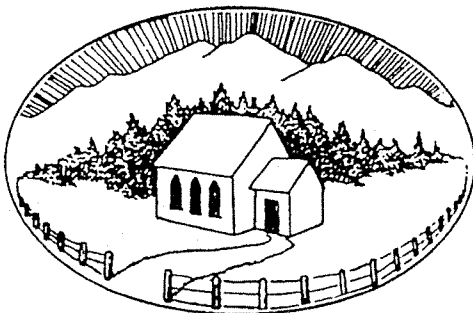


Rural Network News



No. 24

August 2003

Youth looks ahead
old age looks back
middle age looks tired

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.

Farm Setting for Cultural Learning

“Women’s Ecology and Wholeness Farm” is an organic farm in Mendez, Cavite (two or three hours south of Manila, depending on traffic). It was the base for an eight-day event in March called Women Doing Theology (WDT), organised by the World Student Christian Federation Asia-Pacific (WSCF-AP). I was one of 17 women attending from 11 countries in our region - from Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Korea, Bangladesh, India, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, the Philippines, Australia and Aotearoa/NZ. Attending as a Senior Friend of the Student Christian Movement Aotearoa I enjoyed making friends and learning of the issues effecting women in their respective countries.

The 1.2 ha farm, run by the Institute of Women’s Studies with seven employees (mostly women), is an inspiring place. On the land there was a prayer hut, two main accommodation buildings (one Japanese inspired), a herbal garden, butterfly garden, and mendella garden, in addition to a diverse range of plants, trees, and palms that were producing food using organic fertilizers.

Flying into Manila had already given me a very visual picture of the small-scale intensive nature of the Filipino farming in contrast to Aotearoa/NZ. Most of the food we ate was grown on the farm and the rest was organic food bought locally.

The programme included community building, exposure, Bible studies, feminist theology, impact and relevance of Asian feminist theology on SCM / WSCF and finishing in Manila for an anti-war rally and an international women’s day rally. Manila was an incredible contrast to the slower paced, tranquil, higher altitude and cooler setting of the farm.

Exposure was a very humbling experience as we stayed with and met people who were internal refugees from Mindoro Island; they had fled their homeland and the Filipino military in fear of their lives. Their camp, named Kanlungan (meaning shelter) is at the back of a university and seminary college, which has an active SCM unit, Senior Friends, and church people supporting them. We met a cross-section of the 130 individuals (85 of these are children) and heard stories from their leader, a pastor, and some of the women as well as sharing in their daily routines at Kanlungan. The first night we were there the children and women put on a cultural night - only the women spoke (which was unc customary) in honour of International Women’s Day and because we were a group of women visitors.

Learning about feminist theology from an Asian perspective was enlightening, particularly in the context of the Philippines and poverty. Asian feminist theology challenged my Pakeha existence, situated comfortably in the Pacific, as a South Island resident of Aotearoa/New Zealand, fourth generation immigrant of Scottish Presbyterian heritage. There are many layers of my current context still to be explored. I loved the bridges that were so easily formed with my Asian sisters yet, at times, there was real uneasiness at our differences.

I am amazed at how ten days living in another culture can change one’s perspective on life; I came home wanting a simpler life. I am still working out how to achieve that, but I trust as the months unfold that this inner journey will continue. The learning is just beginning.

Nicola Robertson, Christchurch

RIB TICKLER

There’s no longer much fear instilled by the old biblical phrase “The wages of sin is death.”
After taxes on those wages, the only thing left is a slightly tired feeling.

from RUMORS email newsletter © Ralph Milton There’s no charge to subscribe to RUMORS. Send an email message to rums@joinhands.com with SUBSCRIBE in the subject line.

Trans-Tasman 2004

The next Trans Tasman Rural Ministry Conference will be held in the beautiful Clare Valley, South Australia, from 27 September to 1 October 2004.

Trans Tasman Rural Ministry Conferences are held every four years alternating between New Zealand and Australia. "Recapturing Passion for the Local Church" is the theme of next year's event.

The conference is an ecumenical event which welcomes all people with a passion for rural ministry. The 2004 event has a lively, varied and thought provoking programme which includes Exposure Tours, Ministry Conversations, a Welcome Reception, Conference Dinner, opportunity for story telling, a multimedia session and time for sharing other resources.

CONFERENCE COSTS

Anticipated to be a maximum of \$300 (AUD).

