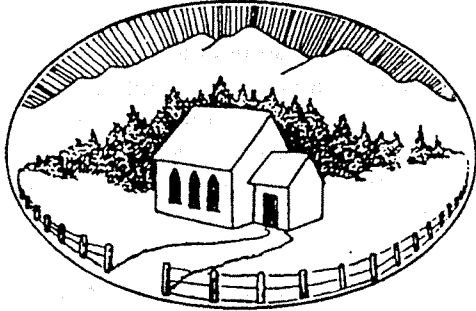


Rural Network News



No.20

March 2002

How can you own something which
will outlive you?

Macli-ing Dulag, Kalinga leader

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.
Responses to items always welcome.

Out Standing in the Field

Rural New Zealand is unique and, for those responsible for ministry, there are challenges that popular writers do not even dream about.

I was therefore glad to help put together an event around the theme "Out Standing in the Field". For three days the Nelson Anglican Diocese's rural ministry units were brought together to share and celebrate rural matters. The following thoughts capture something of the 'feel' of the event.

Rev Andy Thomas from Golden Bay: *I arrived reluctantly, perhaps even with a sense of guilt. You know the story – parish commitments, sermons to prepare and the unfinished business of being a vicar. And, of course, the tension of being out of the parish yet again.*

I left the rural forum with 'my billy boiling', 'amping' and 'firing 240 volts' - these being expressions that our main speaker, Hamish used. The proof of ministry event so translatable: translated into the life of the Parish. Rev Hamish

Thomson vicar of Kaitaia - our main speaker covered topics - ranging from Reading the signs of the time, Critical importance of leadership and vision, to Building a team. "As a society we increasingly measure ourselves in economic terms with the very real down side that it's easy to lose sight of the infinite value of people as people."

To this end I was both inspired and challenged by the stories of those who attended the Rural Conference as they minister the life of Christ in communities many in our society wouldn't give a second thought to - places that I hadn't even heard of!

Rev Miriam Taylor wrote: *"We all received a 'potted' take-home message from the Rural Forum - a purple Ake Ake seedling - reminding us not to lose sight of our churches and their potential. The Ake Ake seedlings came from the grounds of the Ward Motel in Marlborough, where they thrive despite hot dry winds and the lack of any appreciable rain over long periods. Because they have been grown in these poor conditions their leaves are a deeper purple-red than they would be had they been overfed and pampered. This reminds us that our rural churches, though often challenged by lack of resources, will develop inner spirituality and outward attractiveness as we rely on the Holy Spirit to provide and lead.*

The symbol of the Ake Ake...

The Ake Ake has the ability to stand firm despite being buffeted by strong winds: reminding us that our churches will stand firm and withstand the winds of society's changing values, if we remain rooted in Christ and his teaching. The Ake Ake is a prolific seeder, producing great quantities of beautiful, purplish seed capsules, reminding the Church of its task to make disciples, by spreading the seed of God's Word and reaching out into our communities with the love of Christ.

The wood of the Ake Ake is one of the most durable, having been used by Maori to make clubs in years gone by. This reminds us of Christ's promise that his Church will last and the gates of hell will not prove stronger than the Church (Matthew 16:18). The life of the Ake Ake and the Church is ultimately in the hands of the One who will reign forever and ever. *Ake Ake.*

Perhaps in two years time when the event will be held again we can invite people from further afield so we can learn how you are out standing in your field - and encourage you.

Martin Harrison, Seddon

The Nurture of Rural Children

The June 2001 edition of *Rural Network News* included an article from Paul Simmonds of the Coventry Diocese. He asks, "HELP! Is anyone pioneering anything in your patch?"

Recently the Hawke's Bay Rural Ministry Unit heard about what is happening at Puketapu School, a rural school west of Taradale. For the past four years local parents have been running an after-school activity called "Kids' Club", initiated by Briega Rendell of Hawke's Bay Anglican Youth Ministries. Briega has helped turn around our thinking about doing ministry. Instead of trying to bring children *into* the church and congregation, she has helped people see the action of God *in* the context of school life and the wider community.

