

RESILIENCE - BUILDING ROBUST RURAL COMMUNITIES

Report on the Atherton TransTasman Rural Ministry Conference

July 2012



Moses, aka Gazza, surveys the land he knew so well... *photo by Christina Morunga*

Garry Hardingham, Robyn McPhail, Catherine Christie, and
Garth Cant (eds)

RESILIENCE - BUILDING ROBUST RURAL COMMUNITIES: REPORT ON THE
ATHERTON TRANSTASMAN RURAL MINISTRY CONFERENCE, 2012

Published by The International Rural Church Association (IRCA Oceania)

Studies in Rural Change, No 22, published in 2013.

ISSN 0111-0012 for the print version

ISSN 2324-5980 for the online version

Copies available from Dr Garth Cant, 7 Owens Terrace, Christchurch 8041

CHAPTER ONE - JOURNEYS TO ATHERTON

We journeyed to Atherton in July 2012 from many parts of Australia and New Zealand: from Australian places as far apart as Manjimup and Perth in the West, from Cloncurry in the north, from Ceduna in the south, and Temora, Mudgee and Finley in the east; from New Zealand places spanning Te Tai Tokerau, Waiapu, Nelson and Southland. And Catherine Christie was there, from Canada and Korea.

But there were longer journeys and other threads being woven together. The TransTasman rural ministry conferences began in Darfield in rural Canterbury in 1984 and then alternated, each four years between Australia and New Zealand: Kyogle in NSW in 1988 and Waipawa in Hawkes Bay in 1992; Myrtleford in Victoria in 1996 and Northland in 2000; in Clare in South Australia in 2004 and Nelson-Marlborough in 2008.

Here we were in 2012, TransTasman again, and encouraged by the leadership of the International Rural Church Association (IRCA): Catherine Christie from Canada; Garry Hardingham from Australia; and Robyn McPhail from New Zealand. The IRCA journey, supported and enabled by the Arthur Rank Centre in England, began in the village of Offchurch near Coventry in 1993 then re-gathered at Ushaw College near Durham in 1998, in Chennai in India in 2002, in Brandon in Canada in 2007, and Altenkirchen in Germany in 2010.

This time we were in Atherton, in north Queensland, inland from Cairns. We were a TransTasman Rural Ministry Conference, supported by Catherine Christie, President of the IRCA, and lightly but effectively enabled by Garry Hardingham, flying padre for the Uniting Church in Australia, based in Cloncurry, 700 km distant from Atherton. The vision for the Atherton Conference came after the two cyclones, Larry (2006) and Yasi (2011) in northern Queensland, the Christchurch earthquakes (2010 and 2011), the fires in Victoria (2009) and the ongoing issues of drought and ever squeezing rural sector. The on-the-spot resource people would be the civil defence, clergy, and community leaders who had lead the response to cyclones Yasi and Larry. Garry describes the dynamic:

We felt it would be useful for people to tell their stories and to reflect on how these issues have affected us as people and we as church. We also thought that this might lead us into discovering what makes community resilient (or not) and what is the role of the church in this.

The original venue, not Atherton but nearby, was going to organise the accommodation, the meals, and the transport to and from the airport in Cairns. Three weeks before we gathered, they cancelled, and Atherton stepped into the breach. Garry's words have an immediacy:

- The Atherton Motel were great in making their whole facility available to us as were the Frontier Services Student Group Home in Atherton.
- My sister in law, Evelyn Griffiths organised the meals through the Herberton cafe and I made frantic phone calls to people I knew on the Tablelands to organise the airport pick ups.
- In the midst of this, I came down with a flu which triggered dengue fever. As you may have noticed, I was still crook at the conference.

Rev Catherine Christie, came to us from Canada and Korea, to lead with our bible studies and give IRCA encouragement for our TransTasman Conference. Her journey was tacked onto the 2 week whirlwind visit to Transylvania in Europe and Malawi in Africa to confirm the venue and the arrangements for the 2014 IRCA Conference.

And so it was. We arrived in Atherton on Monday July 2nd and in the evening we opened our conference with dinner, with welcomes, and with worship. For the next four days the Uniting Church in Atherton was our home base for food, for work, for fellowship, and for worship.

Each of the mornings, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, Rev Catherine Christie set the scene for the day, and progressed us into and through our journey, with Bible study (Chapters two, four, and six). Tuesday was the day when we shared our stories and listened to those who had been charged with responding to disasters: Wayne Coutts, Lex Peters, and Glen Louttit, resourced us out of northern Queensland in the morning and Rev Stephen Robinson gave us a keynote address on Ministry in Disaster settings in the evening (Chapter three).

Wednesday and Thursday, after Bible study and smoko, we boarded buses and travelled into the Atherton communities: trip 1 took us to Millaa Millaa and Milanda to see how those communities had responded to the cyclones and were dealing with the restructuring of the dairy industry; trip 2 took us to Mereeba and Dimbula to explore the transition out of tobacco growing and new innovations including coffee and chocolate and visit the operational airport for the Missionary Aviation Fellowship (chapter Five). On Thursday evening,

Rev Graeme Gardiner drew many strands together with a keynote address on personal and corporate resilience (Chapter Seven). Friday morning we engaged in conversations, with keynote speakers and with each other, and worked through a series of decisions to create a regional IRCA which would embrace Oceania – Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific.

This publication, online and/or hard copy, will follow the structure of the Atherton Conference. When we departed for home, we carried multiple memories and a host of new insights into being church, being rural, and being rural church. In Chapter nine we include a selection of the insights which we shared with local congregations in New Zealand and Australia.



CHAPTER TWO – BIBLE STUDY DAY 1: THE DAY OF DESTRUCTION

Sometimes we see the beauty, the certainties, the patterns of the world; but sometimes we are more aware of the fearsomeness, the dangers, the unpredictability of the world. Over the next three days I will explore biblical and communal themes beginning in Destruction, with the realities we all share. Hopefully as we spend our time together we can move from Destruction through Reconstruction, beginning again, to Resurrection and rebirth.



Thank you for the invitation and opportunity to share this study. Let me introduce myself. I am a Minister of United Church of Canada. After ordination I moved to a settlement charge in a small community in Alberta, then moved to a small city and chose to return to small community. God sent me to Abbey, Saskatchewan, a very small two point charge, where I stayed for 13 years before responding to a feeling God might be calling me to serve overseas. I applied, was examined for suitability, and accepted for service in 2010 in South Korea with partner organizations of UCC, PROK and NCCK. I work in administrative ministry in national offices in Seoul, doing English correspondence work. I will return there for two or four more years, and will be in Korea during the WCC General Assembly.

In 2002 I was recommended to be a Canadian delegate to first IRCA conference in Chennai, India. After that the Canadians were invited to prepare the second conference, and I chaired the planning committee for IRCA-Brandon, and continued as part of the leadership team for the next four years. Then at IRCA-Altenkirchen in 2010 I was elected chair of IRCA, and in that capacity I have been invited to share with you this week, having just arrived with Garry Hardingham back from Sibiu, Romania where IRCA Europe has held its inaugural meeting and Malawi, where we were doing preliminary work toward the 2014 quadrennial international conference.

I am looking forward to the rich blessings of this time in this network of rural Christians who have been working together for 32 years, a long time, and so have much to teach the rest of the rural world. Also a community that has suffered many and varied tragic events in the last few years, and therefore this time will be for each a support and strength. I am not a scholar, but like many of you, I am a lover of the Word of God and how it impacts life and is impacted by life. I will share some stories of communities in Korea in which I have seen the Spirit of God at work.

May God bless our time together and open us to the impact of the Word.

The day of destruction

This is the focus on our first day. Physical destruction is very real in our world, and many of you come from communities that have been suffering physical destruction – from flood, or fire, or earthquake, or wind, or drought.

Why, God? From Harvest for the world, compiled by Geoffrey Duncan, 2002

The rains have failed.

We see the dry earth:

We see people go hungry, they starve, they die.

Why, God?

The rains are mighty.

We see the plains flood:

We see the people drown, their homes washed away.

Why God?

Your creation is suffering.

We despair, we are angry, we want to know

Why, God?

Today we ask 'why', and think about how to deal with not getting a satisfactory answer. Start with the story of Job, chapter 1:

"There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; ² And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters."

An accumulation of crises

You know the story of Job. We will leave off the wager between God and Satan and see in Job a man facing an accumulation of crises. (Catherine called on four volunteers to be the messengers)

¹³ "And there was a day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house:

¹⁴ And there came a messenger unto Job, and said, 'The oxen were plowing, and the asses feeding beside them:

¹⁵ And the Sabeans fell upon them, and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.'

¹⁶ While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, 'The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.'

¹⁷ While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, 'The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.'

¹⁸ While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, 'Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house.

¹⁹ And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.'

²⁰ Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground

(Catherine put us into small groups for 5 to 10 minutes and asked: "How does Job's experience of loss and tragedy resonate with you? As you have heard his story, now please share with your neighbor the events which have come upon you or your community".)

Such stress can lead to physical consequences, and the writer of the book attributed it to Satan's shenanigans. So we continue to read:

2:7 So went Satan forth from the presence of the LORD, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown.

8 And Job took a potsherd to scrape himself; and he sat down among the ashes.

9 Then said his wife unto him, 'Do you still retain your integrity? Curse God, and die.'

10 But he said unto her, 'You speak as one of the foolish women speak. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?' In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

11 Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that was come upon him, they came every one from his own place; Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite: for they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him.

12 And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not, they lifted up their voice, and wept; and they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven.

13 So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great.

And Job said:

3:11 'Why died I not from the womb? why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly? 25 For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me.'

We know that the friends of Job discuss the issues with him, and that their chief opinion is that people suffer because of their sin, i.e. it is our fault, and God's righteous punishment that we should suffer. This reminds me of one of the retired Full Gospel pastors in Korea who let be known his opinion that the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster in Japan was God's punishment for the godlessness of the Japanese people. He was persuaded to rescind his words, but there they are. In the same way one of the American televangelists once said that AIDS was God's punishment on the godless homosexuals.

If you hear such an opinion given, what is your feeling?

An insight from Luke

Look at Luke 13:1-5, where we see Jesus' take on the cause of suffering:

Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Jesus about the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

And Jesus answered and said to them, 'Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate?

I tell you, no - but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed, were worse culprits than all the people who live in Jerusalem?

I tell you, no - but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.'

We see two events mentioned here: first, an incident of political brutality, and second, a random accident

What do you suppose was the conversation he was commenting on? I picture the disciples throwing speculations around as they discussed the issue of Pilate's brutality. Or perhaps it was a theological question someone brought to him like that of John 9:1-2 – where there is the assumption that events happen as God's punishment, and the only question is, '*Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?*'

And what is Jesus' answer? (Although Jesus rarely answers with a simple yes or no, here he does) What is his opinion on how the level of our sinfulness affects how or when we die?

There certainly have been people we know to be godly and who have suffered, both in the Bible and modern times - John the Baptist, Stephen, Bishop Romero. Has that been the result of personal sin?

What do you think Jesus meant by his repeated advice in verses 3 and 5?

Perhaps they portray the communal nature of sin. There are consequences to the nature of a society as well as personal actions – because of the national and international continuing social behavior, Jerusalem would be destroyed and, innocent or not, people would die, at the hands of Roman soldiers or in the collapse of walls.

And so, one question is, how can our actions lead to the suffering of others?

Kangjeong Village

Let me tell you the story of Kangjeong Village

A small Korean village, close to 1000 people. Citrus farmers, fishers, famous women divers, the haenyo. They can point back to their ancestors being in that community for 400 years. It is a UNESCO heritage site, the home of rare aquatic creatures, natural formations and plants.

Like a flood, a earthquake, a cyclone - suddenly the security of their lives was swept away. Like a drought, the action they endure goes on and on, worsening all the while, and the people have to live with it, their lives are shaped by it.

They were blown away by a government decision to build a navy base on their village site.

1.0 How can we respond to those suffering from natural, or man-made disasters?

2.0 If people say disaster is God's punishment on those who do wrong, what would you say?

This is the day of Job, the Day of Destruction, what can we learn from it as we sit among the ashes?

Prayer

For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me.

Loving God, we your children gather before you, afraid of the terrible events of the world, against which we are powerless. One thing we know, we are not alone in times of suffering, for the Scriptural account, and the stories we hear from the global community, let us know suffering is a common condition that comes in many guises. We will hear stories this week of resilience in the face of crisis, and as we do, help us hear your voice and know your grace. Our prayer is lifted in the name of Jesus, and as his community, we all respond with our Amen.

