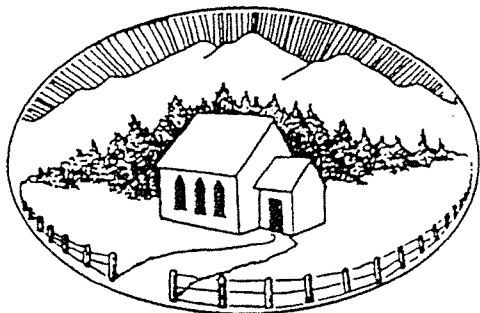


Rural Network News



No.21

June 2002

One stick by itself is easily snapped.
A bundle of sticks gives strength and
resilience to each of the parts.

Theme of Joyce Sasse's *Spiritual Vignettes* for
1 May 2002 at www.agri-ville.com/spiritualvignettes

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.

Pentecost

Fr Martin Davies, vicar of Waipawa parish, ponders an experience of Pentecost when he and his wife Christine were in Sweden at the central city church of St. Peter in Malmo:



The Swedish word for Pentecost is Pingst, and there in a language I did not understand we joined in the Lutheran High Mass. If we did not already know it, the presbyter's red vestments told us that it was Pentecost.

The church was more lavishly decorated than most Anglican churches, but the liturgy was easily followed as if we had been at home in our own St. Peter's. Sturdy Lutheran hymns undergirded the celebration with a mood of certainty and reliability. We felt very much at home, and our friend Gunilla translated parts of the sermon for us. In the greeting of peace came

the profound recognition that we were welcome – not as strangers, not as visitors, not as foreigners; but as members of the body of Christ.

I clearly remember thinking afterward that we *belonged* at that eucharist. I also remembered a conversation from back in Central Hawke's Bay, in relation to the little country churches of our parish and St Peter's, the central gathering place. The comment had been made that people in the outlying areas didn't feel that St. Peter's was *their* church. Sitting in St. Peter's Malmo - in a Lutheran church, where I did not understand the language and among people I had never met before, nor in all probability would ever meet again, and where I knew I was welcome - I realised with an intensity that *Christ*, and not *geography*, is our link.

If we are as passionate about Christ as he is for us, we will *know* that we are at home in church in Onga Onga or Waipawa, Central Hawke's Bay; or in Malmo, Sweden.

My fantasy is based on a dream I had, in which Onga Onga, Tikokino, Otane and Omakere all have a bank and a hairdresser. One day the banks close and the hairdressers win national styling competitions and go to seek their fortunes in Auckland.

Within a week the local people are showing signs of strain: perms are growing out and there is no money left in the purse; the local store also closes, for lack of trade. Within a month grey roots are showing through and all social outings are cancelled, as no one will leave the house looking like *that*.

Then thankfully, people discover that Waipawa has hairdressers and neighbouring Waipukurau (at least) has banks. All was well once more.

It was, of course, a dream about the Church and about priorities. The maintenance, or change, of a hairstyle and access to money are clearly high priorities for us. We simply take these things for granted and will do what it takes to obtain the service we need.

I don't mind if people don't come to church. On the whole I accept that people do what they need to and do what is important to them. And I accept that, without judgement.

What I do have difficulty with, is people who say that the Church is important to them, but appear to treat their own participation casually and in the manner of an occasional recreational pursuit.

I don't think that this was Christ's intention in bringing the Church into being; nor was it the experience of the first Christians, that they would participate in the life of the community of faith if it was convenient and as long as no better offer came along.

I'm not so naïve as to suggest that the first stages of enthusiasm of the young Church could be

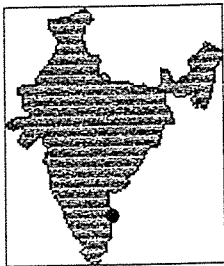
sustained. That would be like saying that a marriage of several decades duration has not got beyond the first excitement of its love, hopes and plans. But it is true that both the marriage of several decades, and the Church of twenty centuries need a sustained seriousness of commitment if they are to have life and flourish, rather than merely exist and stagnate.

