

Ruminations



Saltbush - Uniting the Scattered Community



Hope



Autumn 2018.

Ruminations is brought to you as part of **Saltbush – Uniting the Scattered Community**. The Rural Ministry Unit, as part of Uniting Mission and Education within the Uniting Church Synod of NSW & ACT, oversee this work as an encouragement to all rural Christian communities and their leaders, irrespective of size or location. You are encouraged to share this issue of Ruminations with others.

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Simon Hansford is Moderator of the Synod of NSW & ACT. Simon lives rurally and has been the Minister in a number of regional, rural placements.

Rhonda White is a lecturer in Practical Theology at United Theological College and was previously in Ministry at diverse Uniting Church congregations.

Gereldine Leonard is a Uniting Church Minister who currently lives in Mulwala NSW and is a leader in the Southern Lights Scattered Covenant Community; a creative expression of Christian community in small rural locations.

Editor's Introduction

Welcome to your new edition of Ruminations with the theme of

HOPE!

This might be the first time you have received Ruminations or perhaps you have received it many times before, but it is my goal that through these pages we can all be encouraged in our place as part of the wider Church.

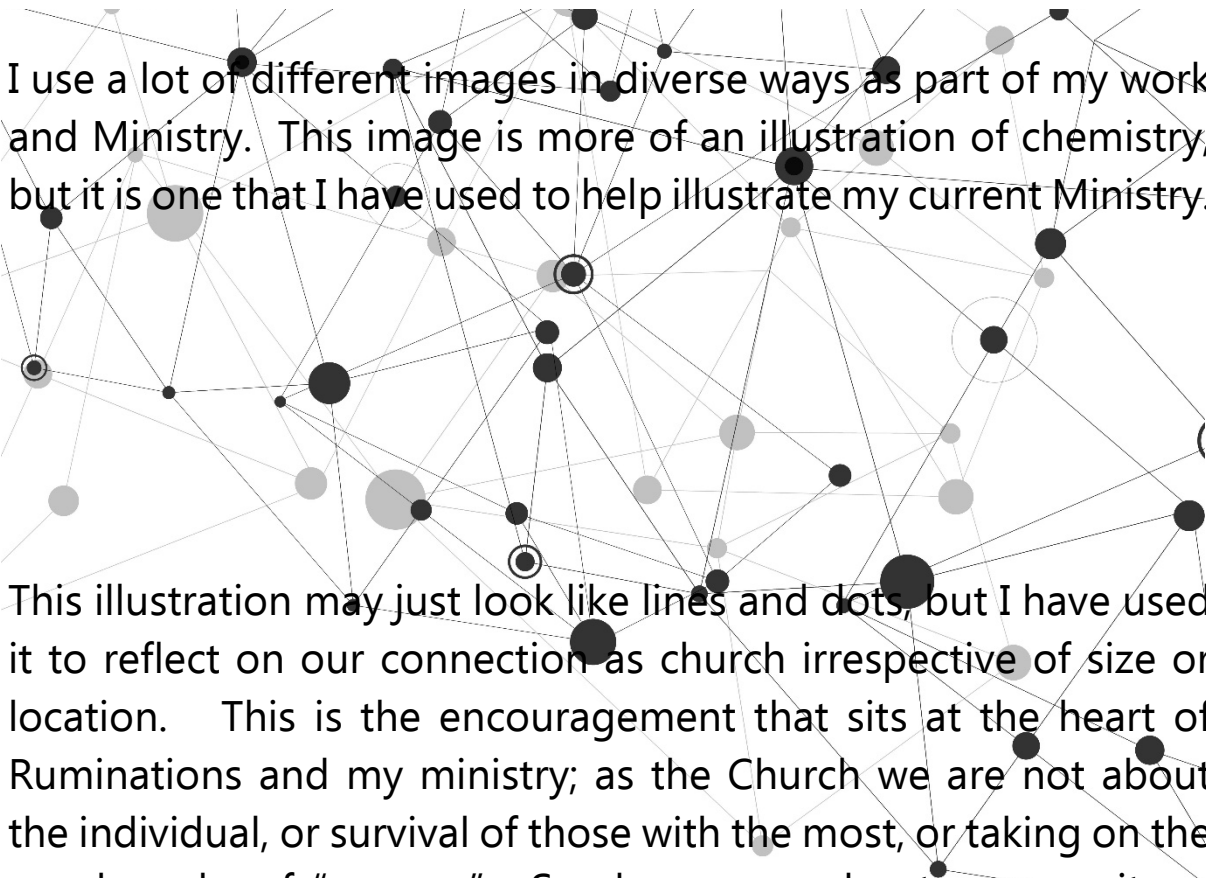
Ruminations has a long history. Many people have worked over the decades writing and publishing this journal as a means of supporting the life of the church in rural areas. Ruminations will still have as its emphasis the lives and experiences of people and the church in rural and remote regions, but I hope to encourage the reality that irrespective of where we find ourselves, together we are the Church. Rural or urban, wealthy or poor, isolated or pressed in, diverse in theology, practice and people, it is not our differences that should speak loudest about who we are, but our ability to be as one.

