for oneself the merits and pitfalls.

This book is very suggestive of honesty as a basic requirement of any process of developing and continuing a new form of ministry and mission in a parish and community. It is also a basic to any sharing of ideas and experience about these new endeavours. This is perhaps timely for the New Zealand scene, with some level of polarisation being apparent between the supporters and the detractors of Total or Mutual Ministry. We need to learn how to evaluate our local ministry experiments, not in the sense of judging pass or fail in terms of often unexpressed criteria of success, but rather by analysing what is happening and why, where the gains and losses are, what is not working and what needs to be encouraged or guided more. For the heart of ministry, and of the stories told here, is in the relationships between people: leaders, church members and wider community with whom the local church lives its life.

This is a book about transformation which is, by nature, never simple:

"Business management consultants tell us that, while all change is difficult, cultural change is like a surgical operation without anaesthetic. That is why it is such a bumpy ride for those of us who are called to live in 'interesting times'. But the alternative to cultural change for our Church is arterial sclerosis. We need 'less red tape and more pink elastic'." (p.215)

Robyn McPhail

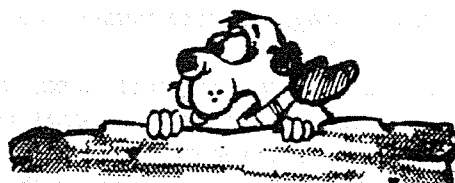
May your reigning in the Earth
Spread about us quickly

May the part that we may play
in that coming reign of God
absorb our lives intently.

May the Human Face of God
in that coming reign of God
smile upon us gently.

Come to us, O Human One,
make home this living earth.

Neil Darragh, *At Home in the Earth*



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