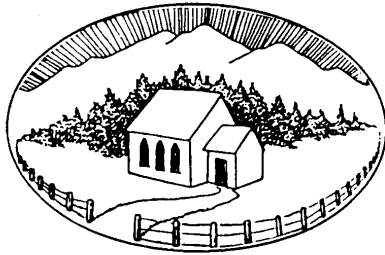


Rural Network News



No. 49 December 2014

Tonight in this room we represent globalisation ... "I saw men and woman from all the lands, from all the tribes and languages." So tonight you will agree with me that indeed this is what it is going to look like in heaven.

John Mastern Dzonzi at the opening of IRCA 2014 in Lilongwe, Malawi

Hei kaitiakitanga, hei manaakitanga, hei whakawhanaungatanga. Sharing ideas for ministry in neighbourhood and land-based communities.

Prints out as A5 booklet.

Please email editor if you can change from hard copy to web-link.

KEEPING WELL CONNECTED

Christians in rural communities share two key experiences: livelihood either directly or indirectly from the land; and continuing to be church in the local area regardless of whether outside help has been available.

As New Zealand has become more urban centred, rural people have felt a

bit side-lined, but determined to maintain a Christian presence in communities that are also feeling side-lined by popular perception and government policies.

Some of the issues we face are:

Isolation felt by church leaders, the few remaining ordained ministers, priests, and pastors and the non-ordained who ensure church life continues faithfully.

Difficulty in accessing education where we need it – close to home and affordable.

The urbanness of denominational churches with many key people not fluent in "rural". When the language and culture that dominates is "urban" it misses crucial connections with us.

Denominationalism in church structures and policies places expectations of brand-loyalty on rural churches which are mostly cross-denominational.

A proposal is to **develop clusters** among people in ministry leadership in rural/provincial churches. Denominational efforts to set up peer support and information sharing in a geographical area are constrained by small numbers and large distances. The rural network could assist by liaising to bring together mixed denomination clusters of ministers and pastors.

If this idea interests you get in touch with robyn@chirmac.co.nz.

What IS? What is God doing in your community and country?

What COULD BE? What is your dream for your community and country?

What WILL BE? What will you do in the next six months to move towards your vision?

Questions put to participants at IRCA Malawi by keynote speaker Jerry Marshall

The questions are asked in relation to our rural churches, what *we* could/will do ourselves and what our *national* churches need to be doing.

The New Zealand caucus of four at IRCA Malawi, – Christina Morunga, Gillian-Mary Swift, Janice Purdie, and Robyn McPhail, drew up these responses to the second and third questions above:

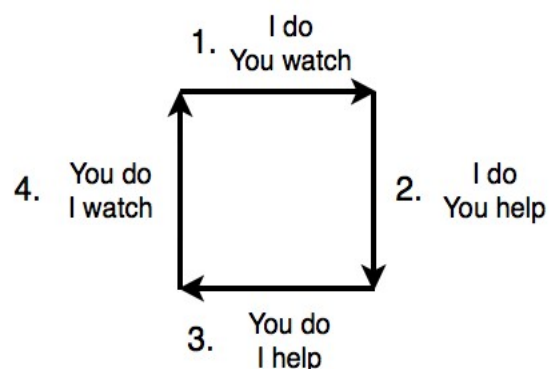
WHAT COULD BE?

- A strengthening of ecumenical relationships beyond the local
- A stronger body across New Zealand for rural/small churches, a louder voice
- Streamlining the use of buildings, off-loading, resolving current issues
- Safe place in every rural community for all local youth to gather
- Local church leaders working ecumenically to assist with community developments

- Liaising in relation to ideas and projects that work, and people with gifts and skills to share
- Better recognition of the value of local team ministry
- Better understanding of local team ministry and what it needs

WHAT WILL BE?