Over time within Ruminations there will be stories, reflections and news from people and Christian communities spread over vast distances. Over time the editors will ensure that we reflect the diversity of the land and its people, the church and its viewpoints. Each issue will have an article from one of the faculty of United Theological College with either a biblical or theological reflection on the theme. Each issue will have a more general reflection on the theme and from one Christian community the story of where they are and how they are living out their faith.

There will also be a report on an event, journey or gathering along with an update on where we are with Saltbush – Uniting the Scattered Community.

From this edition, Ruminations will be published three times each year; Autumn (April), Winter (July) and Spring/Summer (October). Of course you are invited to be in touch with me, to share your stories and thoughts and to be an encourager of Ruminations within the life of your church.

I use a lot of different images in diverse ways as part of my work and Ministry. This image is more of an illustration of chemistry, but it is one that I have used to help illustrate my current Ministry.



This illustration may just look like lines and dots, but I have used it to reflect on our connection as church irrespective of size or location. This is the encouragement that sits at the heart of Ruminations and my ministry; as the Church we are not about the individual, or survival of those with the most, or taking on the usual marks of "success". Surely, we are about community; a body working together and marked by characteristics that are expressed through the life of Jesus Christ.

One of these characteristics is hope!

Peace to you all.

Mark

• Rev. Mark Faulkner

A word from the Moderator

Rev. Simon Hansford

Moderator of the Synod of NSW & ACT.

Hope can seem a fragile thing.

A few nights ago I had the honour of babysitting the child of some dear friends. He woke once only, briefly, during the night, in a moment of unrest. For a longer moment I considered the hopes which rest upon him, from those who love him: hope for living an honourable life, for relationships and experiences to bless and strengthen him.

Hope can seem fragile, but in the life of this child, it is less so. He has two wonderful parents who love each other, and him. He has grandparents, aunts and uncles – family and honorary – gathered and holding him. He has communities of faith and nurture around him as far as the heart can hope.

This child's story is, wonderfully, not unique. Nor, sadly, is it true for each and every child.

When we hope in our lives, it can seem like whimsy or desperation: that it rains, or that a specific event (exam, grand final, job interview) comes good. Hoping for something as elusive as the weather turning can be flimsy indeed.

As disciples of Jesus, we are inherently people of hope, born not of desperation, but from all that we have seen and heard, and experienced in Jesus Christ.

We hope because of those around us, and before us, who tell us the reason for their hope. We act and live in hope because our ground is shaped by the one whose love breathed life into the very dust.

We hope because the act designed to extinguish it was overcome by God's own act in Jesus. We look to the future of creation, and of ourselves, because violence and empire were insufficient to quench God's own love and forgiveness.

Remind each other.

Encourage each other.

Let others know what makes your heart beat and your head lift.

And when the days are hard, turn to others to remember that our hope is held, not in whimsy or desperation, but in a God who intends not just to love, but to restore all of history and all of creation. And all of us.

A story for each of us,
as far as our hearts can hope.



Hope

Rev. Gereldine Leonard

Mulwala NSW

If you were asked to give an account of the hope that is in you (1Peter3:15), as early Christians were, what would you say? No time to think about it. What would you say? If you are anything like me, with a pained look and a desperate edge to your voice you would probably be saying, "I don't know" and who is to blame you. Ideas like this are simply not part of everyday thought or conversation... or are they?