CHAPTER THREE – LEARNING FROM DISASTERS

We continued on the first morning by sharing our stories of disasters, the impacts of disasters, and the learnings from disaster experiences. We began with our own stories and we then listened to inputs from those with specialist roles and experiences.

Kevin told us about Temora in New South Wales where the ten year drought was followed by floods; about the bureaucrats who got it right and got it wrong. Lorraine told us about WA (Western Australia - the biggest State with the smallest population) with experience of all sorts of disasters: bushfires; floods; insect plagues; and droughts. Peter told us about Cyclone Theodore in Central Queensland: the unevenness of government response and the importance of listening to what it is the community wants. The donations that flooded in were bad news – the showground warehouse filled with junk and after five weeks the locals got together and got rid of it, seven containers full.

Garth and Jenny told us about the impacts of the Christchurch earthquakes – sharing gut stuff, and good news stories. Martin told us about people in other places responding to the Christchurch quake by sharing grief, praying, and baking fruitcakes. Arthur told us about kiwifruit farmers in the Bay of Plenty and the impacts of the PSA bacterial disease which affects kiwifruit vines. Robyn told us about her town of Kaeo with a succession of floods and the 'resilience we don't have' to relocate historic buildings.

Glen Louttit, Lex Peters and Wayne Coutts

Glen Louttit's experience was as minister in Innisfail from 2004, which took him through Cyclone Larry in 2005 and, just when some recovery was happening, Cyclone Yasi in 2011. He shared insights from his double role as parish minister, and police chaplain. Cyclone Yasi was massive compared to Cyclone Larry: Larry covered small area in real terms, but Yasi covered an area between Cairns and Townsville; Larry was



four hours, Yasi was 12. Glen set the scene for the presentations which followed and the field visits the next day.



Wayne Coutts from the Queensland State Emergency Service has a leading role in Queensland in disaster response and preparedness. He prepares professionals and volunteers. He encouraged us to reflect on our own events for the sake of the future: "don't bat to the last ball. It's not about the last event; it's about the next one." Wayne told us that if mentality stability is good, recovery after an event will be not too bad. Experience enables us to recognize our mistakes, and then correct them.

Wayne reminded us that each disaster is different. Learn from the last one, and use those learnings to set up systems and prepare for disasters which will be quite different. Wayne drew on examples from around the Pacific and from Florida. That experience feeds in to our preparedness. Train and prepare for the worse possible scenario. We build resilience by learning and preparing.



Lex Peters is a psychologist who lives and works in the Millaa Millaa, Milanda, Atherton area. He works with Blue Nursing, Lifeline and is a State Emergency Service psychologist in emergency and post-emergency situations. He is a member of the local disaster recovery committee. Queensland has a unique statutory setup: Red Cross, Lifeline, and Department of Communities

each have set roles to support people in evacuation settings. There are Peer Support Counsellors: each town has a shed with volunteers; in each shed a peer support person. Lex works with the leaders of each group, and provides back up for the Peer Support Counsellors. As part of this, he works at the front line.

Lex talked to us about resiliency. He asked us to think about an elastic band and asked us “What makes community able to stretch and return without rupture or repair?” There needs to be sufficient services in place, and resources to cope with particular events. Experience with similar events is a resource and the size and frequency of events are important: “Size and frequency of events – smaller cyclones ok but a category 5 each year would rupture the elastic band”

Lex pointed to the belief system of individuals – obviously where the church can work best – can help inoculate people. Allow people to Blame God and ask questions – big questions and How Will I Cope questions? Right person at the right place is important. Being there for people gives them hope. Practical help and listening help. Need to be there in love. There is a “stone in the pond” ripple effect!

Lex pointed to insights into cultural difference – different cultures express trauma differently. There are cultural expressions of trauma. We need to have established credibility with that culture. Alongside that we have insights into Post Trauma Stress Disorder worldwide and can apply them locally: 85% people will recover spontaneously with social support and time. They will often experience some ongoing anxiety which helps with preparedness for future events. Another 15% require more assistance, probably around 10% if they have experienced previous events; perhaps 5% will need more intensive help.

Lex stressed that building resilience is important and needs to be done in advance. Here, for example, it is building an informal network. Every person has 20 or so phone numbers of people to help one another eg. I know X has 2 generators and Mrs A needs one for her medical needs etc.

Lex summed up with some practical suggestions. Firstly, don't pathologise natural reactions. Emphasise the normality of reactions and effects. After Cyclone Larry every child went through evaluation and follow up. This didn't achieve very much. Children will generally mirror their parents: their meaning of event is reflected from their parents; if they show fear but don't talk about it, children will be traumatised.

Secondly, transfer rather than refer. Transfer means phoning the person to whom you're referring and have a 3 way conversation... that is transferral and it transfers credibility. There is a 90% success rate with transfer, much lower for referral.

Lex, Wayne, and Glen provided immediate local experience and we responded, warmly, with lots of questions. Stephen Robinson, author of *Ministry in Disaster Settings*, drew on wider experience provided by ministers who have worked in a range of disaster situations, over a number of decades.

ASSISTING MINISTERS IN DISASTER SETTINGS

Stephen Robinson

My particular interest in this area is in terms of how we care for Ministry agents who in so many ways are *at the coal face of community recovery*. Let me tell you how I got into this:

I was ordained into ministry in 1994. That was a big year in terms of fire: much of the east coast of Australia was alight, and there was a particular threat to areas of population around Sydney, the Blue Mountains, and the South Coast. Numbers of houses were lost and people lost their lives. The bushfire campaign ran for three weeks and, though it was not on the scale of Black Saturday in terms of losses, it was an extreme event.



I had grown up in a small country region between Young and Cowra in the south-west of New South Wales. As a young lad I had joined my father and brother, helping our neighbours burn off paddocks after harvest. Years later, I felt rather useless watching local fire brigade go off each day to fight fires without me. I swore that I would join the Rural Fire Service as a volunteer. In 1996 I did my basic training as a firefighter,

and it was in that year that the fire service itself started recruiting volunteer chaplains and I was asked to become one of those.

Since that time I have served in three fire districts: Hornsby, Hastings and Sutherland. In the Hastings district we have the lot of motor vehicle accidents as the highway ran through the area. There were also house fires. My exposure to those events started me wondering about how carers were affected by the trauma of other people that they cared for.

Then I met Christine Unicomb, a Salvation Army officer who coordinated much of the counselling services. I discovered that she had been the Salvation Army officer at Kempsey (on NSW's mid north coast) at the time of a terrible bus accident at Clybucca. She spoke of how it had affected her and her husband Brian, and her frustration at the lack of care that they had received at the time. I could not get those issues out of my head. It was like God grabbed my heart and I knew what my dissertation would be. I needed to understand what were the key issues of the Ministry agents exposed to caring for a community that's been affected by disaster.

I had started to contact ministers. I was surprised how many of them we were. When I was lining up the interviews, the Minister would say, "have you talked to so and so? They were at Port Arthur"? Or, "Have you talked to someone so, they were at the fires in Victoria." There was absolutely no shortage of people to talk to. What disturbed me most was how similar their stories were. Many of them were deeply affected by the time caring for their community in disaster setting, yet very very few had been given any care at the time or afterwards, from their denomination.

One of the first interviews I did was with Glenn Cumbers. And his story changed my life. He was a minister in a small community in Tasmania which experienced the worst massacre by a lone gunman in Australia's history. I spoke to him more than seven years after the event, and was horrified to find that I was the first person who had talked this thing right through with him since that time. You can read more about Glenn in the case study in *Ministry in Disaster Settings*

The tragic thing about Glenn Cumbers story is that, what was potentially full and rich Ministry, never came to pass. If we're talking today about resilience, and the capacity for people to come back from times of trauma and hardship, we need to factor into that how we help ministries become resilient. Since that

conversation with Glenn Cumbers, I have had many more conversations with ministers that have been immersed in the suffering of their community.

I have found the following to be way too common:

1. No education for ministry agents re trauma / disaster
2. Very little understanding of how ministers are affected by these events.
3. No support or very patchy support of ministers during and after these events

The focus today is on the issue of how Ministry agents are affected by trauma. What does it do to them? What is the cost and the impact of connecting with people and with a community which has been traumatised by disaster? I then move on to look at ways to mitigate the traumatisation of ministers, and to support them during times of crisis, and through the process of recovery.

How Ministers are Affected by Traumatic Events

There are three ways that ministers working during, and after a disaster in the community can be affected:

Ministers are Residents of Disaster Affected Regions

The first way is one that often gets forgotten and it is so obvious. Ministers are residents of disaster affected regions. They are householders. They have neighbours. They have children or other family that they are concerned for. In every way Ministry agents are as open to being traumatised by a disastrous event as any other person in the community. I have the feeling that since the professionalisation of Ministry, we have developed an idea that ministers should be above and beyond being affected personally by the events that will affect anyone in the community. This is nonsense. First and foremost, ministers are people. Ministers have practical, emotional and physical needs as much as anybody else in the disaster affected communities.

Vicarious Traumatisation

We don't even need to *be* at a disaster to be affected by it. Vicarious traumatisation is where the trauma occurs not to the primary *victim*, but to those who are close to them. Here the carer, or the Minister, takes on the suffering, or the trauma of a disaster survivor, in a way that they too are affected.

When a disaster takes place, quite often ministers who have a real heart to serve, will head to the front line. They will find ways of connecting with damaged people, and do what they do well – listen to them, and hear their concerns, in many ways, take on their burden. In normal circumstances, we might hear perhaps a few tales of woe in a day, but in a disaster setting we hear scores of them, even hundreds of them. These are tales right out of the ordinary, and that is going to affect us.

Critical Incidents and Critical Incident Stress

“Any situation faced by emergency workers that causes them to experience unusually strong emotional reactions which have the potential to interfere with their ability to function either at the scene or later.” (EMA)

Anyone who is exposed to an extreme event is going to have a number of reactions. These include: the physical; the cognitive; the emotional; the behavioural; and the spiritual. In terms of caring for someone suffering from critical incident stress, one of the first issues is to assure them that they are not going crazy. People will say, "I can't understand why I'm behaving like this; why I can't sleep; why I keep smelling this thing or seeing this thing." And it's important that those times to be able to say, "just think about what you've just been through. It is so far from your normal experience of life, in a way it would be surprising if you weren't reacting to it in some strange way."

A phrase that is often used about critical incident stress is that it is "a normal reaction to an abnormal circumstance"

Where I've seen it at work in ministers following a disaster, is particularly in relation to their not being able to handle conflict. On a few occasions I have met with ministers who have fallen out with their church boards over issues of disagreement. There's a good reason for this. In "normal times" a lot of what happens in the church is based on order, on "what normally happens around here." We work in an orderly way. If you want to really upset some people just move some furniture, or change the time of the service, or ask someone to move from their normal seat. So many of the patterns of our existence in church are built around what we know happens. So what happens when disaster hits a community and things have to change? What happens when the community expects the minister's attention, and he or she is no longer

there in the same way? What can happen, is that conflict breaks out. That certainly was the case for a number of ministers that I spoke to.

When Glenn Cumbers wanted to change things to accommodate the needs of the community outside the church, there was great pressure on him to "return to normal", to visit as he had visited before. In fairness to his congregation, the stress of the new, and terrifying, reality of their existence in that place, was probably too much. Some may call it denial, but who could blame a member of the congregation for wanting to have life as it was before this horrible tragedy. But that puts pressure on the Ministry agent in place when he is trying to deal with the wider reality of the horror.

Related to this, unconsciously, for the Minister, the world of normality seems very dull and insipid, compared to the world of disaster. A lot of what we do in church really doesn't matter that much in the light of an extraordinary need where people's lives are turned upside down. One minister spoke about how frustrating it was for him to be in meetings where time was spent on what sort of toilet paper to buy for the church – (one ply or two?) This, after he had just come back from ministering to families following the deaths of some young people.

These things are compounded by the way the critical incident stress impacts on people. Much of what we do in church depends on our capacity for higher order thinking. A lot of church life is based on moral and theological concepts which involve higher order thinking. Our life together depends on relationships working, and the capacity to understand things from another person's point of view.

When a minister or carer, and numbers of the congregation, are unable to see things from the other person's point of view – because of their level of stress, grief, fear – what almost inevitably follows is *conflict*. Some of the behavioural symptoms of critical incident stress (which ministers are prime candidates for) are: loss of objectivity, loss of ability to conceptualise alternatives or prioritise tasks, outbursts of anger, frequent arguments.

[All this was heavy stuff. So Stephen read us a kid's story. It is called, "who sank the boat" by Pamela Allen. You can enjoy it at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OsYb1YSYR34> and take that into what follows, or you can find hard copy in your local children's library. Stephen made the point that Ministers live much of their life too close to the water. Their boats are already heavily loaded and, despite the fact that the disaster may

seem bigger than anything else in life, the disaster happens when the mouse joins the other animals? Mouse gets the blame, but is it mouse's fault?]