- Campaign for “10 Minutes on a Tuesday” (MCNZ) to continue.
- Promote the idea of “training without travelling”.
- Share Jesus' model of discipleship development – the I do/you do etc. rectangle – with our synods, presbyteries, archdeaconries.



- Develop cluster relationships for parishes and for leaders/pastors, identifying what exists and building on it, plus forming new linkages.

How would you answer Jerry's questions?

What would you put out as a challenge for local action and for national action?

FILMING AT HIONA CHURCH ŌPŌTIKI

by Scottie Productions (Maori TV)

We have had the privilege of having our Church, surrounding buildings, and grounds captured on film by Scottie Productions, a company responsible for the Whare Taonga series for Maori Television around the country. The film makers consisted of the producer Tihini Grant, Whare Flavell and Danny. Their goal was to seek the relevant history and information regarding the church and its surrounding buildings.



Whanau of Rangatira Mokomoko led by Molly de Mant, the eldest surviving relative

The powhiri took place on Sunday morning and we were blessed by the warmth of the congregation which saw families who had drifted away from the church happily coming together, sharing worship and goodwill within the sacred confines of our Whare Taonga.

Separate discussions were carried out by the following individuals.

Te Riaki Amoamo spoke about the early history of the church. He also

accompanied the film crew out to Waiaua to visit Mokomoko's grave.

The Reverend Bettina Maxwell was the overall narrator.

The carvers, Tom Reedy and Haami Wano explained in full detail the design of the Pare. Chris Maxwell was also invited to speak about his involvement pertinent to the previous arrangements that were made regarding the Pare about twenty years ago.

Julie Williams spoke about her affiliation to the church, the buildings and history. Speakers were required to speak in Māori.

Our thanks go out to the film crew, for their help in guiding us through the ins and outs of film making, so many cuts and laughter. To the speakers who went out of their way to come forward and help us out, the congregation for their tolerance and support, to Gwen Wardlaw, for her dedication, organising skills, and for being there.

Finally to our Minister Arthur Bruce, for his guidance and the many hours of hard work, and the lovely sermon which was so relevant to the events of this memorable occasion. The film crew gave out copies of The Prophets DVD.



The carving which was unveiled depicts a hongi between Mokomoko and Wakana (Volkner)

