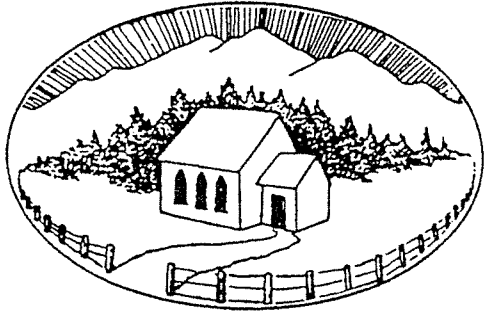


Rural Network News



No.18

June 2001

If you think you are too small to be effective, you've never been in bed with a mosquito.

Joyce Sasse on Globalisation

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.

The Red Umbrella

In a small farming community in the Midwest of Canada, the farmers didn't know what to do. The drought was dragging on and on for what seemed an eternity. The rain was very important to the community's way of life. As the problem became more urgent, the local church felt it was time to get involved and planned a prayer meeting in order to ask for rain.

When the pastor arrived, he watched as his congregation filed in. He slowly circulated from group to group as he made his way to the front in order officially to begin the meeting. As the pastor finally secured his place in front of his flock, his thoughts turned to quieting the crowd and starting the meeting.

Just then he noticed an eleven-year-old girl sitting in the front row. She was angelically beaming with excitement. Lying next to her as her bright red umbrella, poised for use.

The beauty and innocence of this sight made the pastor smile to himself as he realised the faith this young girl possessed that the rest of the people in the room seemed to have forgotten.

The rest had come just to pray for rain. She had come to witness God's answer. *Author unknown*

Creation and Jubilee

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from where cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord which made heaven and earth (Psalm 121:1-2)

To share one's faith on the theme of Creation and Jubilee is made easy by being a farmer. A farmer sees and works with creation every day of the year.

And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land... it shall be a jubilee unto you. (Leviticus 25:10) Jubilee is a time of setting free, a time of personal release from whatever holds you back.

Yes, as a farmer I work with and see creation every day, with the Southern Alps in the background, the trees, the animals and the lush grass. God's hands are in his work of creation which is all around us to enjoy.

However farming is very dependent on the weather to provide a favourable growing season. But this does not always happen: it can be too wet or too dry. When either occurs I begin to get a little uptight, so I need to have a form of release from these pressures.

At the back of our house is a large terrace and on top of that terrace is a very large rock. It is to this rock I go and release to God in prayer the burdens that are on my heart. I come away from that place a different man, with a feeling of personal release perhaps in some ways similar to how the bond-servants felt when set free in the year of Jubilee.

I believe we all need a rock, or someplace, that we can go to in times of need, to be released from whatever it is that is holding us back in our Christian walk.

Our daughters are both in Christchurch and, although they both enjoy the opportunities and retail therapy there, they like to come back to the farm to the peace and serenity of country life.

Recently two of our younger daughter's university friends came to stay. Neither had been on a farm before. They said to me, "Wow! Look at those mountains! The scenery around here is great. You must feel so privileged to farm here. Over the years, I have come to take it for granted and I need to be reminded from time to time of the beauty of God's creation.

A few years ago a missionary couple, returning from the slums of Calcutta where they had been for a number of years, called to see us. They asked how farming was:

"Oh," I said, "sheep prices are down, looks like we are in for another drought and I've got toothache."

"Well," they said, "in Calcutta one is fortunate to have one meal a day!" They enjoyed seeing trees, mountains and green grass again. After years of being surrounded with noise, poverty, sickness and concrete, they were really enjoying God's creation along with a sense of new-found freedom. Another timely reminder of Creation and Jubilee.

Jubilee is a time of appreciating everything around us. And it is a time of release from whatever holds us back in our Christian lives. Sound the trumpet. Blow the horn. Boldly proclaim our faith to the people of our district. I will indeed lift up my eyes to the hills.

Donald Sauer, Methven

An afternoon in Sheffield:

Farewell to Hugh and Ena Paterson

On a pleasant easterly afternoon in late February (it wasn't hot nor west for a change), kindred spirits past and present of the Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit gathered in the corner of the Paterson garden, in the place that was the Vicarage and is now their own retirement home.

