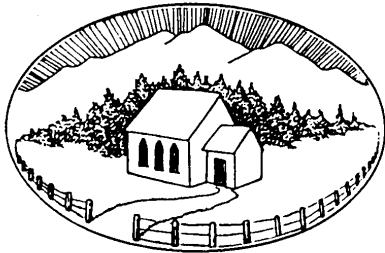


Rural Network News



No. 42

November 2010

When you pray, move your feet.

African Proverb

Rural Network News aims to share ideas for ministry in neighbourhood and land-based communities.
Te manaakitanga, te kaitiakitanga, te kotahitanga.

Please share this newsletter with others you think may be interested. Feel free to make photocopies.

Responses to items always welcome.

EARTHQUAKE CANTERBURY

When the quake hit Canterbury, the lives of the people of that region changed irrevocably. The perception of the rest of us about who is earthquake prone and who isn't has also changed.

To the people of Canterbury, the rural church family of New Zealand sends you our greetings. We have prayed for you in our churches and sent practical support and will continue to do what we can. We asked Garth Cant to give us an inside view on some aspects of the ongoing experience for you.

The Canterbury Earthquake was magnitude 7.1 and happened at 4.35am on 4 September 4 2010. This is a date and a time that is embedded in the memories of all in Canterbury and Christchurch.

Aftershocks continue, more than 2,000 in the six weeks since, and have hindered the recovery. Three of the aftershocks have been magnitude 5.4.

The good news is that there was no loss of life. Two people were seriously injured: one from falling rubble; the other from flying glass.

The number of babies born in Christchurch Women's Hospital in the 24 hours following the quake was greater than any previous 24 hour period. Each mother has a vivid story to tell.

The epicentre for the main quake was 30 km west of Christchurch, near Darfield, and some 10 km deep. The fault zone with maximum displacement of land, including roads, railway, treelines and fencelines, extends from near Rolleston, through Greendale, to Hororata.

The Hororata Anglican Church and the historic Homebush property, home to Revd Louise and James Deans, both suffered severe damage. The Deans homestead cannot be replaced. Dismantling is about to begin.

City suburbs with a high watertable, such as Kaiapoi, Bexley, Avonside and Shirley, have experienced liquefaction with eruptions of soil and mud, and major damage to underground water and sewerage pipes as well as homes. Wooden frame houses have survived well, damage to older brick and stone buildings, including churches, has been severe.

Urban Canterbury and rural Canterbury have been equally affected, but in different ways.

The most immediate challenges were those faced by farmers with dairy herds. Power was cut for most and some rotary milking sheds were damaged beyond repair. Generators were shared, more generators were flown in, and useable milking sheds were made available to neighbours. One farmer, for example, who normally milks 400 cows, was able to provide milking space for 1,600 extra cows, twice a day.

Within 36 hours, every dairy herd in Canterbury was being milked and all of the milk was being delivered to the factories. One factory suffered serious damage and was assisted by its production rival.

Up to fifty grain silos suffered structural damage, putting the contents at risk as heavy rains and wind threatened. Farmers with available capacity quickly made their silos available, and rural transport companies assisted by moving grain and seeds from damaged silos to safe silos.

Our skilled urban counterparts, Orion line staff and electrical contractors, worked long hours in difficult weather conditions, to restore power to

many and, importantly, disconnect power for those with damaged homes, sheds, and silos. Power was restored to all but 3,500 farms by Sunday evening and to 2,500 of the remainder by Monday evening.

There was damage to river stockbanks, more damage from aftershocks, and the threat of heavy rains – up to 200 mm – in the headwaters of the rivers. People were warned to move stock and stay away from river beds. The rains came, the rivers rose, but the stopbanks held.

Beehives, by and large, have survived. Some trees, their roots broken by the quake, came down with rain and winds in the week that followed. Large cracks and broken ground are being restored, fences are being repaired and realigned, and grazing is returning to normal.

Federated Farmers has acted as a linking agency for people needing help and people offering help. Generators were borrowed and delivered. Tarpaulins were in short supply and shared around. Voluntary labour was offered and assigned. Urgent fencing was provided for one lifestyle block owner with water buffalo about to escape.

Help was offered to urban cousins: offers of food and milk; offers of accommodation. Fonterra and Federated Farmers joined forces to provide three milk takers and 78,000 litres of water to emergency centres at Addington Raceway, Linwood High School and Burnside High School. Tankers then stood by to deliver water to households in the hardest hit suburbs. Fonterra donated \$1 million dollars to the Mayors' Relief Fund and worked with Civil Defence to provide food and milk to the emergency centres staffed by Red Cross and Salvation Army.

Canterbury residents, urban and rural alike, have been heartened by the messages and the prayers that have come in from around the world.

Life continues. Services are restored and farm production continues. Short term reconstruction and longer term planning are under way. Two things we are deeply grateful for. The one is that no-one was killed and few were injured. The other is the practical love and support which has come from far and wide.