Once a month all children who wish to come are invited to the Wednesday Kids' Club held in the adjoining school-community hall, a magnificent recently completed building. From 3.00 p.m. to 4.45 p.m. with a mixture of play, prayer, singing (usually action songs), simple lesson content based on scripture, a variety of related activities, presentation of results, food and drink, final story and prayer, then home. Where children normally go on the school bus parents instead come and fetch them.

Briega has helped turn around our thinking about doing ministry

The key to its 'success' is a clear vision - *That children of the Puketapu community will come to know God and make God part of their lives.* This was written by parents who have a key role in helping run the Club and know their tasks well-beforehand. Another important leadership ingredient is Fiona Campbell, a member of the Hastings Apostolic Church, appointed by Anglican Youth Ministries as a paid worker to run the programme. With a teaching background, Briega works for YFC, teaches religious education in two schools, and most importantly is the School Chaplain for Puketapu School. Her ethos is:

- ✓ everyone knows what to do;
- ✓ it needs to have a community 'feel';
- ✓ parents all do something;
- ✓ the facilitator doesn't know everything – no hidden agendas;
- ✓ it is a ministry to the families.

She can be contacted at youthfam@hb.ang.org.nz.

Westshore Parish covering rural hinterland north of Napier also has a children's programme, run by Coralie Brooks, a parishioner and full-time kindergarten teacher, with:

1. A monthly Kid's Club similar to Puketapu's, but catering for the children at the Westshore School

and held in the church just opposite – the parish's urban context; and

2. Holiday programmes in distant rural schools (Te Pohue, Kaiwaka, Putorino), providing children and parents in more scattered places an opportunity for a day's fun, teaching, song, and activities. The theology is again of scattering the seeds of faith in the community where the Spirit of God already is, rather than trying to gather the harvest into the institutional basket. The holiday programme idea is not new, but making it mobile clearly appeals to local communities.

Further information can be sought from Meg Dawson, the parish administrator – Megd@clear.net.nz

A Guide to Theological Reflection

The place where theological reflection happens is at the meeting of theology and personal experience. There are various processes that can be used to foster a high level of fruitfulness from the encounter but they would all include:

- Having some sense of distance or taking a position that allows you to see the "big picture".
- Noting what happens in the relationships and interconnectedness between people, places, stories, events, etc.
- Considering material from what is often called the "four sources": scripture, tradition, experience, and personal position.
- Listening to other voices.

There is great value in reflecting theologically with a group of people so that the different perspectives enrich, challenge and strengthen the conversation. The process of doing theological reflection requires openness from all the people involved so that previously-held ideas and assumptions can be shaped by new discoveries and deeper meaning. It is often helpful to write up what emerges during the discussion, and a final version may or may not include everything that was noted in the writing up.

Theological reflection is not meant to be the last word but emerges from a process of experience, and is itself part of an ongoing process contributing to more thoughtful ministry practice wherever that is located.

Jenny Dawson

The Role of the Rural Church



Caring and relationships are the primary ingredients of the rural church: we learn what it means to be part of a group who have stood together through good times and bad times; newcomers are "adopted" into "the family"; the matriarchs and patriarchs groom young committee members to eventually assume leadership responsibilities; and individuals from a variety of age groups, often with conflicting value-systems, discover how they can negotiate with and learn from one another.

A "portable faith" has been the by-word of the rural church

A "portable faith" - one that can be easily carried within a person as he/she moves through their life journey - has been the by-word of the rural church for years. Its members know about "the time to gather" in worship and fellowship, and "the time to go out" in search of faith. One preacher said of his congregation: "People who are close to the soil don't need a lot of organized religion. They will always come back to the church when there is time or when there is need - whether you think they are members or not."

Furthermore, when they do come back, the church will find a place for them. Their time of wandering is simply noted and accepted. Their roots have kept them connected. They can come back whenever they choose.

For those seeking personal fulfilment, the rural church is an arena where the novice and the committed work side-by-side. Interests can be tested and vocations realised. Everyone from the organist, to the person in charge of maintenance, to the secretary, is usually a volunteer. While it is expected that they will do a reasonable job, people are willing to overlook the mistakes and appreciate their participation. The important thing is that the local community be served and the membership cared for.