Anyone can look things up and if you did you would probably find that hope from a Christian perspective is defined as something like: the expectation of a good future based on the promises of God. Well there you are then. Done and dusted. You now have something to say. Hope is the expectation of a good future based on the promises of God. Does anyone else find this sort of explanation a whole lot less than satisfying? A little trite, a little lightweight, a little disconnected from anything that is in any way real.

In the Old Testament people did think about hope as the expectation of a good future. They did not necessarily believe that something good lay in store for themselves, but none-the-less they held on to the idea and anchored it, invested it, in the future of their children or their children's children or children generations away into the future. The people of the Old Testament often had to contend with circumstances that were dreadful and this interpretation of hope sustained them.

The hope of American slaves was similarly future focused. For many the present was so grim, so unrelentingly awful, that they fixed on the idea that things would be different, in the sweet bye and bye. They too were sustained by the expectation of a good future, in another time and place and who would want to take that away.

I understand these ways of looking at hope, but they do not resonate with me. Has my life been too mundane, for the ideas expressed to have any real meaning, any real impact? I have never experienced slavery or exile. I have always had more than enough to eat and a roof over my head. Like many of you I have lived in a stable society. But the more I have thought about it, very few of us live without things that threaten our peace of mind or literally our lives or the lives of those that we love. The need for hope seems universal.

American slaves and sometimes ancient Hebrews didn't have much choice. It seems they often could not change their circumstance. The hope they embraced gave them a way to live despite what happened to them, but was living with what was happening all that they could do?

The environmental activist, Derrick Jensen, says he does not have much hope for the planet, but thinks that is a good thing because hope, which by definition is future focused, carries the danger of inaction or ineffectiveness in the here and now. In a way this is my concern. Are we lulled into passive acceptance of, or disregard for, the way things are now anticipating that things will be righted at some future time?

Then it struck me that the connection I had missed came from Jesus' preaching about the Kingdom of Heaven. When Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven, he talks about what we do now, how we live now, because we trust the promises of God.

Large or small, few or many, our communities are called to be what Scots theologian, Ian Bradley, has called little outposts of the Kingdom of Heaven. We are to understand that, though not fully established, the reign of God is a reality amongst us and live accordingly. Embracing boundaries that stand against self-absorption and self-serving. Embracing ways that are self-giving and therefore life-giving – all in imitation of Jesus and inviting others to share this life. If I am to understand hope at all, this is hope, something to live, day in, day out.



My story...

Mrs Marion Wilson OAM

Co Chair, Administrative and Pastoral Council, Canowindra

HOPE; The Canowindra Story...

Background

Canowindra is a small country town in New South Wales with a district population of about 2,300 people. It is centrally located 300 km west of Sydney, between the towns of Orange, Cowra, Parkes, Forbes and Blayney. Over the years the Gospel has been faithfully proclaimed through various denominations including Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and the Salvation Army. In 1970, the Presbyterian Church joined the Methodist Church to be the first Joint Parish in NSW and this laid the basis locally for the Uniting Church in Australia in 1977 to have a presence.

Like many small communities the church population was and is aging and with this a limited income to “be the church” was creating a problem in how to sustain a Minister of the Word. It was also a time in our church life where missional activities locally were slowly evolving as the direction to best undertake God’s work. It was recognised that if denominations worked and prayed more together, more effective services and missional work could be undertaken with more people and funding resources available.

The Beginning

In 2003, discussions began between the Anglican Parish of Canowindra/Woodstock and the linked Uniting Church Congregations of Canowindra, Cranbury and Cudal. This resulted in an Interim Agreement of Cooperation, signed by The Bishop of Bathurst, and the Chairperson of the Central West Presbytery as well as all participating congregations. In April 2004, Rev Margaret Finlay, an Anglican Priest, was commissioned and inducted to oversee the development. Shortly after the Canowindra Uniting Church voted to join the Canowindra Anglican Congregation for services of worship each Sunday in the All Saints' church. The congregation transferred to Peace Memorial Uniting Church for worship during the winter months. This worship pattern remains today. Rev Jono Williams served the community for several years and has been followed by Rev Joy Harris. All are Anglican Priests and members of the Bathurst Diocese, as well as having recognition and full membership rites of the Macquarie Darling Presbytery.