The rest of New Zealand turned up in Hagley Park on October 23rd with a nine-hour "Band Together" concert to celebrate Canterbury and its response to

the earthquake. 130,000 came out in the sunshine to enjoy more than thirty bands and vocalists, Dave Dobbyn, Clap Clap Riot, King Kapisi and Op Shop included. Among them were Cantabrians Julia Deans, Anika Moa and Bic Runga.

Garth Cant has prepared this news item from information updates provided by Federated Farmers, The Press, TVNZ, Scoop News, and the Department of Geological Sciences at the University of Canterbury.

REGIONAL EVENTS IN THE SOUTH

Flowing on from a very successful conference last year (RNN 40, August 2009) three regional events have taken off in the south in 2010. Many rural parishes had been very encouraged and some took the initiative to build a network for mutual support, encouragement and learning.

In the first regional event, jointly organised by the **Maheno Otepopo** and **Maungatua** Parishes, each participating parish bought a poster which they used to introduced themselves and tell their story, their successes and challenges. Those present found the experience energising and encouraging. Ideas were shared and folk found new insights that they could put to use in their own situation.

At the next gathering the host parish, **Knapdale Waikaka**, spent the morning telling their story by inviting different members of the congregation to share their insight of the parish's life. It must have been a 'hot' meeting because the hall next door to the church where lunch was to be shared, caught fire. No problem to resourceful locals who got priorities right and rescued the food while the fire brigade dealt with the fire. The afternoon was spend attending a variety of workshops that were offered covering diverse topics such as Giving, Prayer, Children's and Youth work, Music and worship, Floral arrangements for worship services.

Palmerston parish has stepped up to the mark and are organising another day for November 13 where they will offer a perspective from a variety speakers on the subject of Farmers responses to the Emissions Trading Scheme.

Another Rural Parish conference is being organised for June next year and will be held in Gore. There is growing excitement in our rural parishes as they look for ways to engage in God's mission in their area.

Bruce Fraser, Dunedin

HUNGER – THE GLOBAL CHALLENGE

The 2010 International Rural Church Association Conference was held from 20–26 September at the Landjugendakademie, in Altenkirchen, Westerwald, Germany. The gathering of around 55 people from different parts of the world included four New Zealanders, Garth Cant from Christchurch, Janice Purdie from Paeroa, Christina Morunga from North Hokianga, and Robyn McPhail from Kaeo-Kerikeri.



Prior to the conference all participate in “Conference Scattered” experiences, Garth in Switzerland and Janice, Christina, and Robyn in Baden-Württemberg. Janice reflects:

GERMANY

A green landscape with lots of trees, hedgerows, crop growing, pasture, and few animals visible, most being kept in barns. Roofs with solar panels everywhere, including barns and churches, wind farms regularly seen and use of wood to heat homes encouraged, a young tree planted to replace each one that is felled.

One farmer earns 19% of his income from selling power into the national grid. This he generates from bio-gas generated on his farm from the waste from the cow barns and some crop material, and from the solar panels on the roofs of his buildings. He is paid fractionally more per kwh for the power he adds to the grid than what he pays for power from the grid for his use.

THE FAITH WE SHARE

It was a special experience to meet with, and live with, more than 50 people from some nineteen countries. Worship before breakfast and at end of day was led by different people, bringing a variety of preferences and perspectives. It was great singing together some wonderful hymns and songs. Also special were the four Bible studies which explored the conference theme “Hunger – the Global Challenge” and were led by people from different countries and backgrounds.

Catherine Christie, a Canadian currently working in Korea, looked at Luke 12:16-21 and the man

who built bigger barns to store his grain. She asked people to share about their celebrations of harvest. Harvest Festival services are held in some New Zealand churches in autumn. Many other countries have special community festivals associated with harvest. Over the weekend we were in Neckarelz, the locals gathered in their town square for a local Wine Festival as they celebrated what was formerly a part of their community.

Robyn McPhail of New Zealand focussed on Genesis 1:26-31. Earth, as God made it, is self-perpetuating, but with the impact of humankind something begins to jar. We need accurate seeing to see the land as God sees it, and then the appropriate action.

Pushya Billigraham, from India, challenged us with God’s call to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-10. “Abraham, get out of your country; leave your home; leave your father’s house.” That is, leave behind the known, the familiar, your loved ones, all that is comfortable. She likened this to the situation of an Indian girl when she marries and moves into her husband’s home. What is more, Abraham was a migrant and faced the difficulties and stresses that migrants of today have.

David Bathini from India focussed on Revelation 21:1-7 and spoke of living in a society dominated by the caste system in which Dalits find it nigh on impossible to better themselves. It is among the Dalits that Christianity has its highest membership in India. As Christians our challenge is to ask God to help us be agents of the new creation where all people live together peacefully. “I will freely give living water from the life giving fountain” (v.6).