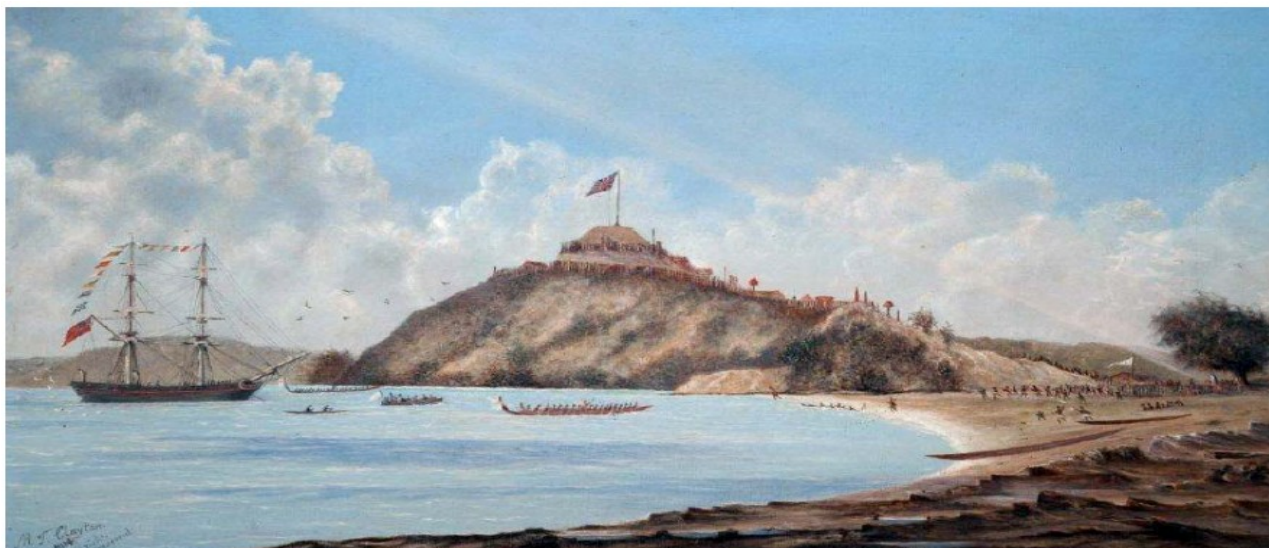
Julie Williams, Ōpōtiki, Bay of Plenty



When I heard of this conference, I thought, wow, this really does consider those who work in the rural areas. For them to be meeting together and encouraging each other, this would be a tremendous help for pastors in the rural setting, for their challenges include loneliness.

Praise God, these men and women are out there to share the gospel of hope, the gospel that transforms. To those serving in such settings, I want to encourage you. That each person you interact with looks up to you and, as such, that's your privilege. That's your opportunity for ministry. Do it in such a way that you provide transformational leadership.

Dr Mrs Maggie Madimbo, Vice-Chancellor of African Bible College, speaking at the opening of IRCA Malawi



CHRISTMAS AT OIHI

As soon as European priests and ministers arrived they were sharing the gospel as they could, in karakia and in mahi. Although there are no records, it is likely that the first Christian Mass took place on board the ship the *Jean Baptiste* in Doubtless Bay on Christmas Day 1769. Every Christmas Day is therefore a significant marker in the history of our land, and this year especially, with the first recorded service of worship, the first protestant service with proclamation of the gospel, on 25 December 1814. It was the partnership between by Samuel Marsden of the Church Missionary Society and local rangatira Ruatara, and earlier between Te Pahi and Marsden, which lead to this pivotal moment in our history and in the development of the special relationship between the two peoples, Māori and Pākehā.

Sunday 21 December marks the opening of Rangihoua Heritage Park, a place that tells of beginnings and includes the site of the Marsden Cross.

On Christmas Day a Bicentennial Ecumenical Service of Thanksgiving will be held at the Marsden Cross site, led by church leaders from across the country and **televised live on TV One 11am-12.30pm.**

For those who can come in person, go to www.gospel2014.org/directions for a map. Come early to allow for the shuttle ride from the car park and the walk down the hill, with everyone needing to be in place by 10.30am. It is possible to travel by boat, with Fullers offering a commercial service and taking bookings at their Paihia office. People need to be self-sufficient with their own water, refreshments, sunscreen, and clothing for changeable weather. There is an invitation for people to stay after the Service with their own picnic, to walk round the site and view the information panels that tell the story of Rangihoua.

COMMUNITY MEALS

The small congregation based at St Andrew's by the Sea Community Church, Whitianga, has a large community vision.

Eleven years ago they called the current minister to lead them in community ministry. Throughout those years the parish has indeed focused on community ministry and connects with a wide range of people, both through activities led by the minister and through various activities that others are involved in as well. There is a thriving *Mainly Music* weekly for pre-school families, *Messy Church* once a month for families with children of all ages, a *Film and Friendship Club* monthly, two *Upright and Active* sessions each week, an *Op Shop* open three days a week. In the April school holidays each year, with enormous help from the community, the minister directs a three day outdoor adventure Day Camp for 300 children age 6–13, and trains teen leaders to assist with this. For the 2014 camp there were 65 teen leaders and about 100 adults helping in some way to make camp happen. The minister is also the RSA Chaplain and provides chaplaincy services to the rest home, Whitianga Continuing Care, as well.

At the Parish Vision Day on 11 May 2013 those present were open to seeking whether God had something more for them to do in mission in the

community. A time of prayer and discernment was followed by discussion and sharing of what God was saying to those present. A man who was homeless at the time was there and he talked about the 'invisible people' in the community, the homeless and the transients, who needed food. Others thought about the lonely elderly and the families really struggling to make ends meet and feed their children nutritious meals.