Key Stressors

Beverley Raphael wrote an important book called *When disaster strikes*. She names three key stressors for disaster workers and carers. These are: a close encounter with death; the anguish and suffering of others; and role stresses. They all apply for any Ministry agent in disaster:

The **reality of death**, is something you do get used to as a minister. A person may do any number of funerals, but the connection with the reality of death is pervasive, is exhausting, and it does get to you after a time. But the impact of sudden deaths, unexpected deaths, deaths of young people, children, mothers, prominent community members, heroic deaths – all feature in a disaster which involves fatalities. There is stress involved in helping others process the reality of death itself.

The **anguish and suffering of others** is very real. Those of you who have been part of the community that is being struck by fire, flood, earthquake, the obscene things that people could do to each other – a capacity to care can exhaust us.

Death and the anguish of others are obvious stressors for Ministry agents; but, in my experience one of the greatest issues in Ministry agents struggling as being that of **role stressors**. We all have multiple roles. I am a husband, father, son, a brother and uncle. I am, a minister, an educator, a writer, a speaker. Every one of us has numerous roles that we try to fulfil. But, in relation to roles, stress comes on in two particular contexts:

Role Ambiguity

The first one is "role ambiguity". This is where we are simply not sure of what we are doing or what role we play.

I had an interview with Paul Scott. Paul heads up the Rural Fire Service critical incident support service in New South Wales. I asked him what is the most important thing in dealing with critical incidents. He said "account for what you doing". He made it clear that the most important thing that we can do when we are approaching a critical incident, is understanding what we're doing there.

A good example of this is a terrible situation that Glenn Cumbers found himself in at the Broad Arrow Café in the immediate wake of multiple shootings. He asked himself, "What was I doing? Was I a minister or a first aider?"

To me this highlights the need to have really good education, and equip ministers to better understand what issues are at play, and what they're trying to achieve there.

Role Dissonance

The second role issue for ministers, is "role dissonance". I mentioned earlier the different roles we play, and ordinarily they go together pretty well. We make them work. But sometimes roles will clash.

This is more and more a problem, particularly in rural ministry settings where more and more ministry placements are part time. A person may be working as a minister for a congregation, and a chaplain for an aged care facility or a school. Sometimes those roles will clash. This can be compounded even further if a third role is caught up in disaster recovery. Clashing roles cause enormous stress. In my experience spending time with ministers following disasters, this is the most significant stressor of all. If ministers can be given some really good help early on in determining what the role will be, and where it won't be, stress levels, and the possibility of compassion fatigue developing, are significantly lessened.

Compassion fatigue

"Those who work with the suffering suffer themselves because of the work." (Figley)

Compassion fatigue is a term which has been coined by Charles Figley. Working as a psychologist he was interested to understand why so many people in their profession ended up leaving it. He conducted a research project on paediatric nurses. These people are the most committed people you could find. They love their work. Figley observed that many paediatric nurses simply stopped coming to work, and he wanted to understand why. What he came up with was a thing called compassion fatigue.

Figley found that helping others: requires empathy and compassion; involves seeing world from their viewpoint; and involves motivation to bring help. So people who are highly empathetic, highly compassionate, prone to seeing the

world through others' eyes are also vulnerable to being affected by their stories, their pain, and their experience.

Highly motivated, sensitive people are more likely to be deeply affected by the traumatised lives of other people.

Figley writes that:

1. People who are selfless and motivated to care for others don't pay enough attention to themselves.
2. This makes them more vulnerable than others because they neglect their own needs, despite what their children or spouses say. And even when they recognise it, when they have a choice to put a victim, a client or a survivor ahead of themselves, they do that.
3. They have to be saved from themselves.

The bottom line is that carers – and certainly ministers are among them – following a traumatic event such as a disaster, are highly likely to not only be exposed to others' pain and to others' painful stories – but they're likely to be deeply affected by these things.

Mitigating stress and compassion fatigue

How can do we mitigate the stress that Ministers are exposed to in disaster situations? How do we prevent it from emerging? How do we guide a minister during a time of crisis to avoid the worst? And how do we care for a Ministry agent after the event? There are things we can do before, during, and after the event.

Before

When we go to Theological College, or Bible College, where we learn to be ministers; we never learn how to deal with trauma. We learn nothing about critical incident stress, about post-traumatic stress disorder. We learn nothing about rebuilding communities after trauma, or about resilience. Even in terms of duty of care, denominations need to spend some time and energy in education about these things. Even a half day seminar on this important stuff could make an extraordinary difference to someone that is in the field – at least they will know where to go for help. The option is to have people drowning in ignorance, feeling ashamed to name the inadequacies, and wondering why they can't cope. The cost of not doing this is enormous. It's not

just the loss of a Ministry. It may involve damaged pastorates in a number of congregations, breakdowns of marriages, abuse, and damaged lives. This education needs to go through every level of every church.

We also have to get it into minister's heads (and lives) that they are not bullet proof and they need others. There is no doubt in my mind that lone rangers are 'asking for' serious problems when the going gets tough. People who have no support networks, no supervision, are going to find it that much more difficult to see it through a difficult patch in ministry.

During disaster

When disaster strikes, there is a need for action by way of support for the Ministry agents from the nation and from other multid denominational networks. Though there are different models of how this takes place I speak from my experience, in New South Wales and the Uniting Church. Peer support and helping with roles are especially important.

Peer support is not a new concept (if you doubt, try Google!) My daughter was a peer supporter in her school, and it's been used to help students help students through difficult peer pressure situations. Police and emergency services use peer support networks. Who better is going to help a police officer following a critical incident, than a well-trained police officer who knows what this is like? The New South Wales rural Fire service has a critical incident support service which operates a network of peers. These are experienced firefighters, trained for a peer support program – which uses critical incident intervention and other tools to support firefighters and their families.

In Australia, Salvation Army has had a very effective peer support program and the Uniting Church in New South Wales / ACT has a small group of people to do peer support. During the Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria in 2009, I spent time in two presbytery areas, one on one, with a number of ministers who have been working in fire affected communities. What emerged from that, was the beginning of the model that we use now in New South Wales. It works this way:

We have a group of 10 ministers who have worked in the past as emergency service chaplains, or in ministries which gave them an understanding of trauma. We have trained them in peer support to come alongside Ministry agents at a time of disaster or trauma. We now send peers to disaster affected Ministry agents or congregations as a matter of course.

The timing is important. We don't send peers in in the heat of battle, in the first days of a tragedy - they would just be in the way. The best timing is about a week afterwards, when a minister starts to get really tired, when they realise that they're mortal and could do with some practical help.

Our model is flexible and broader than clinical debriefing. If you have a spare minister on the ground, their job is to be as helpful as they can be to the resident Minister, working with them to take some of the load off the shoulders.

The peer supporter *never* takes over. They never disempower ministers on the ground. They have enough stress without having to fight for their turf. The peer's role is to support them, and they will do it in the following ways:

Spend time talking to them. This may constitute debriefing, in terms of listening to their experience, and helping them make sense of it. The intent is to gently talk through an experience, in a non-probing, nonintrusive way, to mitigate the stress and confusion and make sense of what the carer had been through.

Bringing education. There are so many very good resources which can be shared, which help the Ministry agent understand what is happening to his or her community. There are tools, which the peer can share, which may be used to educate person's congregation or wider network: for example, Ray Scurfield's stages of disaster recovery. The peer comes equipped with a kitbag of tools.

One of the most important issues in educating a minister who's just been involved in a community crisis is helping them to **understand the timeframe**. Community recovery could take years. One of the reasons why a compassion fatigue sets in is that ministers usually cope week by week. We make it till next Sunday, then we make it to the Sunday after. A difficult funeral comes up and we make it through till after the funeral is over. This can become an unfortunate pattern of behaviour. We get by – until that mouse (called a disaster) jumps in our well loaded boat.

The peer is a very helpful thing if they can help set up the pace, and good habits for the minister involved. It is permission giving to hear someone say, "this won't end soon, so how are you going to make yourself last in Ministry over the next two years?"

Helping with roles. One of the key stressors for ministers is not being sure of what their role is, or being involved in *multiple* roles that clash. I had the

opportunity to bring some peer support to ministers in, and following, the Black Saturday fires in Victoria, flooding and cyclone in Queensland, and accident events in New South Wales. One of the most useful things I was able to do was to sit down and work through what their roles were.

Let me give you an example. In one situation I came across a minister who was part time in a congregation, part-time school chaplain. The school that she was caring for was physically and emotionally impacted by a fire, including a death from the school community. At the same time she was working with other ministers at recovery centres in the area. After a couple of weeks these roles were proving unsustainable. The congregation wanted her back, at least for things like a Bible study that was important to them. The congregation had suffered as well as the Minister.

I found that an important part of *my* role was to ask her questions like: "What thing do you feel is most important at this time?" "What would we need to do, to free you up to do this thing?" I was able to work with the Minister, the presbytery, and the congregation, to see that person work in that role for a specific amount of time. This also meant arranging for support by way of temporary Ministry for the congregation for a limited time to run that Bible study.

I have implemented the same process many times since then. Most recently in the Riverina following the flooding in March. A number of rural communities were badly hit by flood. After seven years of drought these communities suffered two consecutive floods, 18 months apart. Many of these congregations were lay led by farming people who, themselves had suffered great loss. They were seeking to care for a community. An important part of caring for them was asking that very question. "What roles are you doing?" "If we could wave a magic wand, what help would you get to help you achieve the role you most want to do?" The church needs to be able to resource the answer to this question. But asking it is important.

Following disaster

Peer support can be very practical. It's not just about the theory. In one situation, in a busy weekend with flood dividing the parish area, the peer took one service in a church while the minister of the area took the other. Doorknocking and visiting were shared. This sort of thing is always carefully

worked through by the peer. Essential to this working is that the peer him or herself accounts for what they're doing.

Looking at the issues for ministers who were affected by disaster, I found an unhealthy trend. Those that were most affected, did not receive good follow up. Some of them had never been given intentional support, and others have moved on, away from the support networks. The peer should, ideally, follow up a minister some weeks, months, and if necessary years afterwards. One of the big issues for ministerial support is people falling between the cracks.

[Stephen concluded by telling us about Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Networks, and an Australian National Council of Churches Working Group.]

Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Networks

In New South Wales we have also been working on developing an integrated disaster recovery chaplaincy network. It's called the DRCN, the disaster recovery chaplaincy network. This was formed after a recognition that there was a gap in our disaster welfare plan. It involves 14 different faith groups – mostly Christian but also involving Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist chaplains.

This chaplaincy network is very similar to that of Victoria which works under the Victorian Council of churches. In designing the training curriculum and protocols for the DRCN, we have worked hard to help chaplains be integrated into the evacuation and recovery centres, work alongside existing stakeholders there – particularly Red Cross, Anglicare, and government agencies. We have also worked very hard on protocols relating to integrating with local ministers. If you haven't worked it out yet, one of my hobbyhorses is care of local ministers. The last thing I need is a group of chaplains coming in, and disempowering the local ministry. That is not the purpose of the DRCN chaplains. They carry material similar to that of the peers, to help educate and equip ministers as they work to care for their communities' recovery.

[Stephen's presentation, following on from the participants sharing, and the inputs by those who had played key roles in local disaster recovery, triggered important question and answer discussion, and resourced our time in the field and many conversations over the next two days. The keynote presentation by Graeme Gardiner on the final evening brought us back to these themes. (Chapter Seven).]

CHAPTER FOUR – BIBLE STUDY 2: THE DAY OF RECONSTRUCTION

Reflections on Day 1

Yesterday was a wonderful day, and I want to thank you all. Please let me review some of what stood out for me.



I appreciated Kevin's anger because no compensation came from the government because "not enough" people were inconvenienced by flood. The same anger struck me as I heard Myra talking about the double levy paid for water entitlement and delivery; although no water was delivered to them, they were compelled to buy feed, and the river continued to flow for the tourist areas and the city. I am reminded of the fact, often unrecognized, that Farmers Feed Cities. I appreciated her account of her congregation's ministry to the community, and how last night she tied the water of the Murray to her faith. Let me return to Glen, and the pain of the destruction of the fruit farm and the exhaustion of dealing with trauma after trauma – I thought of Job's day of the messengers bringing him his bad news. I appreciated Wayne's matter-of-fact description of the Emergency Management's work which is based on don't design a response for the last event, but prepare for the next, which will be different and might be worse.