PROGRAMME

The draft Trans Tasman Conference programme is designed to appeal with a variety of encouraging ministry and community events to give opportunities for discovery and growth.

Day 1 Monday September 27

Lunch, welcome, worship, community building, Welcome Reception and panel of local speakers on "Signs of hope in the rural community".

Day 2 Tuesday September 28

Worship, Exposure Tours, debrief, free time, Conference dinner and key note speaker.

EXPOSURE TOURS

Designed to allow conference participants to experience aspects of life, work and church in the Clare Valley and surrounds, with a view to:

1. Having a shared experience of the joys and problems of life in the region.
2. Seeing God at work in the lives of individual Christians and the local churches.
3. Gaining greater insights into the role of the local church in the rural area.

On registration, participants will be offered a choice of 5 tours. They need to nominate them in order of preference, and there may be some disappointments as the buses will need to be evenly filled. Each tour will visit 3 places, stopping somewhere for lunch.

Day 3 Wednesday September 29

Worship, Bible Study, Theme Conversations, free time, multi media session "Passion Recaptured".

THEME CONVERSATIONS

Groups will meet with a facilitator. Each conversation will be offered twice so that participants will participate in 2 out of 5. The purpose is to share experiences,

reflect theologically together, to discern appropriate action, and to pray together.

Day 4 Thursday September 30

Worship, Bible Study, Ministry Matter Conversations, free time, small group conversations, 'Show & Tell'

MINISTRY MATTER CONVERSATIONS

Groups will meet with a guest who will provide a point for conversation around ministry and the community. Participants will engage in up to three of these conversations.

'SHOW AND TELL'

This is YOUR opportunity to share stories, resources and experiences from your church and/or community. We will receive expressions of interest for this session. More details upon registration.

Day 5 Friday October 1

Action denominational groups, closing worship, lunch departures

TRAVEL

Conference participants will be responsible for their own travel arrangements and costs. Adelaide has:

- o an international airport
- o interstate rail terminal
- o interstate coach terminal

As Clare is approximately 2 hours drive north of Adelaide, the organisers will provide a coach to transport conference participants to Clare. The coach will depart from Adelaide at 0900 hours on Monday September 27.

For people using their own vehicles, ample free parking is available adjacent to the conference site.

ACCOMMODATION

Visitors have two main options for accommodation.

1. Billeting - this will be with local church families and will be arranged through the conference organising committee. Further details later.
2. Local accommodation of various forms (hotel, motel, cabins, B&B, caravan park). Visitors who choose alternate accommodation will need to make their own bookings, at their own expense.

Contact: Clare Valley Visitor Centre, Town Hall, 229 Main North Road, Clare 5453 (accommodation booking service open 7 days) Phone: 61 8 8842 2131

Email: ask@clarevalley.com.au

Website: www.clarevalley.com.au

CONFERENCE VENUE

Worship, plenary sessions and small group opportunities will be held at St Joseph's Catholic School, Victoria Rd, Clare.

Contact: Peter Gill, Hill River Road, Spalding SA 5454
pnjgill@chariot.net.au and watch for updates at:
www.missionresourcing.net.au/index.cgi?tid=67

New Neighbours

Change in our rural communities is brought about by a variety of things including irrigation and the dairy industry, wine growing and the exodus from the cities for life-stylers with business capital in their pockets. Traditional norms have shifted and communities need new ways of interacting with newcomers.

An Ecumenical Forum held at the Kurow Presbyterian Church in late March devoted its afternoon session to this issue. Groups looked at the impact on agriculture, environment and church and the challenges of the changing scene in the south, with discussion facilitated by Graeme Nicholas and informative input from McGregor Simpson, Garth Cant and Jolyon Manning. Ideas were shared willingly with the afternoon concluding all too quickly. It was so good to be rural church people engaging in realistic but also positive conversation together.

At the beginning of the day I thought we'd arrived at the golf club rather than the church. It was Saturday morning and quite a line-up of cars outside. Inside people had gathered from Wanaka, Alexandra, Cromwell, Oamaru, Maheno, the Waitaki Valley, Kurow, Waihao, Waimate and Temuka. Presenters had also come from Christchurch, Methven and Geraldine. It had been worth getting out of bed early!