WE SHARED OUR STORIES

The United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom face similar issues in their rural areas with declining church attendance. Ed Kail, a rural pastor in south west Iowa, has an advisory and support role for 118 churches.

What’s killing the church is the C’s – Comfort, Customs, and Control – and what Ed named four killer B’s – Buildings, Bureaucracy, Budget, and Bums on seats.

He noted that by 2020 75% of the current people will have died or moved out, and he says there is a 3-5 year gap to get a turn-around before the death

cycle sets in. In some places churches are into a hospice situation of keeping the people as comfortable as possible as they die. What's killing the church is the C's – Comfort, Customs, and Control – and what Ed named four killer B's – Buildings, Bureaucracy, Budget, and Bums on seats.

In many places it is the church that is holding the community together.

Representatives from England stressed the importance of the social capital that churches contribute to rural communities. In many places it is the church that is holding the community together, with networks of rural officers and agricultural chaplaincies to support them. It is important for churches to be community facing and use church buildings creatively, e.g. a mobile post office operating out of a church building with the church folk providing a cuppa; an internet café; farmers' market; second hand clothing and goods shop; before and after school clubs; debt counselling services; drop in centre; and the showing of main stream films free of charge. Small projects can make a difference. They say: do one or two things well and don't try to be the large church. "A satsuma is not a failed orange".

Australia spoke of rural churches no longer able to sustain paid full time ministry, but communities wanting their church to continue. Rural church advisors/encouragers, who have oversight of several rural parishes, work with parishes in the development, training and supporting of lay ministry teams from within the parishes. These rural church advisors meet in State groups at least annually for the sharing of ideas, encouragement and their own personal development.

A large majority of Christians are Dalits (untouchables) with Christians as a whole suffering from the Dalit stigma.

In India, poverty and illiteracy are major issues for the churches. Eighty percent of the population of India is rural, and 4% is Christian. A large majority of Christians are Dalits (untouchables) with Christians as a whole suffering from the Dalit stigma. In recent years there has been an increase in violence against Christians.

With the collapse of rural economies across India, multi-nationals have moved in and 85% of rural households are either landless or marginally

subsistent small farmers. Millions are migrating to towns and cities, where there are few jobs available and the vicious trap of people trafficking. The low status of women, and child labour, are also big problems in India.

The social landscape in Malawi is one of poverty, illiteracy, corruption in both church and government, unsafe water, low level technology, a lack of infrastructure, deforestation, a lack of markets (and little incentive for agriculture), 14% HIV positive, and 1.2 million people suffering from hunger. The average life expectancy is 37. The United Methodist Church, one of eight churches in Malawi, is planting new churches in the countryside in order to bring the gospel to the marginalised.

empowering women ... education scholarships for orphans ... developing clean water sources ... HIV/AIDS counselling.

Initiatives in rural areas of Malawi include empowering women by teaching literacy and sewing (using treadle machines), running nursery schools, education scholarships for orphans, developing clean water sources such as wells and bores, and HIV/AIDS counselling.

A number of church groups are coming in from overseas and starting new churches in the cities. When asked about working in the rural areas, they say, "there aren't big enough numbers of people in the rural areas. There's no money in it."

The people of IRCA were called on to pray passionately, to work together to support one another, and to live up to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Representatives from Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland spoke of the journey back from communism for church and community. The challenges for churches include reclaiming buildings and supporting rural areas that are undergoing greatly reduced employment options.

In many parts of the world the people are searching for a solution which would link the two basic values: peace and justice. The two are like bread and salt for mankind.

Lech Walesa from his Nobel Lecture

CONNECTING WITH THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

A significant development for the International Rural Church Association since its last conference in Brandon in 2007 has been the links made with the World Council of Churches. The Conference warmly welcomed two members of the WCC staff, Sydia Nduna the programme executive for Migration and Social Justice and Carla Khijoyan of the Middle East Desk.

IRCA seeks to work with the WCC to strengthen the voice of rural churches among the churches of the world. For IRCA's primary focus is on being a voice for the voiceless for rural churches and communities world-wide.

MIGRATION

Sydia Nduna, of Zambian heritage, spoke about migration and presented a sobering challenge for us all. Migration is normal and can be by force or choice. The Bible itself is full of stories of people on the move and, as Christians, we are called to love the stranger with no strings attached, to treat all people with dignity and respect. Globally there are 250 million migrants and among the challenges is the fact that migrants are seen as criminals (they have no papers) and therefore have trouble accessing health care and education, and participating in society. Also migration has huge impact on families, especially when one parent is away from home in another part of their country, or as in most cases in another country. Do we welcome them warmly into our church families?

SEEING THE MIDDLE EAST ANEW

Carla Khijoyan, an Armenian from Lebanon, opened up a whole new world as she spoke about the Middle East. For example, before the civil war 1975-1991 65% of Lebanese were Christian; today it is 25%. Many people are poor and, because of landmines, the good land in the south cannot be used. In speaking about Egypt she told us that there are nine million Christians in Egypt and they suffer significant discrimination, with 30% of them living below the poverty line.