For several years, the Anglican Parish and the linked Uniting Church congregations operated within their respective denominational frameworks. However, due to the developments at national and state level of various documents and activities, it became obvious that more could be done in Jesus' name by bringing both denominations together even more locally.

A document based on national and international thinking of the day was produced conjointly by the Bathurst Diocese and the Macquarie Darling Presbytery which became the foundation for all future cooperation. "Framework for Cooperation for Congregations of The Anglican Church Diocese of Bathurst and the Uniting Church Presbytery of the Macquarie Darling", 2011,

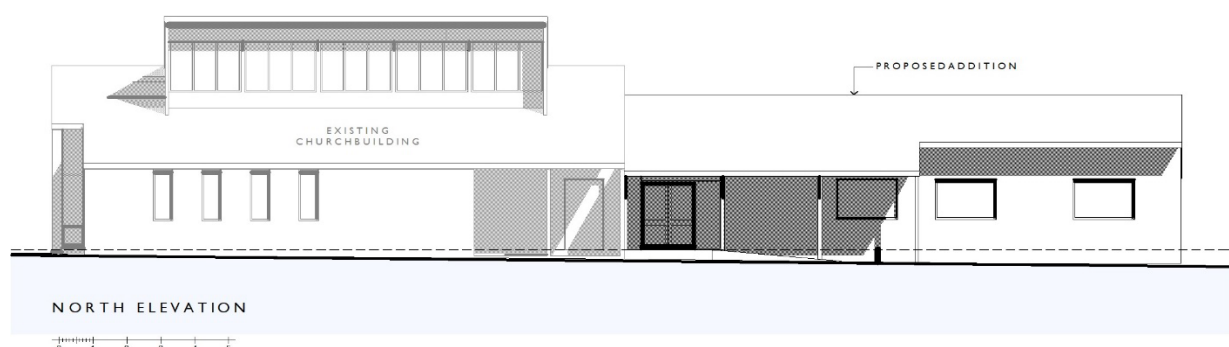
is still the framework under which the current cooperation operates. There has been a Consultative Committee chaired by Bishop Ian Palmer with membership from both the Diocese and Macquarie Darling Presbytery that has overseen further congregational activities and developments across the Diocese and Presbytery based on this document.

To facilitate current administrative and pastoral care needs, a Cooperating Administrative and Pastoral Care Council was put into place 2015 which is the current parameter for all decision making for both denominations. Whilst both denominations still retain formal budgets and bookkeeping, a shared general fund supports the minister and associated costs as well as costs common to the efficient resourcing of the Parish. The Parish of Eugowra was added to the group in 2015 and incorporates Eugowra and Gooloogong Anglican Churches.

Early in the cooperation, a home group was initiated to enable folk from both denominations to get to know one another in a more faith based way and resulted in 2009 in the implementation of the Canowindra Foodbasket. This was in response to an identified need for access to cheaper food by those who were finding it hard. It is now in its 8th year, and has been the forerunner for other centres to develop similar services. A community garden also operates and supports community as well as food for Foodbasket clients.

From small beginnings, it became apparent that to be the Gospel in our community, we needed to assess the needs more strategically and determine how best to respond. Corrina Alchin, Community Development Officer (Uniting), undertook a Needs Analysis. From the findings and using the 5 Marks of Mission it

was determined that a new style of being “church” was essential and a decision to redevelop the Peace Memorial Uniting Church site was made.



The Future

The Canowindra Community Life Centre objectives are: to reduce social isolation; increase community connectedness; increase support for people with mental health issues; provide a hub for locally delivered support; increase access to life skills; provide access to communication and technology interfaces and to increase community partnerships to respond to community needs.