The morning session warmed us to our local task: excellent reports from Robyn McPhail and Judith Milmine on the 2nd International Rural Church Ecumenical Association Conference in South India put our small concerns into global perspective. We learnt about the continued impact of the caste system on village life and the devaluing of the girl-child, difficulties in breaking traditional patterns alongside hopeful stories of the Kasam Agricultural Institute and church Training Centres for young women. We shared in worship from the Conference, in music, prayers and Bible study which spoke to us all, videos and data presentations helping weave an inspiring report. We heard that the internet is proving a valuable tool for rural ministry, in encouraging friends from different continents through the International Association. We are proud that Robyn now chairs this international rural network.

Rosie Staite, Waimate

The Protestant minister was visiting his friend, a Roman Catholic priest. Sitting around in the rectory, the minister remarked at how excellent and spacious was the priest's home.

"It works this way, my friend," said the priest. "Protestant clergy have their better halves, but us Catholics have better quarters."

From RUMORS email newsletter © Ralph Milton

International Points for Prayer

Some excerpts from an e-mail prayer link of the International Rural Church Ecumenical Association

In late June from Alison Young in Victoria, Australia:

"Still drought problems here and farmers who were burnt out [in the fires] are really having a tough time especially as much fencing was burnt and wild dogs now have free access to unprotected stock. Farmers from our areas travel to the burnt areas and spend a couple of days fencing every 3 to 4 weeks. This has been a special time as not only does it take their minds off our drought problems but it allows them to talk through problems with those worse off. There is always something good that comes from bad."

A Neighborhood Economics Workshop was held in Missouri, USA on June 21. Beforehand, Dave Ruesink commented:

"Our current economic theory talks about the allocation of scarce resources in a free market economy. It talks about a private sector engaged in free enterprise and a public sector to control the private sector. Public and private values are about the MasterCard values, commodities that can be bought and sold. What about safety, security, reciprocity, felicity and other moral and social values? The purpose of this workshop is to raise questions about the values that drive our economy and make the argument that there is a third sector in our economy, a neighborhood sector that embraces these priceless values.

"Neighborhood values go beyond neighbourhood boundaries. Doing to others as you have them do to you is a universal value.

(www.neighborhoodeconomics.net/)"

From the United Kingdom:

A new edition of "Ministry in the Countryside", with a new introductory chapter, has just been published by Continuum London (www.continuumbooks.com).

At a time when everyone seems to want a say in the future of our countryside and when more and more people want to live in villages, the future of the Rural Church seems paradoxically more precarious than ever. This, IRCEA founder member Andrew Bowden argues, is because we are obsessed with the need for paid, seminary-trained ministers. Where local congregations are buckling to and 'doing it themselves' the Rural Church flourishes.

Andrew also brings news of work in the Diocese of Gloucester to develop a pastoral strategy. He encourages them to be honest and realistic in the task, but also to start from the community with a committed group of Christians at its heart, rather than the stipendiary clergy. Let's pray with Andrew for strategies in our churches "based on a positive offer to help to re-fashion rural congregations". "This," he says "would find a ready acceptance in some of the more 'difficult' areas - and has a real hope of turning 'problem' into missionary 'success'."

Boarding School Faith

Church Schools and Rural Parish Life

The issue of Religious Education and Worship at Church Schools and their Relationship with Rural Parish Life led the Hawkes' Bay Rural Ministry Unit to hold its May meeting at Lindisfarne College, a Presbyterian integrated college for boys at Hastings.

The day was hosted by Warren and Ann Fortune. Warren is school chaplain at Lindisfarne, a College with a roll of 450, two thirds of whom are day students. Ann is school chaplain at Hereworth School, Havelock North, an Anglican preparatory boarding school for boys with a roll of 180.

The discussion was driven by questions like:

- What is the school chaplain's role?
- What is its significance in the life of the school?
- What shapes the chaplain's religious teaching?
- What faith/life issues concern students today?
- How does this influence the planning of school worship?
- What is the relationship between students, their families and the home church, and how are these links fostered?
- Given the de-institutionalisation of the Church and pluralistic values in a world of rapid communication, education and mobility, what religious styles will characterise the lives of these students as they grow up?

CHAPLAIN'S ROLE

Ann, as chaplain for the last five and a half years, pinpointed **pastoral care** as the dominant ministry role, much of which occurs in the chaplain's own time. Of the 180 boys very few know the Lord's Prayer or have experienced worship. They are not from "church" homes so this ministry extends to their families, who have no home parish links. The other roles are **religious instruction** and **leading chapel worship**. Warren saw his role as identical to Ann's. Each agreed that most of the teaching staff have not had a Christian upbringing, although it is expected they will be in sympathy with the school's ethos and character, and are expected to attend chapel along with the students. However both said that RI is often sacrificed in favour of significant school or sporting events.