Let us invoke the Spirit of Pentecost to ask ourselves what *is* possible, rather than give up and turn in on ourselves. When the hairdressers, banks and even local churches close, let us not be found with grey roots, out of pocket and with starving souls.

Martin Davies, Waipawa

Give us, O Lord, churches in our societies that will be more courageous than cautious, that will not merely "comfort the afflicted" but "afflict the comfortable", that will not only love the world but also judge the world, that will not only pursue peace but also demand justice, that will not remain silent when people are calling for a voice, that will not pass by on the other side when wounded humanity is waiting to be healed, that not only calls us to worship but also sends us out to witness, that will follow Christ even when the way points to a cross.

Christian Conference of Asia



Voices of the Voiceless

Chennai, India

12-19 November 2002

An international conference on Rural Ministry is being held in Chennai (Madras), India in November. Participants will be coming from around the world for worship, Bible study, learning and building networks.

The Conference is under the auspices of the International Rural Church Ecumenical Association and organised by the Church of South India. It promises to be an excellent conference. Preparations are well in hand.

The interface of people from western economies and cultures with people from developing countries promises to be a humbling experience bringing into focus the needs of different people and challenging the western insistence on punctuality and efficiency. The energy with which the CSI advocates the plight of Dalits (people with absolutely no status in society -

those we have previously known as untouchables) and Adivasi (tribal groups) will also be a focus.

Kim Yong-Bok of the Advanced Institute for the Study of Life (at the Asia Pacific Graduate School for the Study of Life in Hong Kong) has agreed to be Keynote Speaker.

So far two people from New Zealand have committed themselves to attend.

Introducing our representatives for the India Conference ...

Judith Milmine lives with her husband Ross on a dry land farm at Tapui, inland from Oamaru farming sheep, goats and fattening bull beef. Ross is actively working for irrigation in North Otago that will bring huge changes for their district and new challenges for the church. They are both elders in the Waitaki parish.

Judith is Worship Leader for Duntroon and leads a team of lay people who prepare all age worship once a month. She finds it a privilege being on the faith journey together, discovering peoples giftings, seeing confidence grow as people step out of their comfort zones. And it's been good to see the kids enjoying coming to church and most people actively participating.

Judith says, "I am looking forward to meeting rural people from around the world and learning from their experiences. I am sure we have experienced similar happenings of depopulation, schools closing, change of farming practices, and people too busy to be involved in the community or the church. That is the challenge!"

Robyn McPhail (the editor of this newsletter) is a parish minister based in the agricultural/ski-town of Methven, Mid-Canterbury, also working alongside a Rakaia parish. Married, with two sons at university, her roots are in rural Eastern Southland. She has spent (and enjoyed) some city time in Dunedin, but all her parish work has been with rural communities.

Robyn's past overseas experience has been one wonderful, challenging month in Sri Lanka as part of the Christian Conference of Asia's 1995 Asia Ecumenical Course. That was formative for her and makes involvement in the Rural Conference in India an appealing opportunity to meet and learn, but also somewhat daunting: "You can't escape having a white face and therefore being identified with western ways. Assumptions are made about you that are annoyingly inaccurate, but some are chastening in their accuracy."

Robyn is currently the New Zealand representative on the International Rural Church Ecumenical Association and puts study time, where possible, into rural theology along biblical themes.



Letter from Chennai - May 2002

Australian Lloyd Vidler is the Chairperson of the International Rural Church Ecumenical Association (IRCEA), the body that brokered the agreement that has the Church of South India hosting an the International Rural Conference "Voices of the Voiceless" in November this year. This is a slightly edited version of a letter he sent following a visit to work with CSI on arrangements for the Conference:

On boarding the plane at Singapore to fly to Chennai I became aware that I was one of very few pale skinned people on the flight. As most people were Hindus their meals were served first. I was glad that there was an International menu available.

I had gone to Chennai to meet with members of the Church of South India who were working on plans for the International Conference 12-19 November.

Processing through immigration was relatively smooth. Before leaving the arrivals area my hand luggage was x rayed. That was a new experience for me. But not to be compared with the security when I was leaving Chennai to come home.

As I moved outside the airport where crowds of people were gathered behind barriers I was hit by a wall of heat. Fortunately the temperature will be 23/24 degrees at the time of our conference.