The small congregation helps people face the painful as well as the celebrative things in life

Finally, the small congregation, particularly through its worship life, helps people face the painful as well as the celebrative things in life. This is in direct contrast with the way so much of our modern world denies suffering and death.

So much is positive when we look closely at the life and mission of the rural church. What we need to

do is develop and articulate our strengths, for we are centres of health in a world that has grave problems. This is possible only in so far as we understand ourselves to be serving in the Name of Christ.

Joyce Sasse, Pincher Creek, Canada
From www.agri-ville.com/spiritualvignettes

International Church Conference

Wanted: lay people interested in attending

Chennai (Madras), India 12-19 November 2002

Theme: Voice of the Voiceless

International Rural Ministry Conferences have been held in 1990, 1994 and 1998, all in the United Kingdom with participants predominantly from North America and Europe. In 1998 New Zealand made a strong case for the next conference to be held in the Third World with priority given to attendance by participants in rural ministry in Third World countries.

The International Rural Church Ecumenical Association, with representatives in 12 countries linked by e-mail, accepted the challenge and the Church of South India agreed to host the conference from 12-19 November 2002.

The Conference will involve guest speakers, Bible studies, discussion time and field visits which allow participants to explore: agricultural problems; rural poverty; rural development; employment initiatives; challenges to gender discrimination; rural to urban migration. There will also be time to share views and experiences from around the world.

Conferences costs are expected to be around US\$450, with travel from New Zealand, including insurance and visas, likely to be just over NZ\$2,000.

The Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit is seeking scholarship funds for participants from churches and rural communities in Africa, Asia, the Pacific, and Central and South America. They have approached Te Runanga Whakawhanaunga i Nga Hahi o Aotearoa inviting them to consider representation at the Conference. There is also a space for a Pakeha layperson who could participate positively in this event and could source their own funding personally or through their church or local community. Two clergy people are to attend on behalf of the Canterbury and Hawkes Bay Units and are similarly seeking funding.

Please contact the secretary of the Canterbury Unit (Dr Garth Cant, 7 Owens Terrace, Christchurch 8001) or the editor of this newsletter - if you would like to go to the India conference. Contact Robyn or Garth also if you have suggestions for rural men or women with a particular contribution to make or avenues of financial support we can follow up.

Is this A Wake-Up Call to the Whole Church?

A Personal Opinion (in two parts)

I work for the Anglican Diocese of Christchurch over the territory between four rivers, the Taramakau and the Haast on the west side of the South Island and the Conway and the Waitaki on the east. All over these rural areas, church people are talking helplessly and anxiously about the impact of dairy farming on small communities.

the impact of dairying...

For the church, what could seem like the blessings of the presence of many new people, often with young families, appear to be countered by other factors. I hear complaints about what are described as “anti-social” working hours, workers busy milking during traditional church service times, people not staying long in the district, families not getting involved in community activities including church, and there are even comments that these people have less stable family life than the people who have been in the district a long time. There are serious environmental questions about water and land use, and concern about whether the dairy “boom” can last. Wherever there are dairy conversions, there also seems to be something very serious smouldering within the communities.

forcing urban and rural together

I want to ask some hard questions, but of the whole church. Theologically, I am convinced that this cannot be a matter simply for “the locals” but, because we are bound together in this faith journey, it must also be an issue for city-dwelling Christians in this country. I am also convinced that the very nature of the change is forcing rural and urban together in ways that cannot be ignored.

I want to ask: is there is here a wake-up call to the whole church? There is surely some theology to do, along with the research and statistics that we have in abundance about some aspects of this issue.

not dissimilar to attitudes and anxieties around “lifestyle block” development

There is also some history to consider. It seems to me that the more recent dramatic changes around dairy farming, while in many ways different, are not dissimilar to some of the attitudes and anxieties around “lifestyle block” development. The people who came with the “ten-acre blocks”, which were carved out of traditional farms a few years ago, experienced much of the same suspicion from some

established rural people as dairy-farmers are experiencing now. Maybe there is something we can learn from putting this new development in perspective – and perhaps the church may now find it simply has to engage with aspects of rural change that it has avoided for two decades or more. Rural communities are no longer what some of us like to imagine they are!