PROFILE IN THE SCHOOL

Chaplains are seen as fellow staff members among their colleagues and both Warren and Ann have strong support from their Principals. They see themselves as sowing seeds – bringing a knowledge and experience of Christianity and other world religions as well as helping boys grow in self-affirmation.

When a student suicide occurred some years ago, it caused a ripple for some time and highlighted the importance of pastoral care for the boys and the need to

develop a climate of trust. Pupils know that that they can come to see the chaplain at any time.

FAITH/LIFE ISSUES

Ann ministers to boys aged 7-12 years, most of whom are self-indulged. "When they have all material things, why worship God? Because Christianity's validity is based on faith and human experience it is a challenge for the chaplain to help them look further".

Warren said, "Don't underestimate, however, what children think". He has regular services when students deliver the message at school worship, and their insights are impressive. He never lacks volunteers. They are growing up in an individualistic society, subject to peer pressure, yet he is amazed at what they are prepared to do.

Breige Rendell (Anglican Youth Ministries) spoke of how the school can build bridges with the wider community, especially socially depressed communities. This is a way of empowering the less privileged. Hospital Chaplain Heather Flavell commented on the help given by Lindisfarne students to patients needing assistance to get to hospital chapel worship. Warren said that 75% of the intermediate age group, though academically bright, felt no responsibility to the less fortunate. For him it was a matter of presenting the challenge of social justice, using such models as Bishop Tutu. Mother Teresa or Martin Luther King.

Caroline Lampp, a member of the Board of Governors, spoke of the pressure to deliver other curricula plus sporting events, all putting constraints on consistent RI delivery.

CONNECTING SCHOOL AND HOME CHURCH

Because students respond to the sophistication of modern media, chaplains keep pace by ensuring their RI presentation is dynamic, with extensive use of audiovisuals. If students go to church in their home environment - with church often just a handful of people - they get the impression that the home church is boring. There is simply a gap between expectation and reality, a reality that has often changed little over recent decades. It fails to engage their curiosity and excitement, and can even fail to relate personally to them. Warren said, "The boys will accept you for what you are". In contrast Ann recalled taking 40 students to a local parish, but no welcome or hospitality was offered. It is essential that if we want children in church then the church needs to be welcoming and contemporary.

The chaplains find it difficult to encourage pupils' families to connect with the parish family, especially where there has been no history of local involvement or experience of congregational life. For many the school chapel gives them their only link with church. In the light of this, neither Warren nor Ann have a policy of communicating with home ministers in every situation.

Despite that fact that the pupils are usually not church-oriented back in their home setting, the schools do surprisingly well in spiritual terms. There were attendances of 250-300 regularly at chapel worship at Lindisfarne, often with family present. Pastoral care extends beyond the school gate and chaplains often officiate at weddings, baptisms and funerals because of these family links through their children. Hereworth has 30 weddings a year.

THE FUTURE

The chaplains agree that their ministry challenges them in their own faith journey, but it leaves them frustrated with the slowness of the wider Church to change and match the hopes and expectations of this growing generation. The Church offers a culture that is congregational, while School culture offers a perception of students as important as individuals. The school chaplain is seen as a friend, offering an unconditional kind of love and this can have added relevance when parents separate.

CONCLUSION

The role of school chaplain is as demanding and as specialised as that of parish minister. Chaplains work in a mission frontier environment of pastoral care, Christian education and worship facilitating. Students and staff are predominantly from backgrounds where active church-going is a rarity. Chaplains confront the students, many of whom come from materially comfortable backgrounds, with some of life's disturbing questions and paradoxes. In such a context the students do grow in self-knowledge and awareness of the wider world and in turn can offer challenging insights to their peers about the world they live in.

Hawkes Bay Rural Ministry Unit

Life in community is both a pain and a protection: a pain because I can't always have my own way, and a protection so that I won't always have my own way.

Anon.

Country Gospel Services

About eight years ago our minister and key leaders attended a number of Leadership and Church Growth Seminars. We were looking at ways we could bridge the gap between the church and community around us. We became convinced that we had to make a number of changes in the way we presented the gospel, if the church was going to survive in the future.