Lex brought some great information about what makes a healthy community resilient. He, and then Stephen in the evening, both talked about Peer Support Counsellors and the advice, 'don't pathologize natural reactions', in other words, 'you are having a normal reaction to abnormal circumstances'. Peter talked about floods, Arthur about PSA virus in the kiwifruit industry, then Garth came and drew the map of Christchurch here on the platform, while Jenny, Martin, Natasha and Craig brought heart stories of the earthquake and their own or their church's responses. Natasha in fact had a story about a woman whose body was shutting down, although the doctor said nothing was physically wrong – I thought about the physical symptoms of Job from the stresses of such loss. Lorraine had stories of WA, and the most poignant for me was the 'prosperity guilt' that affected the neighbours who received some harvest but could not stand before their communities in thanksgiving. Then

last night such a helpful presentation by Stephen on Assisting Ministry Agents in Disaster and Trauma settings. He indeed called us into more helpful and effective ministry.

The Day of Reconstruction

And so today is day 2, and the vision was a day of coming to terms with whatever reality has laid its hand on our community and actively seeking God in its midst, the day we think about reconstruction, of life beginning again.

There are examples from Biblical sources of how people have responded in crises and ways we can learn from them. A disaster causes much suffering but good can come out of it – as Stephen said, crisis holds both danger and opportunity -in the ways that forest fire in some North American landscape is necessary for renewal of the forest – there are cones of spruce trees that only open with the heat of a fire – Garry says the same is true of gumtrees - which says that recurring fire is expected in the plan of nature – it is only when people live in the area, that fire becomes a problem.

I Kings 19:11-12 – We remember Elijah met God after enduring the crisis of whirlwind, fire and earthquake, and received a new mandate for ministry:

11 And God said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake:

12 And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.

What good can God bring out of terrible destruction and loss of life? What benefits might come to a community and church?

The story of YongJin Church

YongJin is another small Korean farming village, this one on the side of the Han river, east of Seoul. Most of the farmers now produce for the city market. When I heard the story of YongJin congregation, I was amazed at their resilience, how they had survived so many hardships. Let me tell you their story, at least from when Christianity came to their village.

The first Christian was a new wife who came from a village across the river early in the 20th century. There was a woman in the village suffering from emotional/mental disease, and the Christian woman said with assurance that Jesus could heal her, and so began praying. The woman did become better, and five families of the village became Christians. In 1907 the first church building was constructed – the first elder of the church had two brothers who were Buddhist monks in a monastery. When I heard that I thought, 'Oh, discord in the family'. But no, the Buddhist monastery sent wood for the church construction. So it began with ecumenical accord. How wonderful.

The second elder was involved in political action. In 1910 the Japanese took over Korea as a colony, and in 1919 there was a wide-spread Independence Movement called the March 1 movement. The elder, the leader of the Independence Movement in that area, was arrested and suffered severe treatment.

In 1925, the Han River overflowed its banks, and the community was in large part demolished. The church was rebuilt, along with the rest of the village.

In 1945, Liberation from the Japanese finally came with the end of World War II, but the country of Korea was divided by the Allies, and in 1950-53, civil war, the Korean War, took place. Being close to the demarcation line, YongJin was destroyed, but rebuilt once more.

The community prospered and the Church grew. In 1972 they decided to build a new and larger church building. However, their minister and congregation were active participants in resistance to the dictatorship of President Park Chung Hee, and as a sign to those opposing him, the Dictator Park Chung Hee ordered the new church destroyed three months after its dedication because of the congregation's 'political involvement'.

The congregation continued to meet in the old church, until 1984, when they built and dedicated their fifth building. In 1994 they finally removed the ruins of the destroyed church and built a memorial park on the site. Now they are over 100 years old, and still involved in standing for justice.

The Story of Ruth

As I thought of survival and rebirth, I thought of the biblical book of Ruth – disasters (in this case a famine) may mean death of family members, breakdown of normal social life and often forces migration. The story of Ruth

is such an account, reminding readers that people are strong and creative in finding ways to survive, and for people of faith, that God is faithful and God's love does not change even in times of darkness and despair.

Elimelech migrated to Moab – it is interesting he would go there, as the people there were hostile to the Hebrews. In times of hardship, though, how do people decide where to emigrate? It's not always where they would choose.

The story also points out that every society has coping mechanisms that help people survive hardship, like the gleaning regulations that allowed the poor to harvest from the field, and especially in this case, the custom of the kinsman-redeemer. (When outside assistance comes to help in times of disaster, they must recognize and strengthen such systems, not devalue them or do away with them.)

What are some coping mechanisms of your society?

What are some times when social coping mechanisms are devalued or disrespected?

Some experiences coming from discussion: 'Food aid' sent from US after famine in Malawi, expired by the time it arrived. In the same way Myra spoke about inappropriate food aid from the city – all imports sent to Australian farm families. And Peter talked about the junk donated to flood devastated station families – all of which had to be discarded – seven containers worth. Glen pointing out the danger of do-gooders coming to help with reconstruction, and imposing on a community that is struggling with its survival.

A story from Japan

A letter from Rob and Keiko Witmer, UCC overseas personnel in Japan:

It seems hard to believe that, already, a year has passed since Japan was struck by the massive earthquake and tsunami of March 11 that brought the Fukushima nuclear power plant disaster in its wake. As people reflect on the past year, they experience complicated emotions. Many people will speak of the year as the longest year of their lives. After one year, the death toll stands at 15,854, the number of people still missing or unaccounted for is 3,155, and those unable to return to their homes or in temporary housing is 343,935. Emotionally many people are still waiting, hoping against hope for lost family members to come home, waiting for a positive identification of the many bodies that are still not and probably will never be identifiable, and waiting for

the day when they can return to their homes or begin a new life in a new location feeling safe, secure and hopeful about the future.

However, the same people may speak of the year as having flown by when they think about how little progress has been made. A year has not been nearly long enough to bring the nuclear accident under control, and although much of the debris left by the tsunami has been cleared away, a year has not been long enough to make any final decision about what to do with it. People live from day to day experiencing both gratitude and frustration, joy and anger, hope and anxiety, expectation and disappointment.

Farmers are seeking ways to cope with the nuclear crisis. Many farmers in Fukushima carry devices for measuring levels of radiation while in their homes, driving in their cars, and working in their fields. They are monitoring levels of radiation in the soil and also in the water in rice fields. They know that a sudden shift in the wind's direction or even a light rain can have a dramatic effect on the level of radiation. They are trying to find hope and to move forward. A professor from Nigata University said, 'continuing ordinary agriculture will, in the end, save both the community and peoples' livelihood and it is the only way to overcome the present crisis brought on by high levels of nuclear radioactivity'.

They tell the story of Mr Ouchi Shinichi, an organic farmer, 70 years of age.

He tells about some of the difficulties he has experienced since the earthquake and nuclear accident. He was not able to ship or sell most of his crop last year. For more than 40 years he has been marketing a good part of his produce to consumers directly. However, after the accident, his customers decreased by 60% even for produce that was considered within the acceptable limits of radiation. He found that customers most deeply concerned about food safety were the first to shy away. Local produce that had been a regular part of the school lunch was also eliminated after the accident.

However, what was hardest for Mr. Shinichi was that so many young families have moved away because of concerns for the safety of their children. Mr. Shinichi broke down when he told us about his son and the breakdown of community that has come about. He attaches no blame to anyone. He understands why his customers have fallen away. He understands why the school doesn't use local produce in the school lunch. He understands why young families are concerned for their children's safety. And yet he turns his eyes toward the earth and believes in renewal and restoration.

When I think of him the words of Jeremiah come to mind, *'the people who survived the sword (read: nuclear accident), found grace in the wilderness'* (31:2). The people of Fukushima are in a wilderness but they are finding grace and moving forward."

The Story of Hagar

Hagar found grace in the wilderness – she met God as she was wandering in the desert in despair after being evicted from her home and employment

Genesis 21:14-21

¹⁴ And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba.

¹⁵ And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs.

¹⁶ And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bow shot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept.

¹⁷ And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is.

¹⁸ Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation.

¹⁹ And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink.

²⁰ And God was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer.

²¹ And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran: and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt.

What kind of spring of water has sustained you in wilderness times? – can you share some stories, scriptures, practices? (Myra shared some of those things last night)

What is your experience of going on and finding new life in a new way? Today during our day we will have the opportunity to hear more about this question.

Prayer

The prophet Jeremiah wrote: *The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness.*

Kevin cannot resist
good machinery

Creator God, Redeeming God, springing up as living water in the wilderness of our lives, we give you humble and hearty thanks. We know that if we listen, we will hear the encouragement of your grace and experience your new life, your abundant life. We pray for our communities that suffer so much anguish, whose stories we are lifting up this week. We pray for times of coming to terms with new reality and times of building new pathways through life. Help us, your believing people, to go forward in faith, as the community redeemed by Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen



CHAPTER FIVE – DAYS IN THE FIELD

Dairy farming has been tough – there are medium and long term economic pressures and the immediate stresses of Cyclone Yasi. It was moving hear the stories first hand.

Caring in tough times



Behind bars

"So this is where the dairy milk chocolate starts"



Strange animals on Australian farms





Coffee is back – the post Yasi crop

We visited the Sudbury Coffee farm, sampled its products, and Robyn met an old friend.



Whangaroa locals meet up on the Tablelands



The taste test

And we caught up on the technologies of picking and processing coffee.

Kevin cannot resist
good machinery



Coffee picking is
mechanised

Coffee peeler



Natasha taking time out



We are welcomed to, and enjoy the Curtain Fig, a gift from Ngadjon – Jii, the traditional owners, to all who visit the Tablelands



We visited Millaa Millaa Falls and this was the place for the Conference picture



Next we went to Mereeba, the North Queensland operating base for the Missionary Aviation Fellowship. It also provides airfield facilities for the McKay Patrol of the Uniting Church. Gary's plane was 'in residence' for the duration of the Atherton Conference.



Are you coming to Church today?

Waiapu and Tinui, hosts to the next TransTasman Conference, are all able to cram in.





CHAPTER SIX – BIBLE STUDY 3: THE DAY OF RESURRECTION

Reflections on yesterday

Again yesterday was a wonderful and inspirational day of good community and learning. Again I want to reflect on what I took from it. We began with worship led by Garth, with a story about Yung Ching in China and the web of its connections that reach almost miraculously around the world – a reminder of the body's life, a reading about being a bridge and letting others be bridges for us to cross into new life read by Rob, pictures of Jim and Christine's farm as background for prayer, and ending with the brilliant song by Colin Gibson (which I hadn't known but hope to learn) 'Where the road runs out and the signpost ends', and calling on the 'dolphin Christ' to lead. The picture which went with those words was Diane's farm. Jenny then had time to tell us about her participation in the social action network of the New Zealand Anglicans, and their passion for the land, fighting intergenerational and interspecies injustice as they face the devastation of the earth coming generations will inherit.

Our first field trip took us for a view into the dairy farm "value adding" at Gallo farm, some of the beauties and treasures of the Atherton tablelands, the curtain fig tree and Milaa Milaa falls, and the "look out" which we were so blessed to see on a cloudless day. We heard about the wilderness time of James and Sarai, who had endured and continue to endure cyclones, market insecurities, overwhelming debt, a daughter who has a passion to become a dairy farmer like her parents. Such people are much of the reason IRCA exists and we know their story and commit ourselves to supporting such as they. Barbecue when we returned, thanks to those who prepared the food. Though cold, it was a great time, followed by the State of Origin game.

From Destruction and Devastation to Resurrection and Rebirth

Today we will look at the last stage of our journey

'If it is not for winter, spring would not be so welcome. If it was not for the death of Jesus, the resurrection would not have been such a glorious event.'

These words were given during the morning devotions by Mircea Dejeu at the IRCA-Europe conference held in Sibiu, Romania, a few weeks ago. Today, the end of our Bible studies, we look at new hope which can arise from tragedy and death, and the ability to proclaim renewal to the world. We will be realistic about it too, because we know more storms will come.

Faith is one long alleluia sung into a dark night, the only end of which is another challenging dawn. (Uncommon Gratitude, by Joan Chittister and Rowan Williams).

In March 2012 Reformed Communique, the newsletter of the WCRC, there is an article about a course of study being held in Indonesia by Yahya Wijaya:

Students are offered their choice of two-day exposure visits to a Muslim pesantren (residential school), Buddhist mendut (centre) near the world famous Prambanan temple, or a rural Christian church community. The list of options includes spending time with people working on post-disaster recovery in an area hit by an earthquake in 2006 and a volcanic eruption in 2010.