I was hit by a wall of heat

- It didn't take long to recognise someone I new. I was introduced to other members of the welcoming party. My luggage was loaded into a vehicle supplied by the Synod and I was driven to the Church of South India Guest House.

The Guest House which is adjacent to the Synod Offices is a three story structure. It can house up to 100 people in twin share rooms. The rooms are fitted with two single beds. There are two desks and wardrobes for two people as well as several chairs. The floors are tiled. Each room is fitted with a ceiling fan. Before arriving in Chennai I had wondered whether the bathroom would be down the corridor. But to my great delight each room has its own ensuite. I was careful not to drink any water from the tap.

careful not to drink water from the tap

Sister Sara is Warden of the Guest House. She arranged for a cup of tea to be brought to my room each morning. One morning she invited me to have breakfast with her. On other mornings I breakfasted in the Synod dining room. The dining room and other

facilities are the physical link between the Guest House and the Synod offices.

My hosts ordered an 'English Breakfast' for me on my first day. It consisted of bread and jam sandwiches and a boiled egg. On other days I had an Indian Breakfast - rice, a vegetable sauce, cheppati or similar, there are many varieties depending on the flour used and the manner of cooking. Bananas appeared at most meals and occasionally papaya.

Other meals are normally a chicken or lamb dish cooked with curry. There is always plenty of rice. Condiments are also served but beware of the chilli. Sometimes there is a salad.

they brew their tea rather than pouring boiling water over the tea leaves

Indians are tea drinkers. I had some difficulty in getting a cup of tea which was weak enough for me. I discovered that they brew their tea rather than pouring boiling water over the tea leaves. Coffee in the Dining Room is divine. It is made with milk. There was always purified and sealed water on the table.

A short walk along a shaded access lane leads to Whites Road and into the noise and activity of people and vehicles. Autos are a cheap and popular means of transport. Painted yellow they carry three people and are metered: for a longer journey it is advisable to agree on a price before starting. Autos weave in and out of the traffic. If it is thrills that you want take a ride in an auto.

If it is thrills that you want take a ride in an auto

Within a 10 minute walk from the Guest House in the Spenser Centre. It contains many shops. I was pleased to find a Super Market (I needed a sweet biscuit) and several reputable Money Changers.

It is quite common to walk on the side of the road. The footpaths are often crowded with hawkers with some living next to their stalls.

Indian women normally wear a sari or a punjab. The saris are brightly coloured. Girls attending secondary school look very smart in uniformed punjabs. Some women wear a lot of jewellery. I saw a lady who wore ear rings, nose stud, necklace, watch, bangles, a finger ring, anklets and toe rings.

Men will sometimes wear the dress, which is common to their region, but mostly they wear shirt and trousers. Shorts are worn in the house but rarely in public.

Footwear is usually made from leather and can be easily slipped on and off as it is courteous to remove your footwear when entering a house.

Chennai has several points of interest. One of those is the tomb of St Thomas. Another is the oldest stone church east of the Suez. St Georges Cathedral, where

the Church of South India was inaugurated fifty years ago, is set in pleasant grounds.

On the waterfront, facing the beach, there are a number of prominent government buildings. The beach is a broad expanse of sand. I saw some very simple fishing boats pulled up on the shore. Some young boys have horses that can be hired and there are food stalls.

The towns are crowded. The land holdings are small.

A trip into the countryside made me aware of how different it is to anything else that I had experienced. The towns are crowded. The land holdings are small. Much of the labour is manual.

A billion people live in India. In 2001 the world's population was 6.2 billion. Only China has a larger population. It is anticipated that India will overtake China in 2050. By comparison USA has a population of 281 million.

India's diverse population is largely the result of a succession of invasions which have occurred in the long history of the subcontinent. Early invaders came from the north-west. Europeans came later by sea, and the subcontinent eventually became part of the British Empire. Independence was gained in 1947 with the partition of the country.

There are a number of languages in common use - Hindi, English, Bengali, Marathi, Telegu, Tamil, Bihari, Gujarati, Kanarese. There are many more dialects.