Our goal was to make Jesus Christ known in the community and we commenced by planning a number of services relating to secular celebrations, e.g. Mothers' Day, Fathers' Day, Valentine's Day, and encouraged members to bring non-church friends and

family along. Next we took a look at our music and looked around our congregation to see what musical talents we had and started to draw people into a group. It was amazing how our young people, learning guitar, flute, etc. responded to forming a band. At this stage it was clear that we were going nowhere unless we put in a good sound system to amplify our instruments and vocalists.

Over the years young people have come and gone but the band has gone from strength to strength, with the addition of a few mature singers and musicians who have given the group stability. Having identified music as a key way of bridging the gap between the church and secular society we started looking around to see how other churches were making music relevant to people outside the church. A group from our church visited a city church attracting a big following with its Country Gospel Services. Energised by the music and the people's response to it our group felt this was something we could do. Drawing on a member's contacts in the local Country Music community, we set about organising our first service.

That was four years ago. From the success of the first night, when the church was filled to overflowing, word has spread and we fill the church three times a year with music and songs that communicate with people both inside and outside the church.

It is important to plan well and approach singers and musicians three to six months ahead of schedule. The theme is an early decision and conveyed to the musicians. The outreach committee has input on the choice of songs for everyone to sing, making sure they are well known and suitable, then gives the group freedom to choose the remainder. We suggest a short introduction to each song – how it speaks to them or why they choose it and this is often an opportunity to speak of one's faith.

About sixteen songs with a prayer and a reflection take about 1½ hours which we've found to be a good time frame. Supper is always popular afterwards.

Four years down the track from our first Country Gospel Service we are now able to provide the music on our own, but it is still good to have a slot for guest artists. There have been occasional uncertainties and frustrations in putting together a service, but these are minor. People keep coming because they enjoy the music, can actively participate and feel uplifted by the experience. We keep encouraging our members to bring a friend or neighbour with them. We pray that God will use this vehicle to reach people in our community and reveal his love for them.

Vivienne Coulter, Ashburton

Opportunities always look bigger going than coming.

Change - Threat or Opportunity?

RURAL FORUM AT DUNTROON

Around 55 people gathered in the Duntroon Public Hall on 3 July 2003 for a Forum on Change – Threat or Opportunity? “Project Aqua” brings proposals for enormous change in the Waitaki Valley and surrounding areas.

A huge canal and six power stations are planned and if project Aqua goes ahead it will mean significant disruption for about six years. People may have to move out of their homes during the construction phase because of dust and noise. A lot of land is needed for the huge canal and valuable farming land is being bought and farms reconfigured. As well, resource consents are being sought for water from the river for irrigation.

Uncertainty is having a major impact

At the same time as this possibility is looming communities are being faced with forced school closures. Uncertainty is having a major impact at the same time as this possibility is looming on our community right now and, because of the stress being generated by all the proposed changes, it was felt that perhaps the Church could organise a Forum that would provide helpful strategies to deal with change.

David Wilson, Community Employment Adviser, was the facilitator for the day and began by asking what makes a community and what were our expectations of the day.

Neville Langrish, Branch Manager Pyne Gould Guinness, was the opening speaker and he outlined the changes agriculture had faced in the past, both in terms of land use, the effects of droughts and irrigation etc. The price for expanding irrigation could be high and affect the viability of some properties.

“The key was not making hasty decisions”

“It is important not to put the farm or family at risk by excessive borrowing. The key was not making hasty decisions, signing documents and then stressing out about it. Think about it, seek all the advice you can and make informed decisions”.

Four people then shared their personal stories of how they dealt with change and the forum appreciated that this was not easy for them.

- *Struan Munro's* family saw their properties inundated by Waitaki, Aviemore and Benmore Dams. In those days there was no Resource Management Act to fall back on. What the Ministry of Works and Crown said happened. The changes his family faced caused major disruptions in relationships, along with the frustrations of dealing

with a Crown entity that kept changing the rules. Compared to today, compensation for land, home, woolshed, yards etc lost to the lakes, was pittance.

- *Janet Brown* from Duntroon spoke about how she was getting her life back on track and then along comes Project Aqua which is likely to affect her home. She has tried to look for small blessings, and to keep a sense of humour and sense of proportion in her life.
- *Mary Anderson* from Livingstone outlined some devastating things that happened in her life. Fear can stop you making decisions, it is often fear of the unknown that is worse than the actual carrying out of the decision. Family is more important than material possessions. Her priorities in life are having a sense of humour, a sense of responsibility, looking after your health and your spiritual needs.
- *Frank Vivier*, a Zimbabwe immigrant, spoke of events leading up to his selling the family farm when squatters moved onto it, and eventually coming to New Zealand to begin a new life on the Maniototo. People here have been very supportive. Changes can be traumatic but you can be surprised how well they turn out. His advice was to look after your loved ones, they cannot be replaced.

