Rural Ministry Synod

31 October 2021

Findings and Future

Sue Burns

Bishop Philip Chancellor E te whanau a te Karaiti , Tena Koutou katoa

The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it. Let us give thanks!

It’s a privilege to present what’s happened in the rural space since last Synod.

Like many current public statements let’s begin with some numbers!

1 Prayer and aim : to celebrate God’s faithfulness as we discern God’s future mission in rural settings.

15 years Taranaki has been praying and working on this project. Thanks for commitment and willingness to give things a go, change and adapt, bringing your experience to Diocesan Day and new ways life is bubbling up now.

303 people in their parishes who turned out to talk, about the past, the NOW and their ideas for their future. 120 at Diocese Day, 120 at Regional followups. The effort you have made, prayers prayed and ideas expressed show your love for your place and commitment to the church. I hope you recognize your voice in this presentation.

542: hours of conversation across these forum

25: written summaries leading to this Synod share what we heard and outline what happens next, buckle in.

Start let’s all, urban, town, rural think of place you love, somewhere that nurtures and sustains you.

The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it. Let be thankful AMEN

Respect, Reality, Release,Resource, Required

We came away with thanksgiving to God for God’s faithfulness and respect to God’s people in each place.

* People love and respect the land that nurtures them and committed to stewarding the land for future. Same for the church. It is ‘place’ that anchors them.
* Worship and Service is cracking on across the units.

However small, people gathering around Word and Sacrament are a church.

Regular, creative worship, seasonal celebrations continues.

Wherever there is service in rural towns settlements the church is initiating new things or present in services they started in the past.

*visiting, Foodbanks, lunch clubs, hospices, care of vulnerable, support for other denominations in youth ministry, Messy Church gathering places in disasters and tragedies. God is alive and in our churches.*

* Churches are taking initiatives – growth, partnership initiatives like Te Awamutu, people finding faith.
* People have can do attitude, longstanding commitment, tenacity, creativity and adaptability. Weather storms, called to be innovative, because self sufficient and respond to things beyond their control, adaptive BUT adapt when it comes to church- don’t much like change.

Reality: Fast facts about context and then rural churches

1. Rural Populations are very varied, different reasons and different people. Towns are growing across the region, except Taumarunui, largest growth is close to Hamilton and Auckland.
2. Housing crisis is everywhere with the poverty gap between haves and have not widening. Rural affordable are being moved on.

Long term UoW decline in population, marginalization.

1. Things that planners take for granted don’t work, going on line, internet access, matter of opening a bank account.
2. Societal and economic change has meant that time families once had is now needed for things that used to be done by a non-working adult. Families are under pressure.
3. Social needs are high, services and infrastructure are not keeping pace with population or needs.
4. Environmental crisis is hitting rural sector.

Churches

1. 12 out of 22 Waikato parishes all ministry is given. Their cash flow, ins and outs, meet power, rates, comms, assessments leaves very limited or no money for ministry.
2. Where there is property that is rented some units can accumulate reserves.
3. Everyone from babies to 80 year olds get older every year. Most churches are not intergenerational and know they do not meet the needs of families,

Some fund other denom that do,

3 have thriving Messy Church communites.

1. Churches recognize that older people facing change and restrictions need support, this may be an area of ministry.
2. Many want to let go of what they are doing, can’t because no one to follow.

Units want to use skills and competence to support ministry and mission; there is little energy for ‘ticking the boxes’.

1. Buildings are important as foci of spiritual, physical, emotional, social continuity. Place is significant in rural areas. Balancing the building and cost of ministry is a challenge.

Units are asking for Release and Resource:

Think : Jesus that his yoke is easy and his burden is light, this is the heart of discipleship.

* Not to be shoe-horned into connections that are not God directed, carving up a map convenience isn’t way forward.
* Want to be resourced in ministry through accessible formation and education.
* Released from the burden of parish management and structures past used by dates and help with building.
* To be better equipped to use resources got used to during Alert levels, shared liturgies, on line church etc.

Stand back and look we see the connections with Kaupapa of the Diocese expressed in the Vision Bishop Philip : discipleship, transforming communities.

As we will see at this Synod and we have shared the diocese is also

challenged financially and has reduced people to do the work.

What we come up with has to be prayed through and sized to be sustainable.

This is probably what you’ve been waiting for!

Required – hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church, is this God’s call to you?

Taranaki, we recognize that you have tried these things, since 2019 everything has changed, we are listening afresh.

Stipended parishes, we are not asking you to spread existing resources more thinly.

Within the current licensing provisions:

spiritually mature people to companion rural communities.

1. Missioner who connects with multiple communities that worship and serve.

Support worship that has integrity, spiritual formation that matures, and focused education leading to ethical pastoral care.

Missioner is available for prayer, supervision, education.

Connection with the diocese.

1. Local Missioner – priest focused on one community with remuneration i.e 1 day a week or 1 day a month. (The remuneration may not include housing).
2. An Archdeacon – as local missioner for a parish to release the parish for ministry and mission.
3. Shared Ministry model with an enabler.
4. House for duty – resident minister, with realistic and accountable ministry expectations.
5. Local companion - Archdeacon or another as the administration centre to provide worship and resources.
6. An administrator – find out which parishes would like to be released from Treasurer role etc.

Next steps:

We are a Diocese, so we approach the local together.

We will continue to pray and return to meet with ministry units.

Backed by wider diocesan discussion on funding,

before decisions are made we will return to ministry units open the books with communities and pray together to find God’s future.

The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it. Let us give thanks to God.