Every village now has a primary school but many children drop out of school to provide a supplementary income for their families. There are more than 50 million students at secondary level, and an estimated 10 million graduates from more than 200 universities.

Major political issues are: political corruption, Hindu militancy and the free market.

India's economy is undergoing radical changes

India's economy is undergoing radical changes. From a highly protectionist mixed economy, which succeeded in building a modern industrial state, India has to a large extent converted to a free market economy and is entering the global market place. Meanwhile in the rural economy people grapple with the problems of subsistence farming.

Tradition holds that the Apostle Thomas came to India in 52 AD and preached the gospel in the south of the country. Certainly a church was established in the south by the year 200. The Mar Thoma Church, the Malankara Syrian Church and the Syrian Orthodox Church all trace their origins to this ancient church. The Syrian Orthodox Church has more

members in India than anywhere else. Roman Catholics came with the Portuguese and Anglicans with the East India Co., but it was not until 18th and 19th centuries that Protestant work really began. The formation of the Church of South India in 1947 uniting Anglicans and British Methodist with an already united body of Congregationalists and Presbyterians was the first such union in the world.

The CSI presently has 2800 ministers. There are about 1200 missionaries working in CSI. There are about 3500 congregations in 21 Dioceses. The membership of CSI is about 2.8 million. The dominant mission emphasis is on the Girl Child. Evangelism, dalit and tribal concerns and education to the rural masses are other mission priorities.

The trouble with being punctual is that nobody's there to appreciate it.

A Wake-up Call to the Whole Church?



A Personal Opinion Part 2

The first part of this article appeared in the March 2002 edition of Rural Network News. If you do not have a copy, and would like one, contact the editor.

From the late 1970's smallholding has been the focus of considerable research attention from a variety of institutions, with some attempts to distinguish between lifestylers, hobby farmers, and the serious smallfarmer. Work by John Fairweather and Nicola Robertson focussed on properties between 0.04 and 20 hectares. However Ian and Diane Grant imply that smallfarming seems to be defined by an attitude of mind rather than a given number of hectares.

In the last quarter-century... the number of small-holdings has tripled

In the last quarter-century in New Zealand the number of small-holdings has tripled. An article in the Wellington Evening Post, 18 October 2001 headed "Lifestyle properties outnumber farms in NZ" contains the information that the number of lifestyle blocks in New Zealand is now much higher than the total number of farms, according to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. These land-use changes are forecast to continue at the expense of traditional sheep and beef properties.

The article quotes Bayleys Country, part of the Bayleys Realty Group, attributing the popularity of lifestyle blocks in part to greater job flexibility aided by technology advancement. This allows urban people

to reside and work from home in the country while still being within comfortable distance of the main business centres. Rural land is described as becoming both an attractive investment and desirable living option.

Rural land is both an attractive investment and desirable living option

Research by Fairweather and Robertson shows that the majority of smallholders are seeking lifestyle (peace, quiet, clean air, privacy, and country living) although a minority emphasise producing. However nearly two-thirds of the smallholders they surveyed (with a 40k radius of Christchurch) did not receive any income from their land at present. Horticulture was the most frequently anticipated new land use. The clear intention of most was to stay on their smallholding in the long-term. Most were "family-aged" (30-50) with professional, managerial or skilled work, typically located in Christchurch. Often both partners were working, both on and off the property. Most shopped in Christchurch. Many stated that they did not want close neighbours.

The effect of smallholding on rural society has so far been studied much less than matters relating to land-use change. Rising school rolls in some areas are however an indicator of significant change because of the influx of smallholders' children. Attitudes have changed too. In the early years, there was at times amusement, suspicion and even downright hostility (a typical comment was "these townies are playing at farming and will soon move on"). In fact many established smallholders are now active members of community groups and have brought new skills and experiences into districts where such input may have been much needed.

many established smallholders are now active members of community groups

However after at least three decades of this movement, what has not been much researched is the impact of these changes on the social fabric of rural community life. Perhaps the churches have stories to tell. Perhaps local church people have learned through trial and error how to work alongside those whose values and dreams seem very different.

The church through centuries of experience understands social fabric, it also knows about change, about mutual support, and about what it means to identify with something wider than the small local area. That knowledge may turn out to be crucial in the ongoing challenges of this movement.