Guest Speaker Dr Merv Dickinson, a psychologist and Leadership consultant from Christchurch, spoke about “Keys to personal resilience in the face of disruptive change”.

Whether we like it or not, there is constant change in our lives.

Whether we like it or not, there is constant change in our lives. We can accept, respond and sometimes rejoice in it, or we can dig our heels in, resist it, get swept along and lose a sense of control over our lives. Farmers are endlessly dealing with factors they can't control. They can't afford to sit around too long feeling sorry for themselves.

We face change from the cutting of the umbilical cord to the coffin. When we stop adapting to change our life is over. Type D people focus on Danger Type O people focus on opportunity. In the light of this Merv talked about strategies for dealing with change.

Catering was provided by Waitaki Parish for a gold coin donation and that provided time for folk to talk.

Another Forum is to be held to continue the process of constructive response to change.

Judith Milmine, Duntroon

Experience is a wonderful thing. It helps you to recognize a mistake when you make it again.

Sulawesi: Invitation to Partnership

From the smallest congregations in the Kulawi area to the Bupati (elected head of regional government) in Tana Toraja the question was the same: "can you be our partners?"

"We have needs that we want to address and believe you can help. New Zealand is good at agriculture and we want to build on traditional ways using modern farming skills so that we can stop being so poor. Could a New Zealand farmer come from your congregation, look at our situation, teach us better methods and help us get technology that will match our needs and our resources?"

95-97% of members of the congregations I visited in Central and South Sulawesi, Indonesia, between 18 and 24 July are peasant farmers. Welcomes at each place were warm and refreshing, with hospitality at every point (including yummy *kolak* – banana, coconut milk and palm sugar!). The interaction was probing with questions about NZ agriculture and requests for help.

"We need money to finish our church," say the Kulawi Samaria congregation, who began building in 1966 and have 30% to go, and the Manggu congregation of Toraja who plan to complete the tower this year, the ceiling next year and the floor the year after. "We need a suspension bridge to join the two parts of our congregation," say the Kulawi Salua congregation, so people can get access when the river is in flood. And the Kulawi Sione congregation needs a library to educate themselves in faith and farming.

"Can my wife come to New Zealand to learn English, living with a family for six months and helping them in some way?" asked Gede, the pastor in Kulawi. "Can you find sponsorship so I can attend the English language course in Bali?" asked Ketut who is pastor for the poorest, most isolated congregations dotted around a west coast cape near the equator. Water, education and health are the priorities in more isolated areas. When it is impossible for children to attend school beyond the elementary level there is little chance of community development and improvement in anyone's circumstances.

These people all recognise that what is most valuable is their human resource. They are ready and willing to develop themselves if and when they can find partners to assist the process.

Much of their congregational life is like ours. The pastor of Nanggala in Toraja spoke of his work in caring for the people's spiritual growth. He tries to get them to look at themselves through their faith and their work, identify the potential in them and teach them how to be good farmers. The pastor at Santung said he was concerned because more women than men come to church and a number of pastors worried about the small percentage of members at church on a Sunday. It is

usually work that keeps them away, at harvest time or on market day. Difficulty in getting time for Sabbath rest is a problem for them, as it is for us. And their livelihood is constantly at the mercy of the seasons (the wet season has been too short for several years now), market prices beyond their control and limited access to markets. But they also have difficulties in transportation because of rough roads or no roads. There are five different words in Bahasa Indonesia for the one English word 'carry' reflecting the five different ways of carrying that form the regular routine.

"You people drink coffee: we grow good coffee but do not have access to markets. Can we be partners? Could your congregation market our coffee?"

"Could there be an exchange between us – a young person come to you and learn good farming and good English, a farmer come to us, assess our situation and advise us on development?"

The reason for my visit was an invitation from the GPID church in Central Sulawesi to speak as Chairperson of the International Rural Church Ecumenical Association to the five-yearly Synod Assembly. I will share the stories I heard through the IRCEA network in the hope of encouraging both prayers and partnership. I wonder if we in this country can help? As Wahyu, pastor in Belau said, "I pray that the international fellowship of rural Christians be not just words but the reality of one body in Christ" and a chorus of voices joined in: "*not only lip service!*"

Robyn McPhail, Methven

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

(paraphrased by Jim Taylor)

If plants had feelings, how might they feel when that first frost hits? Perhaps we too have seasons we need to survive.