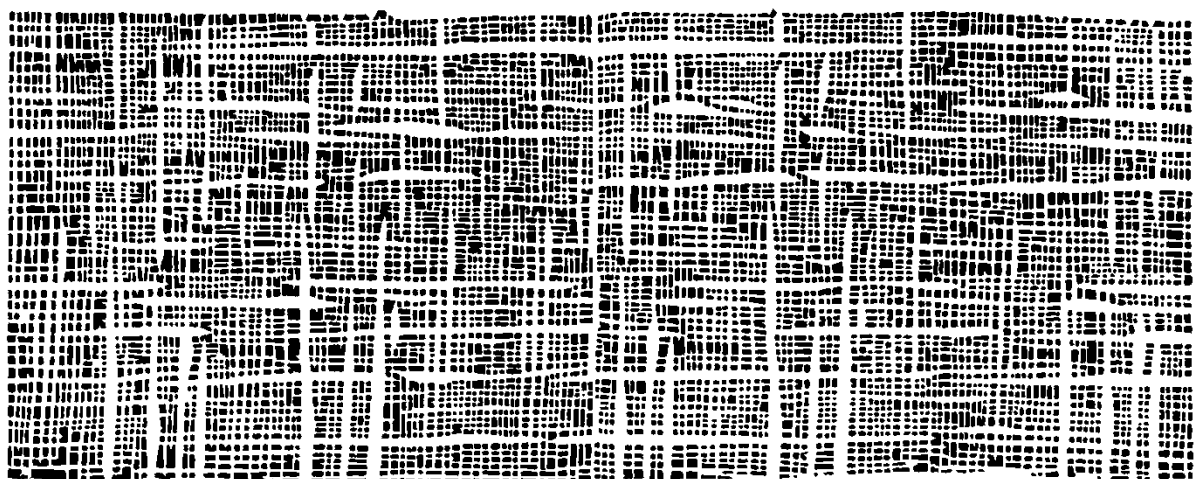
The Canowindra Community Life Centre will provide a centre targeting dysfunctional families, older lonely people, single parents and young people. It will provide a facility which is also spiritually nurturing; enabling and empowering people to live a happy and healthy life; encouraging care for others through relationship building.

A Reference Group comprising membership from Anglican, Uniting, Catholic, Cornerstone and the community is overseeing the development which will be Christ focused. This Committee reports to the Administrative and Pastoral Council.

The Manse and the Old Church (ex Presbyterian Church), current property of the Uniting Church in Canowindra, will be sold to resource the development. Currently, architectural plans have been completed, together with costings, a DA is being lodged and conversations are continuing with Uniting Resources and Macquarie Darling Presbytery to seek the best way forward.

It is envisaged that the centre will require a Coordinator as well as the establishment of policies and procedures that best support the objectives. To be sustainable, ongoing funds will need to be available for operational costs. Contracts with agencies will go towards this.

This project has the support of all denominations in the town with a strong focus of sharing our faith with others. Differences in our denominations ebb away when we focus on "what can be done for the common good". It is an excellent response to the document, "Weaving a New Cloth", produced by the Anglican and Uniting Working Group at a national level. It is also a reflection of what a small community can undertake missionally if denominational barriers are resolved and do not get in the way.



When risking our future for Jesus as Christians in Canowindra, some comment has been made in relation to the ability of a small town to undertake such a major strategy in mission. We are very heartened by the fact that the population is greater than 2300 in the district and thus we have 2300 resources – people known and loved by God, who, given encouragement and invitation, can be empowered to seek and find the Kingdom. They can assist the congregations in achieving not only actions that reflect the needs but expose people to “what Jesus said, where Jesus said it, and to whom he said it” so that in an inclusive environment, they hear the Gospel and realise its relevance for them. Halleluiah!

This is a bold new initiative, born of the Spirit that points to the presence of God in this community in a new and meaningful way. It will also ensure that The Gospel is an active, vibrant way for people to know Jesus and to share His love with others.

Experiencing the Word...

Rev. Dr. Rhonda White

Lecturer in Practical Theology
United Theological College.

Hope in theology is more than a wish list

..... and these things remain – Faith, Hope and Love (1 Cor.13)

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, Hope sits alongside Faith and Love with the promise of eternity.

These are things of God. They are both fundamental to the human experience but not restricted to it. They are both internal (what we feel) and external (beyond us), individual (a personal experience) and communal (our collective experience).