In all, through her own story, Carla introduced us to a world of rich heritage and diversity, and of great conflict and loss. Some of what she said to us could not be shared beyond our conference. One day, perhaps, she will be allowed to visit Jerusalem.

FEEDING THE WORLD

Australian Ross Neville gives a perceptive summary of the messages brought by the other keynote speakers, and of the document they each were asked to respond to.

A focal document at the IRCA conference was the IAASTD report to the United Nations entitled "Agriculture at a Crossroads". IAASTD is the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development of food resources to reduce poverty and hunger.

In considering this document, the conference was asking: what role can the Christian church take?

The following table, presented at one of the bible studies at the IRCA conference, gives us a perspective that we need to have when discussing this issue.

| The Need | Human Role | God's role |
|--------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Hunger | Produce food | Nurture |
| Thirst | Provide access to water | Relaxation |
| Foreigners | Provide shelter | Hospitality |
| Nakedness | Provide clothes | Respect |
| Sickness | Be a presence | Cure |
| Imprisonment | Be a presence | Conversion/release |

The IAASTD report has been ignored by the World Trade Organisation, The World Bank, and Multinational Corporations even though they were initially part of the planning and funding. Australia, USA and Canada have refused to be signatories to this report and yet it contains a massive amount of detailed research and critical analysis.

Why is this report being ignored and suppressed is the serious question the IRCA group began to ask. IRCA feels that the Christian churches must ask for answers and advocate for real discussion of the findings of this report.

The IAASTD report summary can be downloaded on the IRCA website www.irca.net.nz. Written over four years with 600 scientists contributing and working with 30 governments, it addresses three questions. How can the world:

1. reduce hunger and poverty?
2. improve rural livelihoods?
3. facilitate equitable use of agricultural knowledge, scientific innovation, and technology?

There are eight key messages in the report that we in IRCA see as giving a hint as to why this report is being ignored by our governments and big corporations.

- Small farmers are the key to overcoming hunger and poverty sustainably
- We need an agronomic economic revolution
- The multi-functionality of agriculture must be appreciated and rewarded
- Food sovereignty should be a guiding principle – food security is not enough
- Women make the difference
- Public research working with farmers not for farmers can complement their local knowledge
- We can trust and build on peoples geniality
- To overcome hunger the world needs a social and political strategy to empower people

The IAASTD report maintains that poverty, not just production, is the cause of world hunger. A paradigm shift to low-cost solutions is required, along with recognition that agriculture produces food and has social, cultural, and ecological aspects.

85% of farms in the world are on less than two hectares

For a world perspective on agriculture we need to appreciate that 85% of farms in the world are on less than two hectares. Only 0.6% are greater than 100ha yet 90% of research is focused on the 0.6%. Research goes where the money is.

Despite this, Western farmers are leaving farming in all countries (about 2% every year regardless of whether there are any subsidies). In the 3rd world more people are actually becoming farmers every year as farms are subdivided amongst children.

Every farmer in Australia and New Zealand knows you don't grow a crop when there is no market for it. Each year according to estimates of possible prices, or contracts available, a farmer will choose the type of grain or crop to sow. Many have pulled out orchards, vineyards and/or sold water licences or fishing vessels because they know the prices will not cover the costs of production. In Africa, India, and other nations where people are starving, the farmers are not putting in crops to feed their people because they know those starving do not have

the money to buy the food. Or, because of aid or cheap overseas imports, they know they will not get enough money for their product to cover costs.

This attitude might seem mercenary or callous, but it is a reality of farm survival. King-David Amoah, President of the African Farmers Association, told the IRCA conference that African farmers realise they have to unite and challenge their own governments and world bodies to change the situation. African farmers cannot compete against global companies or against countries which dump their excess or inferior produce.

The decline in research in agriculture in almost every country in the world is an indicator of global philosophical extremes and the power of big corporations and finance. Governments are leaving research to private providers. And where is this research focused?

It is clear that business-as-usual agricultural practices are not an option. 'The State of the World 2010' report puts it well: "The Western way of farming is unsustainable; it destroys the resources it depends on; it relies on inputs that are non-renewable and running out; our farming systems use more energy than they produce in food output".

This proposition is supported by much of the research documented in the IAASTD report. Yet science and industrial agricultural systems are still being proposed as the only saviour for the world food supply.

The world is going to need both approaches: industrial agriculture and small scale farming.

The world is going to need both approaches: industrial agriculture and small scale farming. There will need to be paradigm shifts in both approaches in the years to come, and Christians cannot allow one system to the exclude the other. The Bible study at the conference based on Luke 12:16-21 gave an appropriate warning about hoarding food in countries. We need to balance this with Ecclesiastes 11:1 "Ship your grain across the seas,.. invest in seven ventures, or even eight."