People in the region who have survived natural disasters such as volcanic eruptions and an earthquake, will surprise participants with what Wkjaya calls their 'disaster theology'. Survivors who are now rebuilding in the wake of these disasters have sensitivity to the environment, Wijaya believes. 'They have a way of coping. (And we talked about coping mechanisms yesterday – Catherine) They treat a volcanic explosion as a natural part of life. They don't consider nature as an enemy. They consider it as part of our circle of life just as our neighbours and our family are. We should understand nature as we understand our neighbours and family.'

Wijaya recalls how that attitude of acceptance so surprised an American volunteer who came to help after an earthquake hit the area in 2006. The young man had been a volunteer in Florida following Hurricane Katrina. There he saw people reacting angrily to what nature had done. But in Indonesia he saw people smiling as they offered him drinks even though they had little themselves and were living in temporary shelters. 'These experiences stimulate theologians to build a disaster theology', Wijaya muses. 'It is a theology of creation and disaster based on real life disaster experiences.'

Encounters with Christians and peoples of other faiths in a region prone to disaster offer fertile opportunities for people from other countries to reflect on how their theology affects how people react when disaster strikes them. Can students leave better equipped to serve their people following their encounters in Indonesia?

What does your theology say about disaster and resurrection, about anguish and recovery? We have been hearing the articulation of that question all week and will continue to. We heard it from Glen, we heard it from James and Sarai, even though they may not have framed it as theology, we have heard it from Stephen and from each other.

CiRCLe M (Centre for Rural Community Leadership & Ministry) in Canada organized a 4-session webinar series on how to intervene in a rural community crisis, with a special focus on what local churches/Ministerial Associations have to offer. It was offered because of two experiences –one, a forest fire that devastated the community of Peace River, and the other, a Doctor of Ministry student who had been in a community where a murder had occurred and had become heavily involved in the communal grief and ultimate healing. Many of the learnings are things which you have seen and been saying throughout this week. Some of the realizations of participants:

Christians can witness how God is present in the midst of disaster and the rebuilding of communities.

Churches – know the hope of resurrection:

- have eyes that can see glimpses of God's enduring love
- have liturgy and scripture stores – 'they' in the stories are often the exiles, the lost, the homeless, but now 'they' are 'us'.
- 4. have the ability to lament – as done in Psalm 102 and 31 – we have been hurt and share the hurt together as we lament.

A Modern Prayer of Lament

written by Jerry Buhler of CRCN

*We are people of the land,
we are people of a fabric, woven together.*

We cooperate with the earth, participate with nature,

to nurture, sustain and enrich life.

We participate in many systems – environmental, economic, social, family.

*We seek to use well what is in our control –
quiet wisdom, patience, peace and interdependence.*

*Recently we have been visited by circumstances
that have combined to disappoint and discourage:
drought, grasshoppers, economic uncertainties.*

*The enjoyment of planting and harvesting is diminished
when we find the crops lacking and pastures parched.
The lightness in our steps is replaced with heaviness
when our labour does not produce fruit.
The fun of farming fades, and we feel discouragement
Forces beyond our control threaten the source of our income –
the choice of our livelihood.
Empty bins and marketing realities combine
to make us question and feel anxious about our futures.*

*Recognizing and acknowledging our disappointment and
discouragement,
we express our despair to each other and to God.
We look and reach beyond ourselves;
we see and touch each other in collective lament.
And in this act of community, we find hope.
We seek to use well what is in our control.*

*We are people of the land.
We are people of a fabric, woven together*

Do you remember the story of KangJeong Village I told the other day? As they daily struggle against the theft of their land by the government to build a naval base, in the midst of their grief and their fighting, they celebrate every day – every night for over 5 years they have held a community candlelight vigil, they sing and dance and talk together. One of the people, reflecting, said that although they fight for Gureombi, their sacred rocky coastline (they make speeches, march, throw themselves under the wheels of trucks) they are not

destroyed even as the blasting happens, for they are together, and the community is the most important. — a people of a fabric, woven together.

We have heard over and over in the last few days examples of this.

Nehemiah

Another story from Scripture became relevant to me as I considered this day and theme.

Nehemiah 1:4-11 from *The Message*

⁴ *When I heard this, I sat down and wept. I mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God-of-Heaven.*

⁵⁻⁶ *I said, "GOD, God-of-Heaven, the great and awesome God, loyal to his covenant and faithful to those who love him and obey his commands: Look at me, listen to me. Pay attention to this prayer of your servant that I'm praying day and night in intercession for your servants, the People of Israel, confessing the sins of the People of Israel. And I'm including myself, I and my ancestors, among those who have sinned against you.*

⁷⁻⁹ *"We've treated you like dirt: We haven't done what you told us, haven't followed your commands, and haven't respected the decisions you gave to Moses your servant. All the same, remember the warning you posted to your servant Moses: 'If you betray me, I'll scatter you to the four winds, but if you come back to me and do what I tell you, I'll gather up all these scattered peoples from wherever they ended up and put them back in the place I chose to mark with my Name.'*

¹⁰⁻¹¹ *"Well, there they are—your servants, your people whom you so powerfully and impressively redeemed. O Master, listen to me, listen to your servant's prayer—and yes, to all your servants who delight in honoring you—and make me successful today so that I get what I want from the king."*

I was cupbearer to the king.

Here we see grief and lamentation, leading to confession and then Nehemiah's picking of himself up and making plans and a strategy for the future.

This book contains good lessons on planning, organizing, motivating, dealing with opposition, and the importance of prayer in the rehabilitation process.

At the end of the rebuilding there is a joyous celebration. (Neh 12:27ff)

What kind of celebrations have you organized for your community in its recovery?

Rehabilitation is more than physical rebuilding. There will be spiritual battles and physical opposition to face (Neh 4 & 6), often along with the opportunity to reform unjust social structures.(Neh 5)

The church can act as community peacemaker, and can challenge selfishness and competition over scarce resources.

What sources of conflict or injustice may have appeared in your community during rebuilding? Glen dispersing \$2.2 million. Some of the accounts of inappropriate donations. To give another emphasis, what spiritual battles have you faced?

What can the church do to resolve them and facilitate community action to new ways?

From Japan

The story goes on and on: We are not talking about something that will be finished after two years any more than it was after one year. Along with the work of rebuilding destroyed communities, people will, more than anything, need the assurance that they are not alone. Healing and hope will not come easily to those whose lives have been changed so radically. But they are finding strength and hope to move forward by knowing that they are not abandoned by God and that there are people all over the world who care about them and remember them prayerfully.

A Story from Acts

There was a famine affecting Judea, and the Christian community was immediately willing to help.

Acts 11:27-30

²⁷ During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.

²⁸ One of them named Agabus stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world: this took place in the days of Claudius Caesar.

²⁹ Then the disciples, every one according to his ability, decided to send help for the Christian community living in Judaea:

³⁰ This they did, sending their gifts to the elders by Barnabas and Saul

(Catherine gave us questions to work on in groups)

- In Antioch a prophet warned about the impending disaster. How do we find out about such calamities? Media, church connections and partnerships are our news givers today.
- What did/does the church locally, nationally, internationally, do in response to the need? That church gave. We have heard a lot over these days about the responses of our churches

Prayer

Loving God, we rejoice in the resurrection that comes after death, the spring that comes after the winter, the morning that comes after hours of darkness.



Give us resilient minds and hearts that have faith that they will come, that are willing to shout our alleluias into the long night even though at the end will come another challenging dawn. We pray for our communities and loved ones who have known distress. Help us to be agents of ministry in times and places when there is need of rebirth. As we begin to prepare to return to our homes, let us take our learnings with us, and the knowledge that we are part of a wide community. As those who claim fellowship with Jesus the Christ, we commit

ourselves to you this day. So be it. Amen



CHAPTER SEVEN – CLOSING KEYNOTE

PERSONAL AND CORPORATE RESILIENCE – WHAT ARE WE LEARNING?

Rev Graeme Gardiner

Introduction

We will consider a more detailed definition shortly, but put very simply, ***resilience is the capacity to bounce back from a setback***. It is a word that is gaining more and more airplay. If we had been given a dollar for each time the word was used in media reports surrounding the flood and cyclone disasters of early 2011 we would be wealthy people. More significantly, it is a subject area that is gaining more and more attention from academics and researchers. To speak of resilience is certainly a trend, but it would be unwise to relegate it to the category of 'fad', for ***it arises out of sustained and substantial awareness that life on planet earth is not the sure and certain thing that the era of modernism tended to promise***. Indeed, while we may have moved past the threats of Cold War and nuclear annihilation, the feeling of many is that life is currently more precarious than ever.



Earth scientists argue that the planet has been so changed by human activity that our era warrants to be viewed as a new geological epoch. They speak of 'global change' as a term to include a suite of human-induced changes – encompassing climate change, but including a range of other changes that are having global-scale impacts. There is a case put forward that there are boundaries of change in each of these within which there is a 'safe operating space for humanity'. Cross these boundaries and we risk pushing the earth into an entirely different way of functioning, and in a fashion that is irreversible on the time scale of a human lifetime, and would put at risk the natural systems that we depend upon. Though somewhat speculative, some scientists argue that three of these boundaries have already been crossed: those of climate change, biodiversity loss and the global nitrogen cycle.

The current thinking around the subject of resilience has arisen from the coming together of two discipline areas. In science, the subject of resilience took off in the 1970s, particularly in the domains of ecology and natural

resource management. There has been a long held interest in resilience in the field of psychology, centred on the characteristics of individuals and the environments they lived in. This interest in resilience has peaked further with the emergence of the field of positive psychology, which has turned its focus away from solving the problems of individuals, to means of building the capacity of individuals to prosper in both the ups and downs of life. It is grounded in a strengths based approach to life, and the notion of learned optimism, as opposed to learned helplessness.

The reason for this renewed interest in resilience is apparent. ***Society is becoming increasingly concerned with our ability to cope with a range of looming threats***, some which are local and regional, and some which are global. Amongst many they include: climate change and all the implications that flow on; pandemics; market collapses; peak oil; ocean acidification; collapsing fisheries; water 'wars'; terrorist activity; asylum seekers; food insecurity; etc.

Potential threats such as these are also having an impact upon the mind and mood of Australian society, causing anxiety and a questioning of how contemporary society is functioning. Studies are revealing that over the past decade levels of anger and anxiety about changes in society have risen substantially. While indicators such as material wealth and life expectancy have risen, measures of well-being have not. Surveys have revealed that more than 80% of parents worry about their children's futures. Psychological research shows that key factors in personal well-being include a view that the world is comprehensible, manageable and meaningful. The broad sense that human society is lurching from one difficulty to another, and that serious crisis is a real prospect, undermine this world view and thus the experience of well-being.

In this context, the capacity to be resilient, both personally and corporately, in the face of both anticipated and unexpected shocks and challenges, is increasingly regarded as crucial to the future of the world. ***It could be argued that rural communities are less insulated than major city areas and are particularly subject to a wide range of potential shocks and challenges.***

Defining Resilience

Professor Stephen Carter of the University of Wisconsin offers a definition of resilience that has broad acceptance from a range of disciplines:

Three different properties to resilience:

- *Able to withstand a shock without losing its basic function*
- *Able to adapt to changing circumstances*
- *Able to transform to a different way of life when the current way of life is no longer feasible*

Resilience and Theology

In the light of this definition, it does not seem unreasonable to bring a third discipline into play – that of theology. Indeed, from a Christian viewpoint ***it could be argued that resilience is an expression of the principle of resurrection.*** 2 Corinthians chapter 4 provides an interesting interplay between the shocks and challenges of earthly life, and the power of faith and resurrection to enable life to nevertheless flourish: “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body..... Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.” (2Cor4:8-10,16) If resilience is an expression of the principle of resurrection, then Christianity should have much to contribute to the building of resilient people and communities.

Personal Resilience

Psychology, and in particular, positive psychology, has had much to say about individual resilience, and what contributes towards becoming more resilient.

A resilient person will often:

1. be self-aware and capable of self-reflection
2. take a realistic view of themselves and the world and will seek perspective
3. manage negative and positive emotions constructively
4. be optimistic about the present and the future
5. have the capacity to be flexible during times of change and uncertainty
6. have a strong sense of purpose and meaning in life

7. treasure and nurture caring and supportive relationships
8. have a strong sense of belonging, trust, security and safety within the family, peer group, workplace, school or community
9. take opportunities to serve others with their strengths

There are clear parallels between all of these characteristics and many teachings and spiritual disciplines of the Christian life. It is no surprise that research, such as that being conducted at the University of Massachusetts, has revealed that people of faith on average demonstrate greater capacity for resilience and greater levels of reported well-being. There, research that has followed the lives of people impacted by the loss and trauma of Hurricane Katrina has revealed that the three things that almost universally helped provide meaning and motivation to rebound after the hurricane were:

- God (representing religion)
- Grandma (representing a role model)
- Our kids (representing family)

The importance of intentional communication and relationships of care, compassion and camaraderie in surviving trauma is, for instance, demonstrated in the experiences of those who have lived as prisoners of war.