One of the hardest aspects is that not all small-farmers are engaging with the local community. Ministry in many rural areas today is frustrated by the reality that the base community for many remains the

city, including the city church if there is any church connection at all. Lack of availability at conventional church service times, very busy mobile lives and apparently different interests are making it hard for local church people to engage with the new residents.

Many rural churches are alarmed by these changes – and perhaps have been paralysed by the challenge that has already been around for some years through the smallholding movement. I wonder if the dairying phenomenon is yet another a wake-up call, a reminder that ministry is contextual however much that context has changed from the familiar.

the call is not just rural but to the whole church

But I am convinced that the call is not just rural but to the whole church. Urban New Zealand can and does become oblivious of rural life as farming has slipped from its central place in the economy. However as church we must retain a different and wider perspective. What happens in rural areas is not to be divided off from the wider church. The healthy life of rural communities continues to be the business of the church. Theologically we must be engaged with each other where there is a response of suspicion to difference. Many dairy workers are town people wanting to get into farming by working hard. Their mobility after a few years seeds experience and new ideas around the country. Inaccessibility to traditional ministry approaches can inspire the church to do what it has done in the past, seek new and creative ways to be the people of God. The relationship of people and place in ministry is never static. The small-farmers who retain their strong links with the city can remind us powerfully, if mutely, that "rural ministry" is a concern for the whole church, city and country-dwellers alike. We are too small a country for the concerns and life of the areas outside the cities to be left only to those who live in these places.

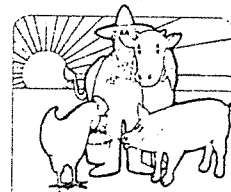
Resources:

Assumptions vs. Reality – Smallholders in Canterbury: Characteristics, Motivations, Land Use, and Intentions to Move by John R. Fairweather and Nicola J. Robertson, (Research Report No.245 Agribusiness and Economics Research Unit, Lincoln University: October 2000).

The Smallfarming Revolution – New beginnings in rural New Zealand by Ian and Diane Grant, (Viking Books 1998)

The Evening Post, 18 October 2001, Edition 3, p.21.

Jenny Dawson, Ministry Educator, Christchurch



Women and the rural church: what keeps them connected?

News from the Hawkes Bay

This was the theme for the Hawkes Bay Rural Ministry Unit's meeting in March. With Tom Libby and Bill Bennett as facilitators the meeting heard from two rural women - **Neddie Clark** from Porangahau Mission District and **Jo Crosse** from Weber Mission District. Both areas have no stipendiary ministers.

Jo lives in a community with only one worship centre where services held monthly, while Neddie's church community is more diverse, including Maori and Pakeha, Anglican, Presbyterian and Pentecostal services, with worship in at least one place in the township every Sunday.

Women have very full lives - bringing up children, working on the farm with their husbands/partners or working in an urban centre, as well as joining in or even organising community events (golf, galas, school activities, dinners, luncheons, etc.)

Jo commented: Rural women have strong sense of local identity. They support their local church even though they may not attend. While many rural organisations have closed three remain a strong focus for the community: school, church and local hall.

Jo did some research with regard to connectedness to the local church and reported that the answer for some is indeed "God". They attend the local church, no matter what their denominational tradition; they will also travel to a larger town church occasionally for 'deeper feeding' or in the church of their birth.

The Weber ministry team has a strong sense of local ownership, with a strong core group who plan and sustain worship, and are known by the wider community for this role.

Children help bring the adults back to church. The church provides opportunities to deal with children's big questions about life, and parents' concerns about parenthood, along with their sense of thankfulness for children.

The question of pastoral care and visiting has been a vexed issue for the local church. The Weber district now employs someone to make pastoral visits on the basis of 10 hours per week.

Jo sees rural women as hard-working, self-reliant, independent and technologically up-to-date. Women are practical, preferring to have a job to do, but they like to be asked rather than act spontaneously, and they prefer to avoid meetings!

Neddie suggested that the word 'rural' in relation to women allows for a broad definition - living 35-100 kms from town, having two and a half children, finding their leisure away from the farm,

working on or off the farm, working in the town or the community or as volunteers. Children dominate their agenda, whether as mothers or grandmothers.