A vision was born – of providing a community meal once a week, to give lonely people an opportunity to eat with others, of delivering meals to those who could not come, and encouraging those who could to come and eat together.

To the casual visitor, Whitianga looks prosperous. As one drives into the town, past the airport with a number of small private planes parked up, and through the waterways development where expensive homes and boats are very visible, it seems like this place is going ahead – and it is in many ways. Yet there is an 'invisible underclass' of struggling people: elderly who have always lived here or came to retire and now cannot afford to move; young families who came for a job – builder, electrician, plumber, or in forestry or the fish factory – but the job finished or became casual or part time and they cannot afford to move and there are no

other jobs for them; solo parents who came as a couple but the marriage or partnership failed and the parent with the children is stuck in a place with no family support, no possibility of work, and an inability to afford to move elsewhere.

We decided that if we were going to offer a community meal for those who needed it, we might as well start straight away – on a Monday, the day before benefits were paid, when people had often run out of money. So the first meal was provided on Monday 13 May 2013. Ten people came to eat together that first day and more meals were delivered.

Numbers kept growing. On Monday 1 July 2013 more than 100 people were fed. By October, the numbers had grown to 150 and have continued at that rate but climbed again in July and August 2014, to closer to 200 each week. A meal has been provided every Monday, including all through the Christmas and January holidays – and there is no indication of the need going away.

Initially all the food was provided by the church community or paid for out of church funds. The second week we paid for an advertisement in two local papers, inviting people to come and also inviting donations of food, time, and money. The community responded – some businesses gave seeding funding, individuals made regular contributions, others gave their

time to help or vegetables from their garden, some of the other churches in our community supported us with funds and food and a freezer. The local papers kept advertising the meals, but did not charge us for that ongoing advertising.

The 'homeless man' who shared the vision in the first place, turned a large part of the manse garden into a community garden to supply vegetables every week for the community meal, as well as extra food for some families during the week.

Over the 19 months we have now been doing this, at different times more than 50 volunteers have helped prepare the food, cook it, package up the deliveries, deliver meals, serve those who come to St Andrews to eat, and clean up afterwards. Some of them are people who came initially for a meal for themselves but now come to serve others too. Some have gained confidence through working in a team to the extent that they have been able to apply for and gain 'real jobs'.

There have also been other 'spin-offs' as we get to know a wider and wider group of people – supporting families with clothing, bedding, toys and food parcels; going with people to WINZ appointments as advocates and support; helping others complete forms; providing emotional as well as practical support and much more

involvement in the lives of struggling people in our community, sharing the love of God with them in practical ways.

The costs for the meals for the meals are roughly \$1,100 per month. Initial gifts helped us to make a start and keep going but, although there are still a few people continuing to make regular donations, the funding is not secure and has had to be supplemented by applications to trusts.

Donations of food keep coming in each week, including, occasionally, wild pork hunted down by members of one of the other churches!

This project is making a difference in the lives of so many people.

Some just need help for a little while and then tell us they can manage again by themselves. Others ask for a meal for a particular week when a high power bill or a doctor's account has taken all their food money.

Many of those who really appreciate a nutritious meal provided for their family are not on benefits but have fluctuating part time work. When there is no work or their hours are cut they are very vulnerable and children go hungry. Volunteers who prepare, serve and distribute the food, also enjoy and benefit from the opportunity to work together. Volunteers from the churches and the community give very generously of their time and resources.

We are very grateful for all those who help in any way.

We have also given away to those who come for meals, more than 80 copies of *Finding God in the New Testament*; and there are some interesting conversations about God and spiritual aspects of life, around the meal tables.