Developing personal resilience should be second nature to the church, as these characteristics have long been part of our core business as a discipling community. Put differently, to the extent that people of Christian faith struggle to demonstrate resilience in the face of challenge and change, the church may have fallen short in its core task.

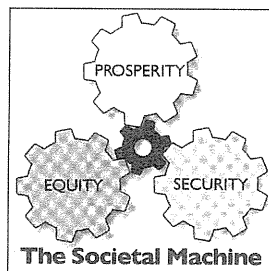
Corporate Resilience

While the tools of building personal resilience appear familiar to people of faith, that which is required to develop corporate resilience – within groups, congregations, communities and nations – may not be as well understood. Here, in recognising that social systems function much like ecosystems as complex adaptive systems, we would do well to draw upon the insights of the physical and social sciences. ***It is not sufficient to consider personal resilience alone, because no-one exists in isolation.*** We live within social and ecological systems, and personal resilience alone will not enable us to bounce back if the social or ecological system is not sufficiently resilient also.

In the publication “Resilience and Transformation”, the attributes of systems and institutions identified as being important for resilience include:

1. Leadership and statesmanship
2. Clear and agreed visions, objectives, roles, responsibilities and resourcing.
3. Encouragement of diverse ideas and skills.
4. Modularity of networks. (Modularity means that failure in one part of the system does not cause failure of the whole system)
5. Feedbacks that ensure rapid and effective detection of change, and the capture and sharing of relevant information.
6. Capacity for, and encouragement of, self-organisation.
7. Governance that spreads authority and responsibility more broadly across society, considering which people and organisations are best placed to detect and deal with change, to collect and disseminate information and to catalyse cooperative actions.
8. Development and testing of suitable approaches to implementing polycentric governance.
9. Processes that truly engage a wide range of Australian society in meaningful dialogue that informs them, listens to their views and involves them in the processes of detecting and responding to threatening *and* beneficial change.

The discussion of ‘systems’ and what makes them resilient invites dialogue with the writing of Brian D. McLaren in “Everything must change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope” 2007, Thomas Nelson Publishers. In this book, McLaren offers a thoughtful analysis of how human society functions – in what he describes as a ‘societal machine’:



It is formed of three interlocking subsystems, each of them serving good and legitimate desires in and of themselves – desires for prosperity, security and equity.

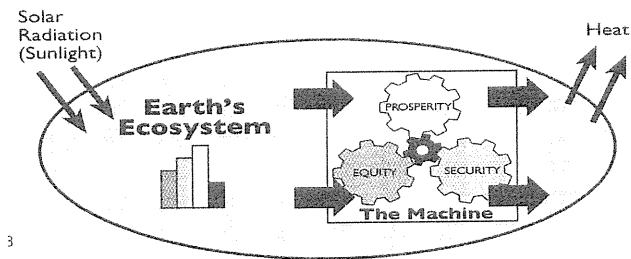
The prosperity system seeks to fulfil our desire to not merely survive, but to thrive. This system seeks to create enjoyable sensations and experiences – for instance, pleasant tastes, interesting sights and sounds,

enjoyable tactile, intellectual and emotional experiences – and to bring relief to their opposite, such as disease, injury and boredom. This system therefore feeds society with goods and services – ‘consumables’. It is comprised of a host of subsystems – of agriculture, manufacturing, energy, transportation, education, entertainment, communication, etc. Of course, should some individuals, groups or even nations acquire a disproportional share of these things than others, jealousies might erupt into attempts to take these away – and thus the need for an interlocking security system.

The security system is in place to protect the prosperity system from interference. It is also comprised of a host of subsystems – weapons, intelligence, border control, policing, surveillance, etc. The security system can often be expensive, especially as enemies and criminals keep on developing more sophisticated means of subverting the prosperity system. Society must therefore develop ways to equitably spread the cost of systems maintenance and development.

The equity system not only seeks to fairly spread the cost of the security system, but also to equitably support the expansion of the prosperity system. The equity system has four basic functions: to develop and enforce laws to protect people’s freedom to pursue prosperity and security; to levy taxes to distribute the costs of these systems; to establish and protect the press and court systems; to alleviate suffering through a range of interventions. Equity does not mean equality. It means fairness and justice with a human sense of mercy and compassion.

These three systems cannot operate independently. But this societal machine is part of a bigger system – and when this bigger system is not taken into account, then the ***societal machine can become a suicidal machine***. This bigger system is, of course, the ecosystem:



The large arrows in this diagram refer to inputs (resources) and outputs (waste). If the societal machine were to grow to a size where it demanded more resources than the environment could provide and produce more wastes than the environment could absorb, it would have tipped over beyond a position of being able to 'bounce back', and would have entered the death cycle.

McLaren asks questions of this machine... what controls it? What determines its speed and the ends for which it works? And what helps the machine restore balance after a shock? That is, what gives it resilience? He argues that ***all the systems and subsystems that comprise the societal machine are integrated by the dominant 'framing stories' we tell ourselves as a society.*** In the diagram it is represented by the black cog at the centre of the machine. If our dominant framing stories are wise, strong, realistic and constructive, it can allow the societal machine to serve us well, and allow it to be resilient to unforeseen shocks. But if the framing story is weak, false, unrealistic or destructive, it can send us along with the machine on a downward spiral to an unrecoverable disaster.

McLaren argues that our growing list of global crises is evidence that our world's framing story is failing us. He also argues that any attempt to 'fix the system' without starting with the framing story is bound to fail. He believes that Jesus confronted the framing story that drove the society of his day and offered an alternative narrative, seeking to address the downward spiral and offer the basis for an ascending spiral of transformation and hope.

If McLaren is right, if individuals, congregations and society at large are to become healthy and resilient to shock, much attention needs to be given to providing a strong, wise, realistic and constructive framing story to drive any values and systems that undergird our life.

[Graeme drew on a range of sources, including insights from the series of articles in *Resilience and Transformation: Preparing Australia for Uncertain Futures*, edited by Steven Cork for *Australia 21*, and published by CSIRO Publishing, 2010. *Australia21* is an interdisciplinary non-profit organisation with a core focus issues of strategic importance to Australia in the 21st century.]



CHAPTER EIGHT - REFLECTIONS AND DEVOTIONS

Our time together was nurtured by devotions, morning and evening, and supported by reflections. Some of these were power points, with landscapes, people and other imageries; others were scripted. Leigh begins

We have come from many places

Leigh Williams, Rylestone, NSW

The call was for volunteers to lead worship. Leigh Williams took up the challenge and lead the evening prayers on our first night. She opened with this prayer from the Iona Community, Wild Goose publications.

Creator of the world, eternal God,

***We have come from many places
for a little while***

Redeemer of humanity, God-with-us,

***We have come with all our differences,
Seeking common ground.***

Spirit of unity, go-between God,

***We have come on journeys of our own,
To a place where journeys meet.***

So here, in this place,

Let us take time together.

For when our paths cross and pilgrims gather,

There is much to share and celebrate

***In your name, Three-in-one God,
Pattern of community. Amen***

Leigh continues "And for me that is exactly what happened. We took time to share and celebrate and in so doing we found that as rural pilgrims we shared much common ground, and the crossing of paths. And while many of us met as strangers, we soon felt the commonality that we have in the family of our Trinitarian God.

Leigh Shared the imagery of Dunns Swamp, close to her home in Ryleston, New South Wales and we then sang *For you deep stillness*, by Robin Mann.

*For you, deep stillness of the silent inland;
For you, deep blue of the desert skies;
For you, flame red of the rocks and stones;
For you, sweet water from hidden springs,
From the edges seek the heartlands,
And when you're burnt by the journey,
May the cool winds of the hovering Spirit
soothe and replenish you,
In the name of Christ, In the name of Christ.*

Looking back, Leigh reflects "As we listened to stories of pain and stories of resilience during the following days – the pain of cyclones, floods, fires, earthquakes – yet also stories of rebuilding, and of determination there were witness statements of "the cool winds of the hovering Spirit" soothing and replenishing, and that continued amongst us as gathered and shared with one another. Thanks be to God."



Rob getting to grips with New Zealand resources

“aha moments in my faith walk”

Myra Cowell

I'm not an academic or theologian, so when I read Garry's email asking for people to lead devotions I thought no way am I going down that path. A few weeks ago I woke up with the prompting that I could perhaps use some of my personal experiences about my walk of faith. I sent an email off to Garry with an outline and the rest as they say is history!!

So here I am – I thought I would share with you some of my **great aha moments** in my faith walk. I'm sure you have all had some. Having lived on a dairy farm all my life until four years ago most of my experiences are of a fairly practical nature.

What would you say is a characteristic in the scriptures which you would use to describe Jesus Christ for you?

The first which comes to my mind is that of the Shepherd. Having a love of and working on the land and with animals I can really relate to this characteristic. Taking it further to not only looking after the land and animals but to look after all of creation including human beings – especially to be on the lookout for those who are in a bit of trouble – in other words those who have gone astray – to be a shepherd.

However what really sticks out to me is the scripture from John 4: 13 – 14 – Jesus teaching the woman at the well about living water” Jesus said to her ***“everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I give them will never be thirsty. The water that I give will become a spring of water gushing up to eternal life”***

Water is so essential for life – what can we do without it - very little. It sustains us in all aspects of our life. We need it to wash in, to refresh us – inside and out – to water our parched land, to grow our food – just to mention a few of the needs. Water sustains all creation.

Jesus Christ is my living water – my sustainer.

Water can come in various ways – from the sky to fill our dams and rivers; or we can have it come from underground as in the case of the well at Jacobs Well in our scene for these verses. It can rush or come in dribbles.

Have you ever been under the shower with your hair all shampooed up and the tank runs dry! You are not a happy person I can assure you!

My life was running pretty dry a few years back and I was having a really dry wilderness experience. I felt alienated from my congregation over a couple of years - which came about from some underhand decisions being made which affected me; my family and others in the congregation.

While I was out on my "vigorous daily walk" around the cow tracks, a couple of years later, I was really sounding off to God about these people; what they had done; what had happened to me; to the other people and the congregation as a consequence of their actions.

Something astounding happened when I was in full flight – I heard this voice interrupt with "get behind me Satan". Not to be outdone I answered, "well that's what they're like and what they've done," and kept going.

Well the voice came back straight away much stronger and in no uncertain tones I heard again "get behind me Satan" I stopped this time and looked behind and saw there was no one there. I thought, "well, I've been told something here in no uncertain tones!"

A few weeks previously a friend had given me a book about praying and the power of prayer. I hadn't done anything about reading it. A few days after this encounter out on the cow track I thought I had better have a bit of a look at this book before I get asked about it.

So eating my cornflakes one morning I came across this part which was saying that we have to give thanks for everything including the bad situations in our life; for those who had hurt us; and what we had learnt from them. With my cornflakes halfway to my mouth I thought "crumbs God you can't expect me to give thanks for that lot and what they have done! Look at the strife it has caused to so many people in the congregation"

Thinking about this I thought well nothing has worked so far; I had learnt quite a lot from the experience of floundering around out in the wilderness; so perhaps I had better start giving thanks a go and see what happens; which I did.

Several mornings later I was in the process of doing this again when out on my walk, when out of nowhere I felt like I was walking on top of the waves; I was gently gliding with the rise and fall of the waves; with this voice telling me over and over "you're free - you're free!"

This walking on top of the waves was an amazing experience; so much so that I stopped and looked down to see what had happened to the track; it was still the same old flat, cow pugged track that I always walked on.

From this time onwards I was able to reconnect with my congregation and have been led along a path I never ever thought I would take or find myself doing.

I was refreshed and saved by the life giving water of Jesus Christ.

Five and a half years ago my eldest son Malcolm had a terrible farm accident – which was the result of drought stress – his hand was severed by an auger. He was fortunate that the auger was a fairly new 9 inch one and it cut straight through his arm at the wrist. It took 8 hours to get him by air ambulance to hospital in Sydney and ready for surgery – optimum time for this surgery is 4-6 hours.

Malcolm was told that he was looking at two options. One was four hours which would just tidy up the arm and the hand wouldn't be attached. The other was 14 hours at least to try and reattach the hand. He went into theatre around 4.00 pm.

Malcolm was in recovery and when he was able to focus saw that the clock was at 7.15; he mumbled "Oh bugger" the attendant asked what was wrong. Malcolm replied they haven't attached my hand. He was quickly told that they had and it was now 7.15 am the next morning.