The Canterbury Ecumenical Rural Ministry Unit is keen to encourage some hard thinking about the role of the church in these changes. Ministry can founder amidst helplessness and anxiety but may flourish in new ways through story-telling, analysis, understanding, and theological reflection. The Unit looks forward to sponsoring an event where this may happen – and looks forward to continuing discussions in this newsletter that could bring critical shape to such an event.

Jenny Dawson, Ministry Educator, Christchurch
The second part of this article will be published in the next issue of Rural Network News.

Rural Outreach at East Taieri

East Taieri Presbyterian is like a large number of parishes in New Zealand – a number of its parishioners are farming *or* have been involved in the industry.

Assistant Pastor Marilyn Ross was inspired to organise an informal get-together for people who fell into the latter category. Marilyn came up with an original name for the evening, calling it “Farmers in Transition” - FIT.

Farmers in Transition – F I T

Some of these folk have been attending East Taieri for a number of years, while others are relative new-comers, selling the farm to move to a different stage of life – discovering “life after farming” – or buying a new property. For those of us who have shifted into a new area and to a larger parish than we previously belonged to, this was an excellent way to meet more people with similar interests. There was much chatter and laughter as we talked and encouraged each other in our faith in Christ, and found a common bond in country lifestyle, even though our circumstances were different from before. The evening closed with a much appreciated savoury supper.

The plan is to meet several times a year to build stronger friendships. This is part of Small Group Ministry which is a particular focus in the life of the Faith Community at East Taieri.

Beth Strang, Mosgiel
Beth has previously contributed to this newsletter from her former location further south at Waimatuku.

Dilbert's Rules of Order

- I can only please one person per day. Today is not your day. Tomorrow is not looking good either.
- Tell me what you need, and I'll tell you how to get along without it.
- Accept it. Some days you are the pigeon and some days the statue.
- I don't suffer from stress. I am a carrier.
- Never argue with an idiot. They drag you down to their level, then beat you with experience.

From RUMORS email newsletter © Ralph Milton. There's no charge to subscribe to RUMORS. Send an email message to rumors@joinhands.com with the word SUBSCRIBE in the subject line.

Morning's Minion

by Robin List



I recall some comments by a theologian who had worked in the soundproofed, air-conditioned environment of a U S university. By the time of writing he was in the sweltering heat of India, with a decomposing goat outside his open window. The reality wafting in suggested very strongly that the environment in which we do our praying and reflecting shapes our prayers and reflections.

I remembered the theologian and the goat because recently I have been doing my thinking and praying with a large hawk in the room with me. The Department of Conservation needed a nurse for a harrier which some brave soul had picked up from the roadside. Brilliantly designed for killing and dismembering, these are not birds to be casually tucked under one's arm like a broody hen. By the time he reached our place Bob was in a roomy cage, but a pair of welding gloves came as part of his equipment.

As we carried the cage into the house I asked why he was called Bob. "After the Australian Prime Minister of the same name." Of course.

Bob is a *Circus approximans* and living with him did approximate to a circus, with gladiators or clowns depending on which version of the circus was playing on any given day. Apart from his inability to fly, the first odd thing we noticed about Bob was that he wore a leg band; more for doves than hawks. The records showed that Bob had been banded eighteen years before as an adult bird. It takes two years for a harrier to attain adult plumage, so Bob was at least twenty years old. No one could be sure that this was typical or exceptional. Also, he had been banded quite close to where he was found this time. Hawks are territorial, but how closely do they hold to their territory over time?

Young ones have a tendency to wander northwards. Had he been away and returned many

times? The magnitude of human ignorance about a relatively common bird was a chastening discovery.

A big carnivore needs his cage floor cleaned twice a day unless you want an unhealthy environment for the patient and a house that stinks like a mews. A mews may be a fashionable address in some places, but the real thing can build up a good head of stink at considerable speed. What's more, when Bob flapped his wings for exercise or in distress he redistributed the deposits from his cage floor. It was winter, so we had him in the house quite a lot of the time. Despite our best efforts with cover sheets we had to do some wall, floor and window cleaning. The question arises: why do this to your nice new house? Is a twenty-year-old hawk worth it? These are theological questions. If in general we have been given responsibility for the earth (rather than domination over it) and more personally have a great love for birds, are our material possessions provided to fulfil in part our responsibility and love? It is better to give love than to withhold it. With the giving comes the reward. In working with Bob the rewards were knowledge, rare experience and a great sense of privilege.