The biggest world issue is to eliminate world poverty and allow people everywhere to have the means to acquire food. This needs to be at a realistic price to sustain their local farmers, and some forms of industrial agriculture will be needed to feed the cities of the world.

There are options being explored to farm in a way that is sustainable, i.e. self-replacing. Some of these alternative practices worldwide are:

- Organic farming, where no artificial chemicals are introduced into the system;
- No till farming, where the ground is basically left undisturbed and crops are sown into normal plant systems, allowing soil carbon build up;
- Permaculture farming, which is an integration of organic, no till and village design to allowing recycling, rotation and companion plants and animals to all work together in a system;
- Agro-forestry farming, which combines trees shrubs, annual crops and livestock;
- Perennial polycultures, which is a new system of farming being developed in USA where annual crops are being replaced by perennial crops; and
- Aquaponics, wherein fish stocks in fresh water systems work together with plants, land animals and land based crops.

While most of these alternative farm practices are considered fringe by many research scientists and the general Western farming population, they are starting to gain popularity. Very few farmers are really comfortable with the high-input environmentally damaging farming that is still being promoted as best practice.

The church has to challenge attitudes that try and reduce everything, God's gifts and God's world to dollar values. In India they call this "neo-liberal policies" and the churches are pointing out the devastating effects to their people and the food production. We see this happening in Australia where dollar values are being placed on water, the environment, the carbon in the air, and animal and insect species,

with social impact studies by-passed where possible.

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| The multi-functionality of farming has to be recognised and rewarded |
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The multi-functionality of farming has to be recognised and rewarded as the IAASTD report recommends. We need to speak out and get some balance.

Ross Neville, Orange, NSW, Australia

CONFERENCE SCATTERED

International Rural Church Conferences follow a tradition, gifted to us by the Mennonites in Canada. Participants share in a "conference scattered" by visiting a local parish on the way to the larger and more formal "conference gathered". Garth Cant reports:

MUNTSCHERMIER, SWITZERLAND

My "conference scattered" was in Muntschemier, in Canton Bern in Switzerland, where I was hosted by Ueli and Elisabeth Tobler, Pastors of the Swiss Reformed Church.

Ueli is eighty per cent of his time with the Reformed Church Parish of Muntschemier. His stipend is paid by the government of Canton Bern, not by the parish, and he has civic as well as parish responsibilities. In times of civil disaster, for example, he has clearly assigned roles and tasks within the Canton.

Ueli is "pastor, chaplain and companion" to the people in the four villages: Muntschemier; Treiten; Breittalen; and Inns. Inns, the largest of the four, has the church where the whole parish worships. Elisabeth is a Pastor also, part of the Ministry team in one of the urban parishes in nearby Biel. Their children are grown up, married, and in employment.

The countryside around the four villages is closely subdivided (often without fences), intensely farmed, and carefully tended. Grape growing in small vineyards predominates, alongside a multiplicity of other crops, vegetables, and trees. Farmers live within the village and travel out to tend the fields, gardens and vineyards. They work full time or part-time on very small farms, tending the land and tending the landscape, with meticulous care.

Most of the residents in the four villages live in family homes, passed down from previous generations. Many have their livelihoods, not on the land, but in towns and cities within commuting distance. One young couple in Inns told me about their day to day commute to the city of Bern: the wife is a teacher, beginning the day early and finishing early; the husband is an IT specialist, leaving home later and returning later. They share one car and the commuting alternatives: each day one is on the motorway and the other is on the fast train. Other days they swap car and train. Sometimes they travel together in car or train.

Ueli Tobler's twenty per cent task is with SRAKLA, the Swiss Reformed Working Party for Church and Agriculture. Gospel, mission and advocacy for the countryside are combined.

Ueli described the framework for the work of SRAKLA by using the image of a triangle, three times over. The first triangle is theological: Creator; Saviour, and Holy Spirit. The second triangle is pastoral: individuals; rural society; and the Swiss nation. The third triangle is the stuff of rural mission in Switzerland: nutrition; ethics; and landscape.

One strand of SRAKLA's role is working with, supporting, and affirming farmers. Another strand is national: advocacy for farmers and rural dwellers within Canton Bern and within Switzerland. A third strand is international: advocacy for farmers and rural communities within the European community and within the global community. The fourth strand is a "farmers' hotline": a telephone help-service that provides a listening ear and practical support in times of emergency, personal need, or financial crisis.

Ueli speaks the three Swiss languages and, in addition, English. Ueli and I travelled together (five trains with four transfers) to the "conference gathered" in Altenkirchen in Germany. There, Ueli played a key role bridging language gaps between German speakers and English speakers, and building Eastern European participants (with a wider spectrum of languages) into our discussions and our fellowship. He also made his own strong inputs about the practicalities and the politics of farming in Europe.

Ueli and Elisabeth were kind and generous hosts for my "conference scattered". And at "conference

gathered" Ueli, from rural Switzerland, opened Canadian, American, Australian, and New Zealand ears to a very different concepts of being farmers, and being rural.