After 15 hours of surgery, his hand never looked like not taking and being successful. We were helped so much by the prayers and support of so many people right across the State.

I spent six weeks in Sydney looking after Malcolm and Jenny's two daughters. As you can imagine it was a very stressful, emotional time for us all. Malcolm has had several operations and years of therapy and he now has partial use of his hand.

We were and have been sustained through all of this by the life giving water of Jesus Christ.

About the time we were to return home I noticed an advert in Insights NSW /ACT magazine for a trip to Israel Greece and Turkey. The upshot of this was that my friend Jill and I registered and ventured off with the rest of the party arriving in Jerusalem on Maundy Thursday.

What an experience that was – there were so many wonderful experiences such as the Maundy Thursday evening meal of a typical Passover meal which included the story of Passover as it is told in every home each year since. The Easter morning service in the garden outside the empty tomb, was another special time; seeing the Dead Sea scrolls was yet another.

Another experience which I will never forget is going up to Caesarea Philippi. I was so excited to be going there and expressed this to a couple of people who with a bit of a puzzled expression wanted to know why. They wanted to know why I would be excited about going to Caesarea Philippi. I couldn't explain why only that I was. They shook their head.

On the way there we stopped off to see the magnificent Banias waterfall. The amount of water pounding over the edge and eventually down into the Banias river which is one of the three tributaries into the Jordan River, was amazing.

We arrived at our destination and an astounding sight met me. I now knew why I was so excited to be going there! Before us was a magnificent big pond of wonderful sparkling water – clear as crystal. This water was coming out of 6 or 7 beautiful springs coming out of the rocky out crop. It was so beautiful; so profound. The evidence left of the time when idols were worshipped was sent into oblivion for me.

These springs have been feeding the Dan River forever – bringing life giving water to all who come in contact with it – and still does.

This is the picture of life giving water which comes to me, when Jesus is talking about life giving water. Jesus is using life giving water to explain to the lady at the well about the life giving water which gives eternal life, divine grace, or God's life within the soul.

The Dan River flows into the Banias River; there is a third river the Snir. These three meet up and become the Jordan River. These bodies of water are parts of a great fissure; the Syrian African Rift, the deepest land rift in the world.

Our faith journey can run like a river, fast and swift flowing.

Sometimes, it can be slow and a bit sluggish.

It can also twist and turn and can change course just as a watercourse sometimes does. However our faith journey needs to be nourished, refreshed,

and sustained by the “life giving water”, just as the beautiful springs do for the Jordan River.

I have found that in having a close relationship with God **over most of my life time is so precious to me**; especially when I look back and see that what I thought were times of isolation from God have really been God holding me in His hand helping me to learn and grow. This relationship is in a myriad of ways; not just as a Shepherd. With His tender love always available to me bringing hope from what I thought was hopelessness; his empowering helps me to overcome difficulties; and in the stuck places I find myself in so often in ministry.

***Jesus Christ is the river of life and love for me in my faith journey;
He is my life giving water.***

Prayer

Thank you loving God for your tender love and care; for all you do for us no matter what situation we may find ourselves in. May we always remember that you are in that situation with us; that we are not alone; that Jesus Christ is our life giving water, sustaining and empowering us?

Give us the courage to accept the help of those who you send to help us in our time of need. I pray that we will on the other hand be aware of those who you are asking us to be your shepherd to and extend your love and care to them, helping to bring your life giving water to them.

I pray through your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Yung Ching villages and mutual ministry

Garth Cant

Kia ora koutou.

Let me tell you a rural ministry story. Let's go back 100 plus years to some small rural congregations in North China. The British and Foreign Bible Societies had been printing scriptures in the Chinese language. Copies of the Scriptures found their way into the Yung Ching villages on the North China plains. By 1900 a cluster of Christian congregations had been formed. The gospel had taken root in their corporate life and witness and outreach.

The Anglican Church from England decided to gift them an ordained clergyman – a graduate from St John's College Oxford, a very immature curate from Darlington, recently chaplain at the British Embassy in Peking. Roland Allen came to the Yung Ching congregations to convert and was himself converted. In these small, low profile, congregations he found wise mature Christians and effective leadership, baptized but not ordained. Before he arrived the totality of the Church was there, when he left a few months later the totality of the Church continued to be there.

Roland Allen's health broke down, and he had to leave China. He returned to England and then moved to Kenya. But the connection had been made, the theology embedded in the life of those Yung Ching congregations had taken root in Roland Allen's mind and imagination. The remaining 45 years of Roland Allen's life were given over to formalizing and propagating the insights he discovered in that brief encounter with the Yung Ching congregations in 1902.

He made little dent on the Anglican communion in England or in East Africa, but his writings were published and sold widely. They fell into enthusiastic hands after World War II when Wesley Frensdorff (a European refugee with a good Methodist name) went to America, became an Episcopalian, trained for Ministry, became Priest, and then the Bishop of Nevada. Wesley Frensdorff read Roland Allen's writings. In the rural, struggling, Episcopalian Diocese of Nevada the theology of the Yung Ching villages again became mission practice.

Local congregations have within themselves all of the gifts and skills and spiritual resources to be the total Church. Supported by Bishop and Diocese, local congregations begin by identifying the ministries which they need to support their life and mission. Then, after further preparation, they discern which of their members will exercise each of these necessary ministries. Local people thus called are licensed and ordained to provide local ministries.

Nevada proved to be fertile ground for Total Ministry and the springboard which has projected it into the life of the Anglican communion world wide. Those small congregations in Yung Ching, through Roland Allen, have transformed the theology and praxis on the global Anglican Church.

Nevada and Wisconsin and Alaska were part of the story. Peter Williams, Ministry Educator in Christchurch Diocese, became involved and places like Cheviot in North Canterbury became landmarks on the international map. (Di Le Cren came to a TransTasman Conference at Myrtleford and told us about

Cheviot) Those small congregations in North China more than a century ago have left their imprint on the lives of congregations like Cheviot and Hinds, and Morven-Waiiau in the Christchurch Diocese. Thanks to the Bible Societies, the scriptures, the Yung Ching congregations, and Roland Allen, a local theology has massively impacted on a global Church.

It has embedded itself in the lives of congregations in New Zealand. Those of you who rub shoulders with Anglicans here in Australia will know which are the dioceses and which are the parishes which have been transformed by “total ministry” – by those Yung Ching congregations, by Roland Allen, and by Wesley Frensdorff.

Kia ora tātou

Cry Out for Help!

Sue Ellis, Ceduna SA

On Jan 7th 1988 it was another 40 degree day at Melrose in the Flinders Ranges South Australia. Our Country Fire Service was battling a bush fire that came raging over Mt Remarkable. Melrose is nestled at the foot of the mountain. The order to evacuate came and it was grab the kids, block the gutters and wet everything down and go, as men stood the fire against the town. I cried out to God for help that day.



Has there been / is there now a time when you cry out to God for help?

Psalm 121 says, “I look to the mountains, where does my help come from?” The psalmist reassures us that our help does come from God.

We returned to our home as the fire moved north along the Flinders Ranges...I recorded the decisions of the Police Inspector for the Coroner, as more places were evacuated, and crews from all over the state came to our assistance. Fire shifts went on, day after day, night after night. We were in another world. When it was over, what was left looked like a battlefield.

The week after the crisis we drove out into a landscape and sky of grey and black – there no other colour. Except for one tiny green shoot from a red river gum.... Hope emerged....here was a sign of another power at work

People of faith remember the power of the promises of God and put their trust in them.....

On the mountain, in the midst of the fire, a local man fearfully commented..."This must be what hell is like!" To wit, a local church goer, fighting beside him said, "So what do you think you will do about it?!"

After a different disaster in the Bible, we hear in Genesis 9: 16 *The rainbow shall be in the cloud and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.*

That was a flood; this was a fire – but the sign of the rainbow reminds us of the power of the faithfulness of God. This gives us assurance and hope and strength: and the power to endure.



Paul writes in 2 Cor 12; 9 – My grace is sufficient for you; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." This grace is not what gives us victory – it gives us the power to endure. Isn't that what resilience is about? Endurance.

Paul knows both his weakness and he knows the power of God: he keeps both in view in order to rest in a "power" that comes from himself.

The rainbow reminds us that God is with us....Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit to us to be our comforter, our Friend, our Helper, our Advocate: God's power with us. Power to endure, to grow resilience.



"Reading new music"

CHAPTER NINE – SHARING THE JOURNEY

We returned to our homes and congregations, taking the learnings and insights of the Atherton conference with us. In different ways, we shared the experience with others who are part of rural church and involved in rural ministry. Some have given us access to these reports, news items, and sermons. *Rural Network News* has given us permission to reproduce items which they have published. We complete our Atherton volume with these “Sharing the journey” contributions.

Building robust communities: who is my neighbour

Craig Smith, Ruahine Regional Missioner

Such is the phrase which comes up in the Parable of the Good Samaritan from Luke 10, was one of a number of Biblical pictures that came to mind during the Trans-Tasman Rural Conference. We were privileged to be treated to an awesome sharing of stories on the Tuesday. Such was the amount of moving material shared, I would like to pick out a few.



I was particularly struck by Glen a Minister who shared his experiences of pastoral care during the Larry and Yasi cyclones that hit North Queensland. He received help for post traumatic stress disorder, having given out so much supporting those who lost everything. Here in the Ruahine we are called to be missional out in the world, not least where we perceive God to be already acting. In that vein I was saddened to hear that Glen had received an offer of help by a lady outside of the congregation to do his entire phone calling, to check all were well, while he concentrated on visiting. The offer did not sit well with some in his congregation: there was the threat of a person to leave his church if the lady continued that telephone ministry.

We also heard a number of very sacrificially shared stories on that first day, shared from the heart.

Another issue which was diplomatically dealt with was the issue of Water. An issue which is polarizing New Zealand at the moment, who owns the water.

Several of the delegates at the Conference took water from the Murray River but from different points. One wants to take more, which if allowed in the latest plan would affect those further down the river.

On Tuesday night we heard from Stephen Robinson, who shared from his ministry experience in disaster settings. He also brought copies of his recent book, which awakened in me a desire to restart research in this area. An area I had written on for my dissertation whilst at theological college. Watch this space!

Wednesday and Thursday were mainly taken up with on the ground visiting of ministries and communities, many of whom had to adapt and diversify fast to what nature and the government threw at them. Wednesday we visited a dairy farm which had diversified into cheese making. But what moved all of us; myself especially was visiting James and Sari. Dairy farmers who are struggling with a lot of debt, are not allowed to form a dairy cooperative à la Fonterra.

James and Sari nearly lost everything with Cyclone Larry. Despite that they both consider that they are better off than many others during those natural disasters. I never actually heard them really complain once. For me they are a supreme example. I intend to keep in contact with letters and prayers.

What struck me about this amazing couple is, when asked what really helped and helps them survive, the answer that rang out was: COMMUNITY. With folk such as James and Sari, hope for the human race is renewed.

I was also encouraged that these folk lived out Hebrews 10:25 (Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching) in terms of doing just that not stopping the “meeting together”. They did not stop meeting together, for “the Day approaching” read “Cyclones Larry and Yasi”. They exemplified the importance of community.

Thursday saw field trips to Starbury Coffee plantation, another diversification crop alongside bananas, mangos and few others. It is an example of a plantation started by a family who had left Zimbabwe with very little, and again had refused to give up. They picked themselves up and indeed we saw the fruits of their labours.

Humour also played a part, in that we enjoyed a very profound visit to MAF (Mission Aviation Fellowship) at Marreba. I say humour as those who know my

hobby also enjoyed more than a little leg pulling. Jokes aside, pilots and engineers sacrificially work in dangerous conditions to bring medical care together with the hope of the Gospel. The day finished with a visit to Mt Uncle Distillery: say no more!

Friday was taken up with admin matters, in terms of where Trans-Tasman Rural Conferences and the International Rural Church Association go from here. A constitution and a governing group were discussed and acted on, and then it was time to start the journey home.

Christian resources for resilience

Myra Cowell, Finlay NSW

This would have to be one of the best things I have attended for years. All the speakers and the whole conference revolved around the theme “Resilience – strength in the face of adversity”. My thanks go to the organisers, especially the Rev Garry Hardingham and the Rev Catherine Christie, Catherine being the Chairperson of IRCA. She is currently in placement in South Korea and gave us some wonderful Bible study times. Catherine told us about some of the difficulties the farming communities in South Korea are facing; as well as some of her experiences as a minister there.



Christianity should have a lot to contribute and bring to our world regarding resilience. Everybody needs a communicator to help get them through the tough times: we can't do it alone. As church leaders we can help people to be able to talk about their faith. Where do you find God in your life and around you? We need to reassure and nurture relationships, and provide opportunities for sharing. We can take theology from being something which happens in the church out into the wider community to be something of value there.