We will provide meals every Monday after Christmas and through January, but only by delivery – rather than inviting people to come to the church to eat. The influx of ten times the normal population of Whitianga, during the peak holiday time, could overwhelm us with tourists who just want a free meal! We will continue to care for the local vulnerable families and individuals but in a way that we can manage, with reduced numbers of volunteers at that time of year.

The small and mostly elderly congregation of Mercury Bay Co-operating Parish affirmed at the 2014 Vision Day, and again at the AGM, that Community Meals are part of God's mission in which we are privileged to be involved.

We will continue in God's Mission from this place, reaching out through the love of God in practical ways.

Mary Peterson, Whitianga

For further information, please contact Mary – email mjpetersen@xtra.co.nz or text 027 244 8396.

FROM ACROSS THE DITCH

“Signs of Life”

I do a lot of travelling across the west of the state from Tamworth [NSW] to the border out to Broken Hill, and sometimes down to the Murray river country. It has been a hard place to see signs of life with this drought creeping down from Southern Queensland this past 12-18 months but I must say there is a Spirit of resilience moving along with it. I have been to a number of Community Nights in halls, sheds and pubs – we had a line-up of speakers (not Pollies, it is hard to get them along sometimes). You're hard pressed not to have them laughing and yarning on into the night. Tomorrow will still be the same but tonight, well, let's enjoy each other. We give them a good feed too.

My role often is the cook but I always get a few helpers. “G'day Bob, I'm Phill you live around here?” Next question “So what's a Rural Chaplain do? Oh, OK, better behave!” “Why? Pass the oil. Ta. So U OK?” “Better than some!” The common answer is “We're all right but what about . . .” and they name an area. Sometimes they tell me about a local.

As the night goes on you hear the stories – bogged stock in empty dams, the cost of feed if they can even get it. Then at the end of the night they head out. Each one comes and shakes me by the hand thanks Phill, and I thank

them for letting me be part of it. For that is what they do, they involve me in their conversations and group. “The sign of life” is the fellowship, being told the stories, good bad and ugly, the hearty hand shake and the welcome next time you're around that way.

I talk to a lot of Local Champions, pastoral care we call it. Leaders and doers in a community, school, department or community service, and ministry agents from all backgrounds. As a Chaplain I can visit two maybe three families a day by visiting the service provider etc. I can help connect communities, congregations and schools. I also cross cultures and boundaries. In the last 18 months I've built a long list of those I visit on a regular rotation. I meet them at workshops, or call in to check out their agency, or meet them at meetings and some times on the side of the road. Some of these folk are long term, others one-offs, but I never know when I might see them next. Often I get contact details and then email saying “Hi, not sure if you remember me but I'm coming your way. Any time to catch up?” So far an average of nine out of ten respond “Yes”.

I just got back from the Broken Hill area where I meet with ministry agents and community workers about once a

quarter. One, who works for an agency was at a meeting in Bourke, gave me her card. "Anytime you're over my way let's have coffee."

I followed up the offer this week. It was hard. She was busy with projects out of town but we got a coffee and a yarn in. The "signs of life" are in her voice as she shared the ups and downs of the last few months. I thanked her for taking time out she said "NO, thank you for taking the time. The office rang," she went on, "and asked me who is Phill, he rang in to see if you are still right." I told them, "you know Phill, the Guy from the Uniting Church that sat with us in the mall handing out Festival of Respect material last year and came to the AGM?" "Oh, him! Say Hi." She went on to say how much she looks forward to these conversations. She even shares with her Gran's Minister who called in and mentioned Phill, the Minister. A friend emailed me about this. Positive feedback!

Life is very spread out here. It's not all rolling green pastures of my home land of long ago. But if, like Christ, we take the time to connect with those we meet along the road, or in our community, we find pockets of new life; growth in the barren ground hanging in, or starting out a life with hope and ideals, plans and dreams. Sharing these is, for me, so humbling; that I am allowed into the very heart of what gives them life!