We were there to re-live memories of the past and express hope for the future of Ena and the Reverend Hugh Paterson in retirement from ministry. Hugh was a foundation member of the Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit and he has remained in the same rural parish all his time in ministry. This was an opportunity to honour pioneering work and personal commitment which has contributed significantly to the sense of purpose and pride experienced by many involved in rural ministry today.

Naturally enough we were mainly locals but from Australia messages of goodwill were received from Gray Birch, John van Riet and Fred Waine.

Current members of the Unit joined former members: Colleen Costello, formerly of Hawarden now Christchurch, retired Archdeacon John Barker of Darfield and Pat McGloin of Horrellville.

The time passed all too quickly with some readings of Hugh's pastoral experiences, interspersed with many personal reminiscences. Everyone had something to say.

But the highlight was Des McSweeney's letter to us all, in which he brought memories of the first rural ministry consultation that set the Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit going:

Soon after the Rural Development and Extension Centre was set up at Lincoln College in the mid 1970's we held a quite high powered "Rural Development Conference". A lot of heavies were there – Ron Trotter, Ruth Richardson, a pack of Aussies, etc. We spent a lot of time on the participants list. In its final stages some really perceptive person asked "what about the churches?" I can still recall my colleague John Pryde saying "Oh not really – they're a purely insignificant group." In the event though we did open the door a little by asking John Barker (vicar and ex-farmer so we hedged our bets).

In hindsight quite the most positive and long-lasting thing to come out of the Conference was the evolution of a Consultation at Sheffield – and that enthusiastic yet thoroughly disparate band of leaders: Hugh Paterson, Garth Cant, Pat McGloin, Heather Little, John Barker, John Elvidge.

One other memory to share with you: I vividly recall a question being asked of us as we travelled by bus in the rural Waimak [Waimakariri]:

The questioner – John Barker

The question – *if the Lord was in this bus right now, what would he make of all that we have seen and been told about this rural community?* I've always used this question as a yardstick.

And finally I am sure if the Lord was in this gathering at Sheffield in February 2001 he would be well pleased with all you have striven to achieve. And I am sure he would look particularly towards Hugh and say: *Well done, you have served your parish, your community and your colleagues so well. But where would you have been without Ena?*

Pat McGloin, Horrellville, Canterbury

The Churches' response to Foot and Mouth Disease

When swine fever broke out in Suffolk in 2000 an aged retired minister by the name of Addington gave a substantial sum of money for farmers whose incomes were threatened as a consequence.

With the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease the Archbishop of Canterbury launched an appeal on behalf of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. The appeal has raised over seven million pounds, from corporations and individuals, royalty included. The Arthur Rank Centre (home to Rural Ministry officers of the Church of England, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church) administers the fund jointly with the Addington Fund.

Applicants need only make one phone call for assistance. Within a day their call is returned by a representative of the ARC-Addington Fund. To date over 12,000 applicants have been assisted and calls for help are still coming in at a rate of 200-300 per day. Over six million pounds (Australia \$15.6m - NZ \$19.4m) has been distributed.

The following stories are examples of the assistance given.

Jenny is a single mother. Following a review of her farming enterprise she followed advice and diversified her agricultural pursuits. She raised sheep, had them slaughtered locally and sold the meat into niche markets; she imported prime Holstein embryos from Canada and commenced a Bed and Breakfast.

With the outbreak of Foot and Mouth, although there was none on her farm, all movement to and from her farm was prohibited. She had no income but a grant from the ARC-Addington Fund allowed her to buy fodder for her stock. Her application for a state benefit was refused. On returning home one day she found a box of groceries on her doorstep. It was from the local vicar who left a note saying, "every week I say we share the one loaf. This is your share of our loaf this week".

Fred who had four children applied to the fund for help. His call was returned by a representative of the fund. The conversation continued well after the essential information was gleaned. Fred needed to talk: the ARC - Addington representative was willing to listen. Fred was endeavouring to establish a new farming business. He had bought a quantity of lambs to fatten for the Easter trade, but Foot and Mouth intervened so he could not sell his stock. He received a grant for fodder and later phoned to express his gratitude for the assistance that he had received. He confessed that the conversation and the

grant had made it worthwhile to go on living and farming.