Women have variable roles, as part of the farm team with their husbands or partners, and they are on-call for other, often unexpected jobs, for example as rousie for the day, or helping muster and drench. Whenever they're in town to get groceries there's always a list of farm items requested by the husband.

A lot of women have urban backgrounds and see their role as a chosen lifestyle. They are usually well-organised, independent, creative and resourceful.

Most felt they are part of the faith community even if they never attend. The church is where they feel supported and nourished, and make contact with others. Many women don't bring children or husbands to church. Neddie commented that 75% of rural people want a Christian burial.

Rural crises have been the basis of women's church and community involvement. Women belong to a variety of community organisations. In addition, though, many children go to boarding school and its activities draw them to those school events on a regular basis.

During the discussion that followed Jo and Neddie's input, it was noted that many rural parents are encouraging their children to take up something other than farming, because they consider the future viability and profitability of farming to be uncertain. The average age of farmers in the district is therefore about 60 years and these are the people striving to keep local organisations alive.

There is much less leisure time taken at home and fewer members of one's extended family living nearby, so families are travelling much more to town facilities and for recreation.

In farming key priorities include the weather and availability of contractors. It is hard to make definite commitments ahead. The demands of farming can make it a 24 hour commitment.

A real issue is ensuring a continuity of faith and worship, especially if worship is only once a month. Other alternatives are Sunday School planning and teaching, Bible study groups, Bible in Schools, the parish newsletter and special events (e.g. Porangahau's Gospel Sing).

Both identified a key need regarding religious faith, namely, *ongoing spiritual nourishment for those who are involved in leadership and are always giving out to others.*

Going to a spiritual director is found to be valuable, and e-mails are a way to provide spiritual nourishment, especially in times of stress.

Thank you to Jo and Neddie for their input and to the Hawkes Bay Rural Unit for this report.

Familiar problem - no organist?

A story called "Donny's Dilemma"

When our organist/choir director retired after thirty two years of service, the congregation did two things. They looked for a replacement. And they decided that, since more children than ever were taking music lessons, they needed to give the young people opportunity to have hands-on experience.

The "new" music leader was a piano teacher who lived in the country, and belonged to a different church. But she readily agreed to offer her leadership in exchange for the use of the church as a place to teach her students. That worked very well.

Then we invited every music student, regardless of age, to "play for us" every time they had something appropriate. The youngest could come forward during story time. The older ones might like to play as the offering was being received.

He was too nervous!

Seven-year-old Donny, well-known for the devilment he could create at any moment, was one of our first youthful candidates to volunteer (or maybe it was mum who made the offer). By the time my story ended, Donny's courage waned. He was too nervous!

But he never left with the others for Sunday School. He stayed hunched in the pew, nervously fingering his music book. During the hymn, I got the signal he would play. By the end of the hymn, it was no go. The same thing happened as the sermon ended. And again after the Pastoral Prayer.

After the benediction Donny harnessed his courage. We sat in anticipation. With the generous encouragement of his teacher he played "Jesus Loves Me". A few years later Donny went to the piano with confidence to play the offertory.



Small communities have such wonderful opportunities for encouraging all of us to develop our talents. Because Donny conquered those first nervous jitters, that would do him well as he moved into manhood.

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

Suburbia is where the developer bulldozes out the trees, then names the streets after them.

FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE BARREL

All the Christian denominations were having a big ecumenical meeting in a church. Suddenly, lightning struck and the church caught on fire!

* The Methodists gathered in a corner and prayed for the fire to go out.

* The Baptists gathered in a different corner and prayed for rain.

* The Quakers gathered for silent meditation on the many benefits of fire.

* The Lutherans nailed a list of the ninety-five evils of fire to the church door.

* The Catholics passed the collection plate a second and third time to pay for the damage.

* The Episcopalians gathered up their incense and formed a dignified processional out the door.

* The Fundamentalists declared that the fire was God's just wrath on everybody else.

* The Presbyterians elected a committee to study the problem.

* And the Congregationalists shouted "Everyone for themselves!" and ran for the doors.