BADEN-WÜRTEMBERG, GERMANY

The other "Conference Scattered" participants gathered as one group in Neckarelz, Baden-Württemberg. As Christina Morunga tells it,

Neckarelz, set in a beautiful area in the South-West of Germany, has been established since at least 770CE. Two rivers, the Neckar and the Elz, join at this point, eventually to flow into the Rhine the largest river in Germany. The Neckar used to meander through the countryside, but has been straightened and made deeper for water transport. For some years a chain was installed in the river to allow boats with barges to be towed by horses on the banks between Stuttgart and Heidelberg.

The road is raised as the river floods severely every ten years, flooding the modern houses that were built on the lowland, unlike the old houses which were built on the higher land. The village has very old buildings, many made of rough-sawn oak beams with mud, straw and sticks which are plastered over filling the spaces, they are well kept and very picturesque.

We were privileged to have a meeting with Rolf Brauch who is a Pastor as well as an Agricultural Engineer. His job is to meet up with farmers and discuss with them ways of making their families and their farms work effectively and for the growth and sustainability of the farms.

He is encouraging a change from "Family Farms" to "Family-led Farms", with diversification of land use, direct marketing of produce, and increased bio-diversity. Church involvement in farming helps provide psychological support, family counselling, and a catalyst for change in family farm management and planning for the future;

The goal is not to "think big" so much as to "think right". As Rolf puts it, one has the choice to:

1. grow alone or together,
2. diversify alone or together, or
3. give up now or later.

Rolf spends time with families working out what they really want and trying to help them to work together to achieve the goals they set. Unfortunately there are some men who are so stuck

in traditional ways of farming that they would rather lose their family than diversify or change the way of doing things.

The most important aspect of Rolf's work is to help people find what is right for themselves and for their lives before God – to find a way through life as Christian people. He sees it is really important to separate family from farm. Family is about love, being open and flexible and yet stable. The farm requires production, hard decisions and an ability to change.

Another theme Rolf stresses is co-operation between neighbouring farmers in sharing equipment and workloads.

Germany is the biggest producer of milk, meat, rape, and grain in Europe. The Churches are realising that rural churches are stronger than urban churches and are putting more resources into them.

Our accommodation, the "Bildungshaus Neckarelz", was originally an administration centre and storehouse for the 10% of the farmers' produce gathered as a tax for the reigning Prince in Heidelberg from the year 1602. Potatoes, wine and grain were stored in the building.

Now it is a place of adult learning for agriculture, horticulture, politics and communication. The building was modernised in 2003, providing twin rooms with ensuite facilities, and lecture rooms along with kitchen and dining facilities and ensured continued use.

The "Bildungshaus" as it is today takes its name from the aim of the organisation to build people up spiritually, provide practical education in farming, and enhance the family experience of farming.

Brazilian farm students also come on scholarships each year so that they can take home skills to build up the farms in their land.

On Saturday morning we visited a dairy farm with 160 cows and heard how the farmer came to leave the 'small village farming' of his parents and take on a larger concern. He is now working to develop direct marketing of his produce by seeking funding, and resource and health consent, to develop a milk processing plant and put the milk into cartons for a local hospital on an annual quota.

And, like many people in Germany, he is utilising the large roof space of house and barns to capture

solar energy with "Photo-voltaics" which feed into the regional electricity network and produce a supplementary income.

In the afternoon we travelled to Heidelberg to visit the Castle and Old Town, and see the famous Theological Halls of the University where many world renowned theologians studied and taught.

In the evening Neckarelz hosted a wine and food festival, so we mixed with the locals as they celebrated the autumn harvest and the traditional products of their region.

On Sunday after the service at Martinskirche, the Protestant church next door, we went to the Schafer's Farm Festival at Michaelsberg. For the last twenty years this beef and pig farm has held the festival to promote their organic status and the farm shop where they sell their meat and other products. One of the sons has become a butcher and processes the meat. They cook a German Angus Beef on the spit and it has become so popular that they expect to cater for about 5,000 people each Festival.

Other farmers come and share their produce and display their animals as well. There were Suffolk sheep, goats of a variety of breeds, horses, donkeys, rabbits, hens, and geese. A variety of stalls ranged from rustic crafts to horse milk and cheeses. The Schafers' next project is to open a restaurant to be managed on the farm by the daughter. On Pentecost Sunday an ecumenical service is held in the ancient church on the property, and they follow that with a celebration meal on the farm. Several farm cottages which they use for eco-tourists or for people coming to work for farm experience. Photo-voltaics on their buildings generate sufficient solar energy to power about 40 houses.