Some farmers have lost all their stock in the cull. Imagine what it must be like to walk into the farmyard and to be greeted by silence. The bleat of a sheep or the moo of a cow, the accompaniment of every day life on a farm, are no longer to be heard.

There are too many stories of banks responding as commercial enterprises without consideration for people's need. "If you want to increase your overdraft you must sell something."

The value of the ARC - Addington Fund is its capacity to respond with compassion. I am reminded of the Authorised Version translation of I Corinthians 13, *Now abideth faith, hope and charity but the greatest of these is charity.*

Lloyd Vidler, reporting from England, updated with information from Gordon Gatward of ARC received on RFD+

A place for theology and dialogue

Rabbi Professor Dan Cohn Sherbok and Professor Mary Grey, theologians with the University of Wales, Lampeter, joined together to challenge the process and reasoning for dealing with the Foot and Mouth crisis in the UK. They questioned the assumption that mass slaughter was the only effective response and suggested FMD is not an extreme health disease but an economic disease – "animals who suffer from it will lose their appetite for a short time and suffer weight loss. The ensuing meat will not be so juicy or rich, and not so lucrative on international markets."

When their article was published in a Church newspaper in Britain, letters flowed in disputing the arguments and objecting to theologians getting involved in such issues. 'Theology, don't engage with issues of life and livelihood.' Is that right?

Through the Arthur Rank Centre website a link was made to a group called "Christian Rural Concern" with some useful reflections on the issue and on treating it as an issue for Christian concern.

They suggested three options for dealing with the crisis:

1. *The present austere destruction policy for all infected animals and those within proscribed orbits of infection.*
2. *A vaccination policy for all cloven-footed livestock in the UK.*
3. *To let the infection run its course, believing that in an endemic scenario the disease can be lived with.*

They weighed these up in relation to the UK environment, in contrast to regions where the base level of diseases and parasites in farm animals is higher and immunity more established.

It is true, Christian Rural Concern comment, that FMD is an 'economic' disease, "but all animal care in a farming scenario has a close tie with economics... Our concern is when economics exacerbate a situation or actively promote animal suffering."

And here we move onto common ground with Mary Grey and Dan Cohn Sherbok. They speak from the heart of Jewish and Christian tradition to protest action and reasons for action that are narrowly human-centred: "Our traditions are united in the recognition of the intrinsic worth of all God's creation. We recognise the complexity of the issues around intensive farming and the globalisation of agribusiness: but we ask if the current conflagration of innocent animals that has engulfed the countryside can recall us to the centrality of compassionate concern for all creatures at the heart of both our traditions."

But which option would do this best? For Christian Rural Concern it seems a loss, loss, loss situation, with too many unknowns and too little informed debate and academic input. "Christian Rural Concern has advocated sustainable farming, organic or extensive farming practices, mixed farming and family farming, believing this to be true not only because it makes common sense to have sustainable production but also because we believe it is God's purpose for his creatures. It has always advocated too a care for all in the rural scene: humans, animals and the total rural environment, so that our ecosystem is the heritage of our children's children and not their death warrant."

"My symbol is an apricot stone"

These words were spoken as part of a rural parish liturgy. It involves a person coming forward with something which symbolises God's presence in their life over the past week. They place it on the communion table and then they relate what the symbol means for them. Secateurs, 42 millimetres of rain and grass growth are also examples of the things brought forward. One articulate person used her experience of cracking apricot stones as a child for the almonds to express how sometimes we need to be broken open to bring the best out in us. The chance to be able to select a hymn to follow the symbol is possibly a carrot which helps people to respond to this wonderful piece of participatory worship. Over a couple of years or so people at St John's Methven have grown in their appreciation of each other as they have got to know something of each other's personal life.

Their minister, Robyn McPhail, was in Hawke's Bay as speaker at the Rural Ministry Training Day at Waipukurau on June 8. She related how she has drawn from her parishioners and community their sense of God and what is valuable. They express their relationship to the land in a rich use of imagery. We all draw on those passages that portray the cycles of nature such as Ecclesiastes 3, or Psalm 23 for our experience of shepherds. Jesus' parables and Psalm 121 also strike chords with many rural people as they relate to their experience of life. She used a video of a high country muster along with tourist ventures, ski scenes and community gatherings. As we watched this we sang the 23rd Psalm to Crimond, a very moving moment indeed - the words took on real power for our context. (It

reminded me of a time when I used a collection of slides of New Zealand Mountains to show as I read Bill Bennett's "Mountaintop Christ".)