I don't tell you this that I should be seen as anything but what I am, a person of the people. God's called me into this placement for the growing of his Kingdom. Not to give out texts, but to share life's yarns of a God that cares for each and every one. My gift is to let him work through and with me, and despite of me.



It's not all rolling green pastures of my home land of long ago

For me "the signs of life" are all around us. They're in each person, as part of their own story of Hope, Faith and Love; where they move and connect to communities. We need to cross into these stories and communities and entwine the Love, Hope, and Grace of the New Testament, Jesus' Gospel of inclusion and welcome. We don't need incentives or handouts. We come as who we are, God's pilgrim people seeking ways to connect others, as they are, one story at a time.

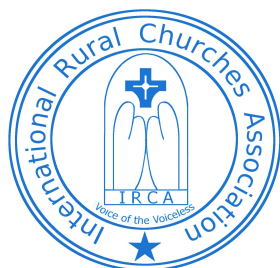
"For as much as you do this for the least you do it for me".

Rev Phill Matthews, Rural Chaplain,
Uniting Church in Australia

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

I don't really know why I care so much. I just have something inside me that tells me that there is a problem, and I have got to do something about it. I think that is what I would call the God in me.

Wangari Maathai



<http://www.irca.net.nz/>

Our Vision

The International Rural Churches Association is a network of people with a passion for rural communities, based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our vision is to be a voice for the rural community worldwide and to encourage sustainable rural communities and practices. Joined by our reliance on the land and sea for our livelihood and by determination and hope because of faith in the triune God, we share our stories of struggle and of hope.

Holding on to Hope

The Fifth IRCA Conference was held in Lilongwe, Malawi, 28 July to 2 August 2014. Prior to the Conference a small group spent several days in the north of Malawi at Mzuzu. Guided by the Rev Copeland Nkhata and friends, there were visits to Mzuzu United Methodist Church projects and PCUSA funded work at the Mzuzu University.



“Holding on to Hope” is the just released publication that brings together material presented to the conference, as well as insights into the Pre-Conference and reflections from participants on the time spent together.

Hard copy of the publication, in the form of an A4 sized booklet is available at a cost of \$20. Email your order to robyn@chirmac.co.nz or write to “Holding on to Hope”, 17 Campbell Lane, Kerikeri 0230. An invoice for payment will be sent with the booklet.

“Holding on to Hope” is also available on-line in pdf form. Go to <http://www.irca.net.nz/africa> and find the link under “News”.

IRCA Activities

IRCA links together people from rural churches through Facebook, emails, and a newly launched e-newsletter. Click [here](#), or contact the editor of this newsletter to go on the emailing list.

Facebook

Whether you have a Facebook account or not, you can access international news about rural churches from IRCA's Facebook page facebook.com/IRCA.News

IRCA-Oceania

[IRCA-Oceania](#) was instigated in 2012 and builds on the relationship that began in the 1980s between rural churches in Australia and New Zealand. Trans-Tasman rural ministry conferences have been held every four years since 1988. The last conference was in Atherton, North Queensland, in July 2012. The next will be in 2016 and is expected to be held in the Wairarapa.

REFLECTION

People are often unreasonable, illogical, and self-centred. Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.

If you are successful, you will win some false friends and some true enemies. Succeed anyway.

If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you. Be honest and frank anyway.

What you spend years building, someone could destroy overnight. Build anyway.

If you find serenity and happiness, others may be jealous. Be happy anyway.

The good you do today, people will often forget tomorrow. Do good anyway.

Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough. Give the world the best you've got anyway.

You see, in the final analysis, it is between you and God. It never was between you and them anyway.

Concluding reflection by Jeffrey Maganga to his Bible Study presented to the IRCA Malawi Conference



This intermittent newsletter is printed by Anglican Diocese of Waiapu and distributed by a Hawke's Bay team. Contributions of news, views, insights on anything to do with the rural church and its gospel mission gratefully received.

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