Mr Schafer told us the farm has 120 hectares of cereals and 110 hectares of grassland plus some woodland and orchards along with the houses, barns and work areas. It carries 80 German Angus cows which are outside grazing 10 months and in the barn for 2 months. Each age group of cows is farmed separately with a bull put to them in the spring, and are calved in the meadows to prevent calves being trampled in the close quarters of the barns. The calves are weaned from the cows at 10 months, the heifer calves not being kept for replacements being sent to market at 11 months.

The bull calves are then grown on and fattened in the barns in age lots, and fed for maximum growth with hay and maize silage, with minerals added. The straw from a further 80 hectares of land is brought in each year to keep the barns dry and warm for the stock. When the bulls reach their peak between the ages of 15 to 24 months they are sent to an abattoir, off farm, for slaughter then brought back to the farm butchery for processing and sale.

Their pigs are a local breed (Schwäbisch Hällische) which grow well, produce good tasting meat and are relatively disease resistant. They are housed in partially open sided sties in open air enclosures all year round to meet the organic standard. They have several sows and boars and raise all the offspring for the butchery. It was good to see such a good example of a Family-led Farming business with plans for expansion and maximising production within the local economy.

I am very impressed with the involvement of church in the support of farmers and the local economy.

Rolf's basic guide of "think right" and "choose to grow alone or together, diversify alone or together, or give-up now or later" is a good strategy to challenge farming families within New Zealand, as a catalyst for change.

BOOK REVIEW

Mission-shaped and rural: Growing Churches in the Countryside by Sally Gaze, forward by Bishop Graham James.

Church House Publishing, London, UK. 2006, reprinted 2007. 135 pages plus index. ISBN-13 978-0-7151-4084-0 ISBN-10 0 7151 4084 1
Sourced through amazon.co.uk RRP £7.99

...fresh expressions and traditional forms...

Written by Sally Gaze, the Team Rector of a multi-parish benefice in Norfolk, and with a foreword from the Bishop of Norwich, *Mission-shaped and rural* appealed to me because it offered hope for 'fresh expressions' of ministry in a doggedly conservative community. At the same time it affirmed what I already had perceived – that traditional forms of church still have their place.

Several chapters of the book are devoted to rural culture - listening to it, finding the distinctives of

rural life and cultural change, engaging with it, becoming inculturated, and responding to rural distinctives and change. The call is for ministers to walk among the people – just as Christ did – and meet their needs in their time, their place, and in their way.

Chapter 4 looks at several kinds of expression; alternative worship communities, base ecclesial communities, café church, cell church, churches arising out of community initiatives, midweek congregations, multiple congregations, network-focussed churches, school-based churches, seeker church, traditional church plants, and youth congregations. With such a range of possibilities, it would be a poor minister who could not find some expression that would work in their particular community.

From the first chapter to the last the text is punctuated by stories from life

The great strength of this book is that it is not simply a wonderfully written dissertation on a well-researched theory. From the first chapter to the last the text is punctuated by stories from life – a kind of diary of the life and growth of ministry in the benefice. The first story is Sally's own, relating how, when she arrived in her new post she planned to set aside 40 days for prayer and fasting. She quickly discovered that "you can fill 48 hours of every day with activity which seems absolutely essential and urgent."(p.4) By page four of this book, you know the author has walked the walk.

The book is around 140 pages long and the last 30 of these are appendices.

The first appendix reports on the recommendations for rural mission-shaped dioceses found in the *Mission-shaped Church* report, covering Diocesan Strategy, Ecumenical Collaboration, Leadership and Training, and Resources.

Appendix 2 provides five pages of resource information, including books and reports, booklets and magazines, DVDs, and useful websites.

Finally, we come to the end-piece which provides information and background to the *Mission-shaped Church* report. A series of books has been written, including *Mission-shaped and rural*, with a common approach that has seen the Church of England and the Methodist Church committed to developing a mixed economy – fresh expressions

of church alongside traditional local churches – and working together towards the goal.

This is not a book to consign to the bookshelf. This is a book that sits at my elbow – at my desk, at the breakfast table – frequently taken up and studied, for inspiration, for answers, for help.

Bronwyn Mason, Harihari, Westland

God, we affirm that you are still speaking. May we still listen. Amen.

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS FOR CHRISTMAS

Mary and Elizabeth

Where Mary and Elizabeth's lives intersect ...

Mary, the young peasant girl, found herself pregnant and scared. Luke tells her story leading up to the Christmas event.



This was supposed to be a blessed occurrence, he tells us, but Mary was confused and alone. She thought of Elizabeth, an older relative known for her wisdom.

Imagine the scene. Elizabeth opened her door and her arms to hug the young visitor. Instinctively she felt both pain and joy. “You are blessed among woman” she whispered in Mary’s ear by way of validation – and that validation helped lift the burden from Mary’s shoulders.

Within a few moments the story was told, so far as Mary understood it. What a relief to feel the encouragement and to have one who would help her understand what was happening.

In due course Mary was able to express her gratitude to Elizabeth by singing “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God for – for God has looked upon the low estate of this handmaiden – for God who is mighty has done great things for me.”