Robyn introduced us to New Zealand musical and prayer material which I appreciate more than imported resources. I once worked in a place where it was assumed all solutions came from America, but I found that we could design things much better locally. This has made me determined to use local material and be suspicious of things foreign. So I welcome this sort of training day because this colonial boy thinks he has grown up.

Material from VISION New Zealand – the 1999 Congress' Rural Stream – was also used to help us earth our church in the community in which we live. Robyn got us to look at things we feel we have lost, then suggested there are other perspectives. Perhaps these changes have opened up new opportunities. Her grid for mapping spirituality among people was a useful tool which showed the range of people's preferences from patterned worship to free expression on one axis, and the more word- and image-focussed through to the more practical and action-oriented on the other axis. It produced some very useful ways to look at ourselves and how we can be more inclusive in order to offer people an opportunity to express their own spirituality. Her presentation was peppered with wry little offerings from the poetry of Jim Morris.

A good day earthed in humanity, humour and the humus.

Robert Bruere, Waipukurau

Fulfilment

I have worked in the fertile earth
and planted a garden
so I know what faith is.

I have listened to the birds carolling
in the early morning and at dusk
so I know what music is.

I have seen the morning
with clouds after showers
so I know what beauty is.

I have sat before a wood fire
with old friends
so I know what companionship is.

I have walked the paths of quietness
along the forest floor
so I know what peace is.

I have dwelt in the valley of remembrance
and on the hills of home
so I know what love is.

I have seen the miracle of spring
the fruition of summer, the beauty of autumn
followed by the repose of winter
so I know what life is.

And because I have perceived
all these things
I know what God is.

Children's nurture and evangelism

I would like to know how people are gathering children (say under 11) for Christian nurture week by week. For it is often in the face of very small numbers and wide age range (no natural friendship groups), cold and unfriendly places to meet, liturgy and music designed for the adults not children and an irregular pattern of services.

How will this generation of children proceed to youth and adult membership and commitment?

Are there any clues from anywhere, any fresh thinking? Bussing, midweek groups, internet linking, the *Minster* model of itinerant Children's ministers, the *market town* model of gathering for weekly or monthly big gathering...etc?*

And what of the children of families who never come to church.

HELP! Is anyone pioneering anything in your patch? Has anyone worked on any of this? Any clues from history? Our only steer at the moment is to wonder whether, theologically as well as practically, we need to start with whole families/households. What would parents say if we asked the question: *How can we help you with the Christian nurture of your children and see where the answer might lead us?*

Paul Simmonds on behalf of some people in
Coventry Diocese.

* In the *market town* model, things centre on the larger body - people come into the larger central church for activities as they come into town for the market (or shops these days!) There may well still be services held regularly in the smaller villages, but these are more like satellites of the centre. The '*Minster*' model turns this round, and sees the larger body as a resource to serve the smaller local groups. So the larger church would send out children's workers to support the work being done in the smaller local congregations.

If you have any responses for Paul, please contact the editor of this newsletter.

Coping with the stress of rural living

"I go to bed at night and pray I won't wake up in the morning." That is what one woman from rural Saskatchewan is quoted as saying. That is how desperate she is. "There's nothing more we can do to try to help our situation."

So many cries of helplessness are that poignant: from ranchers in South-eastern Alberta who have had no snow all winter, and only measured one tenth of an inch of rain in April; from farmers along the Rockies trying to resist selling to acreage owners because they want their land kept in production; from small town business folk for whom the next move is to board up their windows.

This is the people side of the rural crisis. This is where the stress mounts and the tensions become unbearable. This is where rural people have to insist that the Church, and church leaders, assume their role as life-savers. In the first instance, churches have wonderful

networks of people that reach across many boundaries. They need to make use of those networks.

For example, twin rural and urban communities. That is, invite urban people into country communities. Help identify the good things country communities have to share with their neighbours, and talk with these visitors about those things that are painful for rural residents to face. By twinning congregations, there is opportunity to develop lines of fellowship and understanding, there is opportunity for sharing resources - and laughter and tears become intermingled.