Regarding resilience in the corporate workplace we heard that no one is in isolation; a list of attributes is important for the corporation. The corporation needs to have a clear and agreed vision; encouragement of diverse ideas and skills is also needed. A resilient system is one in which a failure in one part does not bring down the whole system. There is networking so you don't have

to soldier on your own; and a governance that spreads authority and responsibility.

Garry had a wonderful varied group of people to speak to us revolving around the theme for the conference. Firstly we heard from Rev Glen who was at Innisfail during cyclones Larry and Yasi. Glen told us about his own battle with depression which resulted from the stressful situations he found himself in after the cyclones. He also shared with us a DVD which featured a local family and their farming enterprise before and after the cyclone went through. The destruction was unbelievable.

Glen was amazed about the number of people who routed the system for reimbursement from Government and agencies. He also said that one of the hardest things he has had to do as a minister was to admit that he needed help and timeout.

We also heard from Wayne who was in charge of SES for the Far North Queensland. Wayne gave us some valuable tips on preparing for disasters. He told us that every event is different and unique in its own way. We have to make sure that our families are in the best possible position to get through a disaster. We have to be prepared. It isn't about the last event; it is getting ready for the next one. Wayne also told us about some of the situations regarding the hurricane Katrina in the USA.

Another person we heard from was Lex, a counselor from Atherton. Lex told us that a response to a disaster is "to get the people off the roof" first, and then their recovery starts after that. Resilience is like a rubber band – it can stretch and stretch but then it can eventually snap when over stretched. He feels that "the belief system" of individuals is something which the church can do something about. The "why did this happen to me; bad things happen to bad people; I'm a good person so why did this happen to me?" type of questions. There is no better time for the church to be of use to the community than in the first two weeks after a disaster. To build resiliency we need to build relationships - an informal network – practical love in action. Children cope in the same way as their parents do – the meaning for them comes from their parents.

It wasn't all sitting and hearing from speakers. Garry had organised for us to have time out on a tour of the local area around Atherton which was very enjoyable; especially for someone from the flat plains country of Finley. On

one of these excursions we visited a dairy farm which was affected by the cyclones and learned about the difficulties which they faced first hand.

We saw the beautiful Millaa Millaa Falls, enjoyed a visit to a cheese and chocolate dairy farm – due to the downturn in the dairy industry the owners have decided to cut down their milking herd numbers and adding value to the farm income with the cheese and chocolates.

Just as interesting was a visit to a coffee plantation; we had delicious food at both of these places. In fact we had delicious food the whole time we were at the conference.

I will conclude with some excellent advice from one of you:

“As ministry agents we cannot keep giving out – we need to go back to God to get our strength; don't let the little things over run us and take us away from God. Keep going back to God to fill ourselves up; that way we can keep going”.

Many, many thanks Garry and Catherine for such a great conference which you organised. Also to the great people who came. My one disappointment was that there weren't more people attending, they missed out on a great event.

Who do you call when things get rough?

Martin Harrison

Well, if you are from our generation your mind might have sprung to the reply “Ghostbusters” which was a popular 1984 movie. Real life can be stranger than fiction and a might scarier too at times. We live in a time of great uncertainty when whole communities can quickly find themselves living on the edge. Casting our mind back over recent history we can think about “Pike River” and the “Christchurch Earthquakes”. There are dozens of other events ranging from floods, land slips, fire and deaths which have affected communities.



Who do you call when things get rough. In natural disasters Civil Defence comes to mind but for some time now they have been publicising what many had suspected. A natural disaster will be so overwhelming for communities that they will not be able to meet the needs. Therefore they suggest every

household should create their own survival kits so they can be self sufficient for 72 hours. Have you heeded the advice?

Then there is the emergency services of Police, Fire and ambulance, they too do not have an endless supply of resources and in a big event cannot meet all the needs. I remember back to the Boxing Day fires in Marlborough sitting in the a fire truck traveling between fire fronts thinking, "this is huge" and "what could the church be doing to help". The reality the church was already working – many were out helping on the fire line, others were making meals as well as providing places for people to shelter. The "church" carried on after the fire with counselling and providing the community with ways it could both reflect on the losses and make some sort of sense of such abnormal situations, while also celebrating the efforts of the community.

Think about your own community and its traumatic history. Was the "church" able to step up and begin to address the needs of the community with the issues it faced? Unfortunately if we are honest as an organization we are not always good at doing this. Partly because we fail to plan, educate ourselves and prepare so we are ready to stand up in these times. This was the subject of the Trans Tasman Rural Conference held in Atherton in Australia, which I and Rev Natasha Glenderran attended. The conference theme was 'Resilience - Building Robust Communities' which can respond in times of natural and man-made disasters which can drag communities through the wringer.

How do we build 'Resilient - Robust Communities' As hinted above the first is to educate ourselves about what disasters mean to individuals and communities. Disasters often leave people trying to understand and make sense out of something that is abnormal to their daily life. By learning as a church simple listening and communication skills we can help people to process their experiences in such a way they do not become scarred and marked by the incident.

Secondly we can create a database of the skills and resources we have in our communities both in the church and outside so when help is needed we can find and access it quickly. This could be as simple as creating the tried and true method of telephone ringing trees. Or it might be more sophisticated as having a register of where to access gear – like sand bags and where sand can be sourced (One flood the sand was sourced from the School sand pit).

Thirdly and most importantly spend time creating healthy relationships within the church and the community. These relationships will resource

individuals, and the church as a whole, to be there for hurting people in a way that outside agencies cannot. Because through these relationships you will know what is appropriate and will be taken as genuine because they know that you are there for the long haul.

I finish with a quote from the main speaker Dr Rev Stephen Robinson "In Jesus Christ, God chose to enter a traumatized world. Christ came to bring blessing, healing and restoration to all who suffer as part of a broken world. Even as Jesus ministered in this way, he shared our trauma, died our death and, even beyond his resurrection and ascension recognized as the lamb that was slain (Rev 13:8). Since his earthly ministry, Christ has called many of his followers to come beside others in a way that exposes them to traumatic circumstances. They, like Jesus, bear the scars both physical and emotional, of the encounters with pain and suffering. Christ's hope would be that these people do not gather these cares for no purpose, or gather them alone."

So as we minister with resilience as the church community to the hurting world, may we do it in a responsible way where we look after each other not only in the present but in the preparation and after the event. And may we do all this through the power and the energy that God gives us so God gets the glory. After all he can answer all our calls.

Stories of disaster and recovery

Garth Cant, Canterbury, NZ



We came to the Rural Ministry Conference at Atherton, we shared experiences about disasters: the experiences, the responses, the preparedness for disasters.

Northern Queensland has had cyclones and floods. Canterbury has had earthquakes. Victoria, South Australia, and West Australia have had bush fires. New South Wales has had floods and a bus crash disaster when two buses, laden with tourists, crashed head on.

The churches, along with police, ambulance, and civil defence are at the front line of practical help and caring when disasters happen.

Glen Louttit and Wayne Coutts have worked together and they presented together, in tandem. Glen is a Uniting Church Minister in Innesfail which bore the brunt of Cyclone Yasi, he is also the District Police Chaplain. Wayne is the Director of the State Emergency Services, a full time job, with a full time team. Part of the time they are responding to disaster, much more of their time they are planning, equipping, and preparing people for emergencies.

Glen's message as Parish Minister and Police Chaplain caring for emergency workers is:

1. know your people, who they are and where they are
2. understand what stress is
3. be there when the emergency is full on,
4. when they are ready to talk, be there to listen
5. listen, support, understand when they get to breaking point.

There is nothing more natural than stress, the bigger the emergency, the bigger the stress. Be there for them, in the days, weeks and months after the event.

Wayne's message, as Emergency Services Director, is direct and matter of fact:

1. every disaster is unique,
2. prepare well, equip well, work out good routines,
3. but know that the next disaster will be different and unexpected.

Stephen Robinson, is a minister, a firefighter, a chaplain to emergency workers, a researcher, and the author of *Ministry in Disaster Settings*.

Stephen Robinson and Wayne Coutts are at one with the third message:

Disasters do happen. Be prepared for whatever, take care of yourself, and take care of each other. The challenge to us as loving, caring, compassionate people is to be prepared.

The message from Atherton is to widen our network of caring to care for the carers – to give those calm, skilled, compassionate emergency people the back up and support that they need.

And the message for our local congregation is to care for our carers. They will be calm, and skilled, but they will experience great stress. Our role as congregation is to include them in the network of people we care for.

Kia ora tatou: care for ourselves; care for our neighbours, and care for those whose role is to care for others.

Resilience in disaster

Jenny Phillips, Kerikeri, NZ



About 30 ministry agents and chaplains, including a few farmers, met daily at a church in Atherton to have morning and evening devotions, bible studies, and to exchange stories of disasters in their patch, such as fires, floods, cyclones, and earthquakes to name a few. Everyone was allowed to think aloud and discussions sometimes went on a bit with the chairman sitting at the back tapping his watch to alert the speaker of time constraints!

I was somewhat out of my depth on all counts but I enjoyed the times when we gathered to study, sing and pray. I wasn't entirely useless as there were dishes to wash and dry three or four times a day, so I volunteered kitchen duty.

We visited farms, small businesses such as cheese and chocolate making, a coffee plantation where they grew and made their own coffee.

Some people's businesses were examples of adapting to different circumstances after major disasters of one kind or another, demonstrating resilience, which was the theme of the conference, while others decided to tough it out come hell or high water, because that was the only life they knew.

Some professionals were invited to the evening sessions as guest speakers. Some spoke of strife following disaster, anger with others' ideas of re-establishment, re-building and recovery plans. And what to do with all the old clothes people sent in response to the call for help. Cash was needed, not old clothes.

Rev Dr Stephen Robinson was one who spoke of the impact disasters have not only on victims but also those who minister to them. He quoted one traumatised minister who could hardly get through the day while members of the congregation were arguing about whether they should have two-ply or three-ply toilet paper! His book *Ministry in Disaster Settings* explores ways victims and ministers can be helped through tough times.

One quote which has stayed with me was "We're not human beings having a spiritual experience, we're spiritual beings having a human experience".

Encouragement and advocacy: our mission

Robyn McPhail, Kaeo and Kerikeri NZ

In rural churches it goes without saying that the lay people are the local leaders and, among those gathered in Atherton, only a few of us have a church at home that has a resident clergy leader. Yet they all came from vibrant churches with a strong mission in their local community, and no big questions about viability. The role of clergy in these situations is to feed and support, to connect with congregations and their leaders, to visit and lead worship occasionally, and to equip and mentor local leaders.



Over the years that I have been involved in Rural Ministry this pattern has gone from strength to strength. In the cities, and in the mainstream talk of our denominations, the push is for large congregations. Rural communities, and small churches in urban areas which have a strong local mission, are ignored in this 'critical mass', clergy-driven approach. That's why the rural churches movement is so passionate about its mission of encouragement and advocacy.

Travelling Onwards: IRCA Oceania looks towards 2016

Jenny Dawson, Secretary IRCA Oceania

Every Trans-Tasman event takes a long time to process, when we return home with new learnings then discover the myriad ways that they hook into local happenings with even richer meaning. The “Resilience” theme of Atherton strengthened and challenged our faith as we heard speakers both practical and theological, and those challenges continue to ring in our ears as some of us begin to think about the next gathering, in 2016. It is planned for the Wairarapa in the southern part of the North Island (Te Ika a Maui) of New Zealand.



Wairarapa is a region of big skies, wide valleys and small towns, three major forest parks and a wild stretch of coast. Within an hour's drive of Wellington, it has become well-known for wine, olive groves, and cafes in quaint villages. There is also the Pukaha Mt Bruce National Wildlife Centre (where you might see a kiwi among other rare birds) and a strong history of sheep farming centred on the largest town, Masterton. It is an area like many, where much demographic and economic change has reshaped community life, yet the diversity that has developed offers hints of the future. Nearer the coast, Tinui, was the location of the first Anzac Day commemoration service, in 1916, one year after Gallipoli. It seems appropriate for rural ministry people from both sides of the Tasman to meet soon after what will obviously be a profoundly significant marking of our shared history. Having journey together as people of faith taking time every four years to reflect on and discover mutuality in the rural ministry journey since 1984 (Darfield) this may be the opportunity to take stock of our shared life. As people of the land we continue to have much to offer each other and a great deal of shared story to celebrate. In 2016, looking to the past and trusting for the future, will you join us?

IRCA Oceania <http://www.irca.net.nz/oceania>