When Mary realized that Elizabeth also was pregnant, she stayed with her. Her youthful, infectious spirit must have been a blessing to the older woman. As they tended the home-making chores and marketing together, we can imagine them sharing details about their developing pregnancies. Laughter and tears and questions about what their children would become made the days pass quickly. Both were trying to grapple with how the hand-of-God changed their lives.

Eventually it was time for Mary to return to face her confused yet devoted fiancé. Elizabeth made suggestions how Mary might encourage him and love him through the bad times they had yet to face.

Out of the rich sharing of sisterhood both women found enough strength to nurture a new generation.

Joseph at the Front of the Stable

Men have much to contribute at Christmas ...

Men have sometimes been labelled as the “stagehands” of Christmas: following through on the orders of their wives, and financing the extravaganza. But when Ann Weems, in her book *Kneeling In Bethlehem*, thinks of Joseph’s place in the stable, she envisions him being more central to the Christmas story.



“Who put Joseph in the back of the stable?” she asks, “to stand as background for the magnificent light of the Madonna?”

Weems recalls how faithful Joseph has been “in spite of the gossip in Nazareth” and “in spite of the threat from Herod.” Actually, “it was he who named the Child Emmanuel.”

He was the kind of person who guarded his family and greeted the visitors whatever their status.

“When he wasn’t in the doorway, he was probably urging Mary to get some rest, gently covering her with his cloak, assuring her that he would watch the Child.” Can’t you imagine him holding the baby, walking him and quieting him through the night until he closed his eyes?

“This Christmas, let us give thanks to God for this man of incredible faith, into whose care God placed the Christ Child.”

Notice, too, the way other fathers reach out during the Christmas season to show the love and care they have for their families and to reflect the deep spiritual truths that makes the season special. Listen to their suggestions, acknowledge their advice, be prepared even to do things in a different way at their behest.

Think of Joseph giving Jesus a grounding so solid that he would later dare to teach others a whole new way of thinking about relationships with each other – and with God.

“As a gesture of gratitude, let’s put Joseph in the front of the stable where he can guard and greet and cast an occasional glance at this Child.”

Joyce Sasse, Pincher Creek, Alberta, Canada

CONFERENCE RESOLUTION

www.irca.net.nz

“Hunger – a global challenge”

At the IRCA-conference from 20 to 26 September 2010 at Evangelische Landjugendakademie Altenkirchen, Westerwald, Germany, 50 participants met; grass root people (farmers, ministers, lay people) from rural areas from five continents.

The theme of the conference “Hunger - a global challenge” was drawn from “The International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development” (IAASTD) of the UN which brings a new and revolutionary approach to agriculture (Report Summary: www.agassessment.org/docs/10505_Multi.pdf).

The facts are known: abundance and overweight on the one side, hunger and poverty on the other. Farms being given up, migration, discrimination, climate change, threat to biodiversity and problems with water follow.

The IRCA-worldwide community and solidarity strengthened our belief in networking. It encourages us to continue our journey as the people of God, though we know, that the road to the Promised Land leads us through the desert.

From the conference we bring back to our churches, communities, countries what we have learned:

From the IAASTD report:

- The first purpose of cultivating the land is food production, but it also includes social, cultural and ecological factors.
- If carefully recognized, these factors prevent forced migration and bring a good livelihood to humanity.
- Most attention has to be paid to the small and subsistence farmers and the work of women, who feed the world. This is one surprising result of international research.
- Food sovereignty needs to be valued as a human right. Each person and each people group have the right to gain their daily bread from their work. (A first step toward this direction: UNO-Resolution of 28/7/2010 recognizes the right of pure water as a human right.)

Water was identified as a key issue for the future of creation and humanity:

- Water must be considered as common property, faith says: a gift. For Christians (and all other religions) it is a symbol of vital importance.
- It must not be the subject of commercial exploitation, but considered a common resource.
- A similar approach is needed for “the land”.

The presentation from the migration department of the World Council of Churches (WCC) brought out:

- Migration affects 250 million people in the world. Some of them are persecuted Christians.
- Migration plays a more important part in the Bible, and in the past and actual history of humanity than we usually recognize.
- Migration affects urban and rural areas and churches.
- Each human being has a need for “roots and relationships”. This is a challenge to rural communities and churches.

The poor and brain-drained rural areas need a voice. IRCA assumes the role of a voice for and to the voiceless.

Voice of the voiceless
Hope for the hopeless
Saviour who washes the feet of a slave.
The face of the faceless
The giver of life
One who lifts us up to God.

The chorus of the Conference Song written by IRCA secretary Garry Hardingham – a powerful challenge, being Jesus' own example to us.



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Contributions of news, views, insights on anything to do with the rural church and its gospel mission gratefully received.

Editor: Robyn McPhail, 17 Campbell Lane, Kerikeri 0230, 09 401 7554, fax: 09 401 7555, email: robyn@chirmac.co.nz

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