Second, there is the weekly opportunity for people to gather for worship, to share their concerns and pray together. Too often the farm people are not there because there's nothing in the service that holds meaning for them. Too often these same people simply aren't missed. If clergy and church leaders do not know what crisis many in their community are facing, they need to be told. They need to be prompted to include these desperate people in their prayers. They need to be reminded to address their issues in the sermons. They need to be available to advocate on behalf of these marginalized people within the extended community.

For many, the moment does come when the only possible decision a family can make is to "let go" of the farm, the business, the cattle ... Never is it more important than to take time to work slowly and prayerfully through that process. To be encouraged by spiritual advisors to consider what your most precious possessions are. The Biblical message is that God cares for each individual, and is there to accompany each one through the bleakest times. If God so loves the sparrow, so the old song goes, does he not also love me? Name the gifts God has given. Offer prayers of thanksgiving for them, and clutch them to your bosom.

Name, also, those things that you have to let go. Give thanks for what they have meant in your life in the past, and look ahead to what opportunities will reveal themselves in the future.

Don't be afraid to be angry. Don't be afraid of the tears and screams that come when the pain is too deep for words. Don't think you have to hide your feelings to protect others. Don't built walls when what you need is support and affirmation.

Know that your life and work has been important. Know too that when you get past this white-water time, you still have much to contribute to the rest of the world. Rural people are precious in God's sight.

Joyce Sasse, Pincher Creek Canada
Posted on www.agri-ville.com on January 1, 2001

There is something we can do!

"Frighteningly uncontrollable" is one way of describing the extremes of depression. And when it has its worst effect - when a person ends life by their own hand - family, friends and community enter a turmoil of pain, bewilderment and powerlessness. How can it be, especially for those in our rural communities, where life and livelihood is often closely connected to the land, that

things get so bad for people? The pressure to perform in farming and the solitary nature of the work are perhaps contributing factors. So it is important to build a culture of openness along with honest, supportive networking among farmers. But there is also something else people in rural communities can do: play a part in changing this world we live in and attitudes to mental illness.

Health Services and understanding family and friends make a difference. But one thing remains a barrier to regaining health when mood disorders strike - attitudes. Namely, a persisting supposition in our society that people can, or should be able to, pull themselves out of any troubles, and the preconception that mental illness is an individual or family shortcoming.

That's how it feels to those who suffer depression, of whatever degree. It's something shameful, a failure of personality.

We need to listen to the experiences of those who know, to hear the wisdom of the professionals and to imagine what it is like simply not to be able to see anything good ahead of you: to be stuck in the gloom.

We are human. We do fail. We do make wrong choices as well as right ones, at the best of times and the worst of times. But mental illness takes the full freedom of choice away. It can be like having a computer programme of self-destruction in one's mind or a programme that confines one to options that are all without hope. As the rock band Metallica put it, in an aptly titled song "*No Leaf Clover*"

And it comes to be

That the soothing light at the end of your tunnel
is just a freight train coming your way
That's the inside of depression at the extreme. What is needed is understanding and compassion.

Robyn McPhail, Methven

Alive and loving it

Ecumenical Rural Ministry was part of "Alive and loving it", a celebration of the life of parishes, Anglican groups and ecumenical groups which are active within the Diocese of Christchurch. Cathedral Square and the Cathedral itself pulsed with energy for six hours on Saturday March 10th.

Rural Ministry was highlighted at a stall located inside the Cathedral, close to the Visitors' Centre. Those who visited were given information about the Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit, told about its activities and shown samples of *Rural Network News* and Rural Ministry Publications.

Each person who visited was asked three questions and their answers were plotted by putting coloured stars on a series of maps:

- * Are you part of a rural congregation?
- * Have you worshipped in a rural congregation?
- * Were your ancestors part of a rural congregation?

The stars on the map - especially for the second and third question - were scattered right across New Zealand and the globe. Those who visited had, for example, worshipped in rural congregations in places as far afield

as Canada, USA, Peru, Chile, Pakistan, Malaysia, the Philippines and Japan together with many different parts of Australia, the United Kingdom and Western Europe.

One contact made during the day has led to an ongoing exchange of information and resources. Ann and Dave Wright are from Horley, a market town in Surrey, and are part of their Diocesan Faith in the Countryside group in England. They receive copies of *Rural Network News* and have asked the question on children's nurture and evangelism reported elsewhere in this issue.