Listen to me, God.

You are warm, while you leave us to freeze!

Stir yourself to save us.

Shine some light into our darkness;

Send some warmth our way!

Bring back the sun;

Give us a chance to live again!

Are you angry with us?

We cannot survive winter on our own.

Bitter blasts come up from the south.

Frost burns our faces.

We hang our heads in shame;

We wilt away.

Bring us back to life again, God.

Let the sun warm the earth again,
so that our stems can grow tall and straight,
and our blossoms lift their faces to the sky.

Take away this winter of our discontent,
Lord, and we will not let you down.

Give us life, and we will give you glory.

Send spring quickly, O Creator.

Let your garden grow again!

"Everyday Psalms", Wood Lake Books, www.JoinHands.com

Farmland Faith

A booklet on rural life and faith in New Zealand has recently been updated. Called "Farmland Faith: Towards an Understanding of the Rural Community and the Rural Church" it provides up-to-date statistics on agricultural and outlines the economic and social factors, historical and contemporary, that affect rural living. The faith aspect is explored both in relation to the church community and the distinctive spirituality engendered among people whose livelihood comes from the land.

It draws particularly on experience in the Hawkes Bay and Gisborne but author Bill Bennett is happy for area-specific sections it to be adapted to relate to other areas of New Zealand. Contact him at w.bennett@clear.net.nz or 59 McGrath Street, Napier.

People are like tea bags - you have to put them in hot water before you know how strong they are.

Book Review

Ministry in the Countryside - a model for the future

by Andrew Bowden

296pp Published by Continuum, 2003

Reviewer: Bill Bennett, Napier

Consider the changes that have taken place in rural New Zealand over our short Christian history then, by contrast, consider the massive tradition of rural and village ministry that has existed in England over the past 1,000 years. This book endeavours to provide an overview and points to significant changes affecting countryside churches and communities.

The author, Andrew Bowden, is Local Ministry Officer in the Diocese of Gloucester, England, and Rector of the Watershed parishes. Local Collaborative Ministry in England is broadly the equivalent of Total/Mutual/Local Shared Ministry in New Zealand. (He came to New Zealand in 1998 to explore how we were doing Local Shared Ministry. The result of this world-wide tour was joint authorship of another book, "Dynamic Local Ministry", with Michael West).

Andrew has had a long association with the rural church and served on several significant commissions and committees which have grappled with the changing face of rural England and the role of the church. His book concentrates on the past 10-20 years. He reflects in depth on the progress that has taken place since the first major commission penned "Faith in the Countryside" in 1990. The rural parish is ubiquitous in rural England. Its roots lie deep in medieval history. The parish priest, the parish church and the village community are the stuff of literature and theology.

However, the same dynamic changes which have affected rural New Zealand are also changing the face of rural England - the economic pressures of Europe, globalisation, a marked decline in available stipendiary clergy and consequently a variety of emerging structures to ensure ministry continues in the small towns and villages (parishes linking together, ecumenical projects, team and group ministries).

Also mad cow and foot-and-mouth outbreaks have been body blows to an already struggling agricultural economy, as well as the burdensome regulatory nature of European agriculture.

Like New Zealand, urban people are moving into villages. Rural life is a sort of panacea for the deep urgings of the spirit from the midst of the complexities of the city environment. An attendant veneer of secularism presents a challenge to the traditional villagers.

Andrew has clear ideas about the shape of the future. The laity will take an increasing leadership for the local church; parishes will function in teams of laity and clergy; greater numbers of non-stipendiary clergy will be ordained (the Americans call them bi-vocational ministers); the role of the stipendiary ministry will become that of supporter and trainer and there will be greater engagement with community groups. This is already happening in New Zealand. However, Andrew comments: "researchers say that the churches most likely to grow are those with no more than 20 members. So there is hope - if we have the will and are prepared to take the risks. As the Kiwis would say: what we need is less red tape and more pink elastic!"

In this dark world of turmoil,
Christ's light must shine through us.
Let's practise what we preach
With joyful love and happiness,
For no matter where we go
This world created by God
Is ours to make or break.

Mona Riini



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