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.

The Ponnai Dam Festival

Harvest Thanksgiving in India

I recall, as a child, harvest festivals that were grand displays of the produce grown by people grew on their farms, in their back yards or made in their kitchens. The Sale of Goods which usually followed on the Monday evening brought the congregation together for an event at which some items were sold far above any reasonable value.

But I have also lived to see the day when Harvest Festivals have degenerated into displays of tinned fruit and canned vegetables. The connection with the land has been over taken by reference to the factory.

Recently I attended the Ponnai Dam Festival in India. The dam is several hours west of Chennai (Madras). The Ida Scudder Memorial Hospital and Vellore Hospital are in the general region.

The Festival was inaugurated 105 years ago. It was suggested by a missionary who was conscious that Hindus converting to Christianity lost their festivals. It is primarily an occasion for people to bring their offerings and to express their gratitude to God for the fruits of the harvest.

People gather at about 4 o'clock in the afternoon although many arrive before that. The people are very welcoming and open. There is a spirit of goodwill and gait. Most bring their own food and a small bundle of wood to make a fire for cooking. They simply lay a piece of cloth on the ground and settle down as

families. There are also stalls from which food and other items may be purchased.

The torch procession, led by tribal drummers, and the fireworks display maintain something of the festival atmosphere.

Stirring preaching continues almost unabated. When it does stop dramatic enactments of Biblical stories, prepared by villagers, commence on a different stage.

While all of this is in progress people are quietly making their offerings of thanksgiving. I was asked to meet and pray with one such family.

As the night wears on and people become weary they lie down where they are and take a rest.

At 4:30am on Sunday Holy Communion is celebrated. By about about midday people begin to make their way back to their villages and homes.

It is difficult to find words to describe the atmosphere, the press of bodies, the noise of conversation, the colour, the smells. But if I tell you that twenty two thousand people were present that may help.

The dependence of these village people on the vagaries of weather, and the other hazards of farming, make the festival a very important event. It underlines that, while labour may contribute to the development of a crop, there is always a providence on which the farmer depends. And we call that gracious Spirit, God.

Lloyd Vidler, Bowral, Vic, Australia

Update on Resources

Books you can buy

(1) Vision New Zealand (1999) *Rural Churches Sharing Good News with Rural Communities* (available from PCANZ, P O Box 9049, Wellington. Price \$5)

(2) The following TransTasman Rural Ministry Conference Reports can be purchased from the Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit, 7 Owens Terrace, Christchurch 8004. (The price is \$12 including postage in each case. Cheques to be made out to *Diocese of Christchurch*)

Stuart, Julia (1992) *Rural Realities: Creation or Chaos*. Waipawa.

Stuart, Julia (1996) *An Ecological Vision for the Rural Church*. Myrtleford,

Cant, Garth, Chris Honore and Dave Mullan (2000) *Country Conversations*. Northland.

(3) Bennett, Bill (1997) *Listen to the Shepherd: Whakarongo ki te Kupu*. and (2001) *Seasons of the Land: People's Prayers for Town and Country*, both Church Mouse Press. (These publications, along with the JBCE items listed below, can be purchased from Epworth Books, P O Box 6133, Wellington 0800755355, e-mail: sales@epworthbooks.org.nz.

Books you can borrow

You can borrow any of the following books from the Rural Ministry Unit (contact Garth Cant, 7 Owens Tce, Christchurch 8004, or garth@geog.canterbury.ac.nz, unless otherwise indicated):

Bearers of Hope: Report of the Rural Ministry Conference of Australian and New Zealand Churches (1988), Kyogle, NSW

Bell, Anthony (2001) *The Church Upside Down*, Diocese of Christchurch. (An Anglican visitor reflects on a New Zealand visit)

Bowden, Andrew (1994) *Ministry in the Countryside*. Mowbray, England. (Available from Jenny Dawson).

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The man climbs to the top of the snow-covered mountain. He is wondering, "Can God really hear me from here?" So he yells: "God, what should I do with my life?"
"Feed the hungry, strive for justice, work for peace," says a huge voice from somewhere.
"Oh," said the man. "I was just testing."
"I know," said the voice. "So was I."

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