Garth Cant, Christchurch

"Dry Weather"

An urban colleague of the editor has written a series of reflections by a cat named Felicity. During the autumn Felicity got thinking again...

Dear People

It's been a while since I wrote last. But I assure you – I'm still around! In fact, in mid-autumn the Rev reckons I'm getting rounder every day.

It's been a dry season, and a warm one. I heard someone say on the radio that it is the driest season on record for Canterbury! The driest season since my great-great-great-great-grandmother came to town!

Sometimes I get quite thirsty. Then I jump into the bath to see if there is any water remaining around the plug-hole.

On Friday morning I heard mother Jean ask the Rev.: "How do you tell a cat has been in the bath?"

The Rev. answered: "Because there's soap behind her ears!"

"No." replied mother Jean. "Because she never cleans up her paw prints!"

And then there's the dust. There's a beautiful patch in the driveway by the front door, where the Rev backs his car onto the lawn so he can go forwards into the road. The car has demolished the grass and left a nice dusty bit.

Most mornings I accompany the Rev to get the mail. First he collects the key to the Church letter-box, then goes out the door. I am asleep on the armchair, but the movement wakes me, and I follow. While he walks out to the street I play cops-and-robbers under the rhododendrons, but still get to the letter-box before him, the church letter-box, then the manse letter-box.

At this point I proceed up the drive to the bare patch and have a dust bath. O roll over and squirm around on my back. Then I turn right-side-up and crouch low ready to attack. It never works. He always sees me and walks past telling me what he thinks of my grey patches.

The neatest thing that can happen next is for the Rev. to return to the study, where I can jump onto his mahogany laminate desk-top and, with the mildest of shakes, deposit a liberal coating of dust and grit just where he is going to recommence working. He knows I like to be close!

O the joys of the drought!

But one kitten's joy is another kitten's sorrow, so they say! I'm not sure that's right in this particular case. More – one animal's joy is another animal's sorrow.

When mother Jean has gone to work, and the Rev to the study, I swipe the newspaper down from the dining table and have a glance through. At the moment I am seeing pictures of sheep and lambs getting thin because of lack of feed. I am seeing pictures of dried-out water-holes, and streams with only a trickle of water flowing. I thank God I am not a sheep. I feel sorry for all the animals who are not getting enough food and water.

Anyway – with me – spare a thought for the country districts – for dry paddocks and dwindling water-flows. Remember the animals, including the human animals who depend on their farms. And pray that God may give us rain.

We, in the city, have had more than enough of this fine warm weather. Give the cockies a turn – and the sheep, and the lambs, and the cattle, and the eels, and the trout, and all those other things that are hurting.

Please, God, please!

Miow from Felicity

.....
Physical exercise is good for you. I have worked out this program of strenuous activities that that will keep you fit as a fiddle. Do each of these at least once daily, with meals.

Beating around the bush	Pushing my luck
Climbing the walls	Swallowing my pride
Throwing my weight around	Passing the buck
Running around in circles	Jumping to conclusions
Putting my foot in my mouth	Picking up the pieces
Making mountains out of molehills	

What a workout! I think I'll exercise some caution now, and sit down.

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Amorangi Ministry: A Model for Self-Sustainable Ministry of Word and Sacrament

There is a ministry treasure hidden from the sight of most of us, and it is at work in communities many of which are rural. Its name is "Bearers of Heavenly Tidings" (*Amorangi*) and it is a way of ensuring access to ordained ministry as well as safeguarding the sacred nature of such ministry.

Te Aka Puaho (the glowing vine), as self-determining Maori partner within the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, established this ministry during the early 1980s in response to needs experienced within their parishes. There are similarities with Methodist auxiliary ministers of the time and Anglican Minita-a-Iwi. Like these, Amorangi were, from the first, partly trained, part-time and unpaid. Nowadays some are in full-time secular employment and included are a number of women.

The call process has always been important, with the sense of call tested and taken as seriously as with men and women seeking training for full-time stipendary ministry. A programme of training is in place, prior to ordination, with training weekends utilizing staff from the Presbyterian School of Ministry and people from the community (e.g. police, social workers, district nurses), as well as guided home study. As the Rev Eric Caton, Co-Director of Amorangi training, comments: "current Amorangi are also expected to attend training weekends as a means of in-service training."