Cleaning wasn't too arduous a task unless Bob was feeling disinclined to co-operate with the cleaning staff. That's when the welding gauntlets came into play. We respected his sharp, curved beak, but it's the talons that will slash your fingers to the bone in a fraction of a second. A hawk's beak is too close to his eyes to be a major worry. That may sound strange, but a hawk's most treasured attribute is its amazing eyesight, therefore it will protect its eyes first. That means getting its eyes away from the threat and bringing into play some weaponry that is less vulnerable.

If all one experiences is flying fertiliser and terrifying toenails then nursing a hawk wouldn't do much for the soul and a sense of privilege would be hard to find. But Bob's moments of panic grew fewer; we were gaining his trust. Try to imagine what it does inside a person to have even the partial trust of a bird of prey! Imagine how surreal it is to be so close to that bright, fierce face; and so involved with a bird usually seen hovering looking for a kill or circling so high that your eyes ache to see him and his unattainable mastery of the air is an ache for the infinite.

One night the house was still and a sound began. A gentle purring cooing sound. Bob, warm, well-fed and sleepy was making a sound beyond any notion of hawkness that we had. It was a blend of the call hawks make in their courtship flights and the purring of a cat. This fierce-eyed raptor was multidimensional; he had a peaceful side we hadn't dreamed of. We felt love for Bob and the realisation

came that if we are as artless as hawks we might be loved too, and have less need of our beaks and talons. True, he made a similar sound as he toiled away at a half-grown rabbit, turning it inside out and wasting nothing of our cat Toby's generosity. That is the way of hawks, to eat rabbits. We're not yet in that place where we see the lion and the lamb lying down together.

The privilege of having a creature so fierce, so designed for freedom, resting by me as I thought, prayed and wrote gave me a focus and intensity; a reconnection with deep feelings half-submerged by cares; a desire to live the life that is so different yet so attainable if only we have faith and courage. At the time Bob arrived I was beginning to recover from a serious illness and frustrated that my body was caging my mind and spirit. There we were together, our powers cooped for a time but growing stronger for being cooped. He so lovely to look at; I at least being made a little lovelier on the inside because he was there.

Epilogue: Bob moved to a bigger aviary and spent a long time eating well but not flying. Perhaps he thought the retirement village for old hawks wasn't such a bad place. But finally he did what we hoped for and became a wild hawk again, leaving some semi-feral humans in his airy wake.

She was a student leading her first worship service. She intended to pray for the "homeless and lonely," but instead prayed for the "homely and lonely." Which, come to think of it, is not a bad idea. After church a sad looking man came up and said, "Thank you for including me in your prayers this morning."

From RUMORS email newsletter © Ralph Milton

Subscribe to "Ruminations"

Four times a year the New South Wales Rural Ministry Unit produces a journal of rural church news, events and reflections, appropriately entitled "Ruminations". Some of the contributions make their way into this newsletter, but there is always more worth passing on than *Rural Network News* has room to include.

Subscriptions for 2002 are currently being renewed, with a bulk order arranged with the *Ruminations* editor and dispatched within New Zealand by the Diocese of Christchurch.

If you would like to subscribe for 2002 you can do so by sending your name and address to Robyn McPhail, 9 Jackson Street, Methven, including a cheque for \$17.50 (payable to "Diocese of Christchurch"). Prompt action should mean you receive the March edition as it arrives.

It's one thing to start a business, an organisation, a cause. It's quite another to find the right people to continue it...

Passing On The Torch

A paraphrase of Psalm 89:20-37

"I have chosen my successor," says God.

"I have chosen you. You will take my place.

For years, I have taught you my vision;
now I want you to take it forward into the future.

To avoid being controlled by bureaucrats,
to protect yourself against fast-talking promoters
and bottom-line economists,
you must ask yourself what I would do.

By keeping me always in mind,
our reputations will both grow.

What I have started, you will continue;
through you, my influence will spread.

I have been your launching pad -

Now it's up to you to carry on.

I want to be proud of you.

As long as you pursue my vision, you will prosper.