Amorangi work in partnership with other ministers, stipendary or Amorangi, offering a *co-operation* role-model for the whole parish. Total communication and respect for one another are the norm.

What possibilities this offers rural churches and communities generally!

Book Reviews

Calling the Station Home: Place and Identity in New Zealand's High Country

by Michele Dominy (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Maryland: 2001, 274 pages)

Reviewed by Robyn McPhail

An anthropologist ventures into the hinterland to study the "tribe" that lives there. They are not an indigenous tribe so how can she view them in any way but critically - as usurpers, as colonists only there to possess and profit from the land? But Michele Dominy went up the Rakaia Gorge to engage with the people of the place, a place that has become "a highly contested zone in a rapidly changing New Zealand political arena." (p.39) Viewing them as a privileged enclave from the colonial past, down-country, particularly urban, people have become vocal in claiming ownership of the place Gorge residents call their home and their responsibility as guardians. Sentimentalised adulation mixes with hostile criticism when myths and mystique dominate. Dominy is concerned to hear high-country speak for themselves, and to observe the deeper realities of their life and culture from in their midst.

For Dominy feels some kudos in coming to belong among the people of the Rakaia Valley, passing the first test of finding her way to Belinda and Hamish Ensor's and eventually being acknowledged at a Gorge event by the most sceptical of all, Jim Morris of Manuka Point. It was essential for her as an anthropologist that she got alongside the people, became trusted and, as I interpret her writing, did not betray that trust. In one chapter we are shown the difference between anthropology and photo-journalism, together with other forms of writing about the high country that function to convey "high country mystiques". These latter types continue to promote untested assumptions, projections of down-country and high-country people alike. Anthropology endeavours to uncover underlying truths, or at least some of the layers of experience and interaction between people and land that get closer to the core of their life and culture. In this book I discovered the virtue of

anthropology as an academic discipline, searching for realities among appearances, sifting what people say and do for cultural patterns and thereby enabling others to catch a glimpse of the depth and complexity of relationships among high-country people and between these people and landscape.

Michele Dominy's study is of people in context. Therefore this land of mountains and ridges, valleys and rivers is no mere setting: "I examine place... not merely as scenery or panorama, but as habitat, as an inhabited and deeply culturalized landscape." (p.3) It is landscape with which people form spiritual and not just material attachment, the ache of absence of a daughter whose adult life is lived elsewhere bearing witness to this. What is more, it is land inhabited by stock. This is a place where what counts most is detailed knowledge of land forms and animal behaviour, along with resilience and continual adaptability in the face of the big uncontrollable - the weather. If there is any privilege in belonging to a high-country family, the inheritance is not the land itself (for leases must be purchased and not all can stay), but the local knowledge and experience through childhood and apprenticeship in the high-country network.

This book is scholarly and its technical language and complex style often gave me pause. But that was compensated for me by the quality of material I could immediately relate to as a rural person and as one who values insight into relationships among people and with the land that gives rural livelihood. Dominy's input on certain issues - family farm succession, homestead design and family life, sibling loyalties and equity, the cultural impact of the seasons of farm work, the Ngai Tahu Land Claim and sustainability - has been grist for my mill of reflection. I also found myself making comparisons with down country rural life, for example, the way family members interact, male and female roles, the pressure on sons to marry and marriages to remain intact, as well as the design of farm houses.

I sense that for Dominy anthropology is, in its way, a breed of ecology. Sustainability in relation to the New Zealand high-country now entails human community as well as land and its flora and fauna. The pre-human condition of New Zealand landscape is long gone (the well-being of tussock-land is often linked with the grazing of stock) and there is a distinctly community-based approach to the high-country ethos of land guardianship. Dominy notes a "not-so-extraordinary parallel between cultural diversity and biodiversity, between community sustainability and ecological sustainability" (p.251).

This study leaves the reader, like its author, not detached and somehow in possession of objective information about high-country living. Rather it draws one to understand and even identify with the values and passions of these people, while acknowledging and respecting the distance between their lives and one's own. "Some people would ask me:" writes Dominy, "Aren't families everywhere the same? It was difficult

to say that even the assumption that social units elsewhere are families marks a late-twentieth-century people as distinct. This is a world where social structures and roles are clearly defined.” (p.268) Yet these are not entrenched people in a static culture: they are continually adapting and changing with a land that needs them to adapt and change if they are to continue to live with it.