"But if you wander off my way,
if you lust after competitive advantage

and chase after quick profits,

if you sell out to other gods and other goals,
then you will destroy yourself.

You will lose all credibility;

you will go ethically bankrupt.

"Even so, I will never turn against you.

I have taken you into my family;

you are a member of my household.

I have promised it; I do not lie."

from *Everyday Psalms*, by Jim Taylor, published by Wood Lake Books;
included in Joyce Sasse's *Spiritual Vignettes*

Multiple Community Syndrome

In the not-too-distant past, neighbours took time to talk about the rain, crops, yesterday's farm meeting, an incident at the school, or how best to help the family whose bread-winner was in the hospital. As they talked, they continually exchanged stories and information that defined the traditional values on which their community was built.

Common values held the people together

These stories were told again around the supper table, and so were subtly passed from one generation to the next. Neighbourhood, school and trade boundaries were similar enough that common values held the people together.

Overnight, it seems, people found their lives consumed by multi-community commitments. The kids' hockey commitments made them part of a more extended area. Church commitments pulled families in other directions. The local banks closed, and the machinery dealership served a broader and broader area.

Multiple communities impact my life, which opens opportunities and leaves me scattered and unfocused

Rural people are now kept so busy moving about, they hardly have time to stop for a visit. And when they do, the topics of conversation have to be selected according to what these particular individuals hold in common.

The lines between physical community and communities of common interests get even more blurred because of the ease with which we use communications technology. Evenings and weekends, I can talk to a friend across the country as easily and as cheaply as I can phone my neighbour. By e-mail I'm able to exchange through cyberspace ideas I hold in common with someone whose exact location I don't even know.

Now multiple communities impact my life. That opens many opportunities, but it also leaves me feeling scattered and unfocused. How do we cope? How do we identify those basic values that nurture our spiritual and cultural roots? How do we pass these on to our children? Can we take time to rethink how to handle this "Multiple Community Syndrome" before our lives become so fractured that we lose ourselves completely?

Joyce Sasse, Pincher Creek, Canada
From www.agri-ville.com/spiritualvignettes

Give us a break!

Is there time for Sabbath in rural life?

Are we exhausting ourselves and the earth in the pursuit of livelihood? Are we stressing out all round with the frenetic pace of agriculture and tourist ventures? Are we impacting on air, land and water to the detriment of our interconnected good?

Big questions. Too big, perhaps, especially when pressures are coming on us from a variety of directions – work, family, community – and the next job is crying out to be done. We'll think about it when we get time. If we get time.

Sabbath as a time of rest and re-creation seems most likely to feature in what Disney films used to call, on their regular Sunday television features years back, "Fantasy-land". I guess people would like to say to me when I ask about holidays and taking time out: "dream on, Robyn!"

But some people in our community do take long dreamed of holidays and they know they get a pat on the back from me for it. I've managed it myself and it's worth the effort – that double or triple pressure before getting away can be paid off by the sheer benefits of stepping off the tread-mill.

Worth it for the chance to renew one's acquaintance with *having nothing one has to do*. Somehow adult life slots us into a routine of projects and chores such that we can lose the ability just to be ourselves. We need that ability to play, really play (like a child). But we also need the break in order to think and feel the real stuff that's in one's system, stuff that's usually covered up by the projects and chores on the agenda in front of us. Usually therefore avoided.

So when I have a real "no demands on me" holiday I can't say I am happy every moment. I have space to think and feel and that often involves sadness (it goes with being part of a group of people who are there for one another in joys and sorrows) and plenty of wondering about direction and purpose and what I might be good for. I think this happens to most, if not all, of us *when we let it*.

Now this is surely Sabbath because it seems to me to lead always on to thankfulness: for the life we have, for the people we share it with, for this good earth that gives us livelihood.

Of course, this is not the Sabbath of the 19th/early 20th Century, with its sabbatarian burdens and restrictions – "you must not clean shoes, play cards, read non-religious books..." "you should go to church" etc.

Rather it is freely chosen, often worked hard for, time and space to catch up with ourselves and get in tune again with our God. It therefore can genuinely *give us a break*.

Robyn McPhail, Methven

Book Review

***Seasons of the Land: People's Prayers for Town and County* by Bill Bennett**

Church Mouse Press, 38 Joseph Street, Palmerston North: 2001 ISBN 0-908949-21-9 pb, 121 pages. \$18 (plus \$1 p&p)

Having read some of Bill Bennett's previously published prayers in issues of *Rural Network News* and *The Preacher* (magazine of the Lay Preachers' Association), I agreed with alacrity to review his latest collection *Seasons of the Land*. A week later I stood as State School chaplain of the local Area School, Bill's book in hand, and joined with a group of 4th formers as they dedicated a tree to the memory of a classmate killed in a hunting accident. I read the prayer entitled 'Thanksgiving for Life', one of four that could be used at a funeral or remembrance

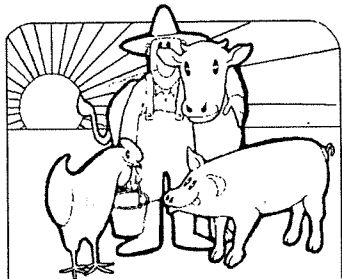
service, and was very thankful that Bill's experience of rural life and his gift of expressing thoughts in a poetic and 'real' manner is shared with us all in this collection.

The prayers are arranged in sections - with such titles as Daily Life and Work, The Seasons, Times of Challenge and Eucharistic Themes. The index is thorough, with prayers often listed more than once, perhaps by title and then subject - very user friendly and great for the many of us who are asked to lead prayers of intercession in church, at a study group or on a special occasion.

His use of imagery connects with rural New Zealanders and as I read 'The Strainer Post' at our service recently, I could hear the quiet murmurs of affirmation as the image used made sense to those present. Prayers entitled 'The Privilege of Farming', 'Farm Work', 'The Muster', and 'God at my side' take rural people, farmers in particular where they are at and move their daily work experience to a way of seeing God ever-present.

I am so thankful for poets like Bill Bennett who go to the trouble of having their work published - Bill even includes his own illustrations. This collection of poetic prayers is not only a wonderful resource, but also an inspiration for us all to look around at our everyday situations and see God's hand teaching, loving and renewing us.

Sarah Gardiner, Waiiau, North Canterbury



Thoughts on Seasons and Praying

Helen Williams is a member of a Central Canterbury Catholic congregation and her response to Bill Bennett's new book of prayers comes in the form of some thoughts on "Good Seasons" and some ideas for prayers in Sunday worship.

Helen notes that good seasons are usually good *for some*. This season has been good for those reliant on pasture: grass growth has continued. But for others, for example, grass seed crops have been wrecked by rain. It's been great for making silage and baleage, but hay will be very pricey. And there's been the unusual sight of wheat still green but sprouted.

Good for some. Give thanks and also pray for those who face hard times.

Helen is regularly involved in leading the Prayers of the Faithful at her local church. She uses some

prayer resources but changes the words to suit the local situation. She like to connect her prayers with the readings and sermon so, as well as bringing notes taken watching the news during the week, she sits in church with pencil and paper and jots down ideas as she listens.

Her aim is simple language, talking about what is happening and allowing space for people to add in spontaneous prayers. People find the spontaneous bit hard, however, so perhaps a note-book for prayers could be passed around, to give people time to think about what they would like included.

Helen also leaves room for the priest to add his prayers and bring it all to a conclusion.

The Gravel Road

Our country gravel road has many challenges -
sometimes narrow and difficult to pass on,
hard to make traction when freshly grade,
so dusty in summer we lose sense of direction,
so corrugated at times we lose momentum,
after heavy rain liable to slips and washouts,
so full of bends we cannot see approaching
vehicles.

O God, our journey through life is like this road -
so narrow in love that we forget to be generous,
sliding in the loose metal of competing values,
blinded by the dust of overwork and lack of
vision,
jolted by the corrugations of pain and loss,
blinded to the pitfalls of selfishness and
arrogance,
and unable to accept the bends and twists of
fortune that life brings us.
In your son, Jesus Christ, you call us
to journey in the way of the cross.
Enable us to travel that way with faithful
alertness.

Seasons of the Land: People's Prayers for Town and Country,
by Bill Bennett, prayer 39. selected by reviewer Sarah Gardiner



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