At Home in the Earth: Seeking an Earth-Centred Spirituality

by Neil Darragh (Accent Publications 2000, 204pp)

Reviewed by Boyd Wilson

One of the many reasons why this book should be read widely and with respect is that the author respects his readers. It is not a book to be scanned for truisms to insert in bible studies and homilies. Rather, it is a book that critically informs and stimulates the reader’s own quest for a spiritual ethos that makes earthed sense for the planet, all its life, humanity, Christianity and person. Neil Darragh, a New Zealander, is both a teacher and scholar (principal of the Catholic Institute of Theology and teaching in the University of Auckland) and a pastor (parish priest of Glen Innes). He took on a big task in this work. He would not, I think, wish to claim it to be definitive, but succeeds wonderfully well in seeding the urgent dialogue to which all people of faith are called at this critical time in the story of the planet. For it is a time when the power of human-centred, short-vision, consumption-driven, value-less economics and technologies has so vastly outpaced the growth of wisdom.

Darragh seeks no less than to *earth* humanity, the Holy, evolving Christian doctrine, a vision of justice for the biosphere, and the search of ordinary people for a living hope in faith. Spiritualities that centre the Divine and ultimate humanity off-planet, with consequent disdain for Earth, are challenged on ecological, ethical and theological grounds. This is so not only the case for faith invested in “Heaven” but also for faith invested in a “Marketplace” understood by some to be driven by metaphysical forces: what doesn’t make sense in terms of sustainable justice within this complex and vulnerable planet may have no basis in reality at all. The idea that the human species has elite rights in the ultimate economy of life is debunked.

The chapter headings give a fair guide to the book’s scope: Seeking an Earth-centred spirituality; A human way of dying; Seeking a human role in the Earth; Living sustainably; Locating God; The incarnate God; Eucharist. Each chapter begins in prayer and ends with a focus for meditation.

Any fair audit of human responsibility within the history of Earth shows some of the most destructive attitudes have been fostered or condoned in the name of Christianity. Neil Darragh helps us toward acknowledgement and repentance. There are especially helpful passages about appropriate images of God; useful pointers to fresh ways of understanding and

responding to the deep truths of creation, incarnation, death, resurrection; a suggestion (one that may need further unpacking outside communities centered in liturgy and sacrament) that Eucharist may be the setting in which a truly redemptive spirituality is liberated within the life of Earth.

On the other hand, non-Christian readers will find that the Christian tradition has always offered insights more creatively caring than commonly assumed, and that some contemporary Christ-referenced explorations (particularly when assessed on merit outside the walls of institutional religion) are excitingly fresh and relevant.

This writing is almost all out of the Western Christian tradition. The ongoing conversation will profit from being also informed by Eastern Christian understandings; those of mythic peoples living within creation with no line drawn between the spiritual and the material; some literature absent from Darragh’s extensive bibliography (I looked in vain for the names of Paulos Gregorios, Frijof Capra, Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki and Charles Birch); and some insights out of non-Christian religious traditions. In particular, a vital Earth-centred spirituality for Aotearoa-New Zealand must evolve in a dialogue drawing deeply on Maori understandings.

Neil Darragh’s context is never less than the whole planet – all its life, all its matter including the atmosphere. This provides excellent insurance against undue sentimentality, human-centeredness and regional or religious bias. Also needed in the future conversation are the spiritualities in intimate context of (say) a soil ecologist at her microscope, an orchardist in a hailstorm, an elderly person planting a slow-growing tree, and a family whose debt servicing commitment frustrates a wish to husband land in a less exploitative way. In our rural districts, this book will be of great help to members of faith communities wishing to foster such wide, urgent, careful and deep dialogue.

Grandpa and granddaughter were sitting talking when she asked: “Did God make you, Grandpa?”
“Yes, God made me,” said Grandpa.
“Did God make me, too?”
“Yes, God made you.”
There was a long pause while the child looked at her grandfather. “You know, Grandpa, God’s doing a lot better job lately.”

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