Faith:

I am used to differentiating Faith and belief in my introductory practical theology courses – the distinction is helpful when we are doing theology, (making sense of God's presence in the world) and needing to reconstruct our belief frameworks as God reveals more of God's self to us. Differentiating Faith and belief, and understanding Faith as that which is given to us as gift by the grace of God and which is eternal, means that the constant fear of 'losing our faith' is negated. This then frees us to examine where God's Spirit might be leading and to be enabled to follow that leading, unencumbered by belief structures that no longer make sense other than 'we have always thought this way'.

Love:

The eternity of love is something easier for us to get our heads around. We experience this first hand with the death of a loved one. Their physical absence does not negate our love for them. We also know from attending countless funerals that it is how we love that remains our most important contribution to the world and which remains and develops in others. We also understand God as love and our ability to love at all is because God has first loved us. (1 John 4)

Hope:

Does the Hope hold true for us in the same way as Faith and Love?

Is Hope a belief, a feeling or an emotion? Is it a vision or a way of being? Is Hope something one wilfully discovers or something one is offered as a gift? Is it a dynamic or an entity in and of itself? Does Hope arise from the internal world or is it something external to human beings. It is likely that Hope is all of these things and more. (Marshall 2016)

In Greek mythology, Pandora's curiosity saw her defying strict instructions and breaking the seal on a jar, which immediately released all the troubles, illness, crimes and tragedies of human experience. She immediately regretted her decision to open the jar but it was too late. She tried to capture all the troubles but it was impossible. As the story goes, she is holding the empty jar in despair when she notices at the very bottom one last creature that had not escaped. This creature was hope. Zeus had placed hope in the bottom of the jar knowing that if it was ever opened, humanity would need hope.

Hope, is deeply embedded throughout the Biblical witness and linked inextricably to the Gospel message by Paul (Romans 4). God provides hope, demonstrates it in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and this hope, given by God, will not fail. When we participate in God's Mission we participate in Hope.

Our Hope is demonstrated in our understanding of God's Hope for all creation even in the midst of all manner of troubles, disease and tragedy. Throughout the biblical text we encounter God's Hope for the world, humanity, all creation. This Hope is expressed in terms of reconciliation, redemption, salvation, reversal and restoration. The biblical witnesses to God's Hope are our clues for Practical Theology as we scour our experience, for signs of the presence and activity of God's Spirit in our everyday experiences. It is this Hope that will be found even in, and sometimes particularly in, the midst of despair. This Hope is not limited by our ability to be positive thinkers, or glass half-full people. This Hope is the activity of God and we are called to seek out the presence and activity of God. We do this in a number of ways: gathering for worship, forming communities of welcome, reconciliation and healing, being a blessing to the world.

It is a sobering moment for us in the church to realise that God is at work, reconciling the world to God's self, whether we participate or not. Distracted by the assumption that we need to 'build the church' we can lose sight of our reason for being the church which is accepting the invitation to follow the way of Jesus. In Jesus we have the invitation to participate with God, by the power of the Spirit, in God's work of bringing justice and peace to creation but we don't own this work and sometimes we have to play catch up because God has gone ahead of us.

The people of God are called to give witness to the Hope that God's work will be done. That peace and justice will be made a reality through every reconciliation of difference, every acceptance of the other, every replacement of suspicion with inclusion and every act of love and forgiveness grounded in gospel of God's grace to us.

Our focus is to be on where are the signs of God's Hope in our communities and how might we participate in bringing justice and peace.

Another way of putting that is to ask ourselves a few probing and reflective questions.

Where are the glaring gaps between what we say as followers of Christ and what we do?

Where do we see reconciliation at work in our lives, in our community, in the church?

Where do we see the work of forgiveness and grace?

Where do we encounter the sacrifice of one for another?

It is our folly to focus our attention on what is lost or waning at the expense of seeing what God is doing and renewing. We can easily succumb to despair if we only pay attention to what is ailing and fail to see where God might be at work.

Hope is not requiring that we 'put on a happy face' because sometimes the pain of loss, the magnitude of injustice or the

complexity of the issues makes it impossible to be happy with any integrity.

We might lose our hope, we might feel like giving up, we might wonder how a faith and love will be passed on and yet generations of faithful witness and even our own experiences will point us again and again to God's Hope and we will pray for sight to see where the Spirit is leading us.



Suggestions for further reading:

Hope: Challenging the Culture of Despair by Christiaan Mostert
(This is an Australian book with excellent chapters from prominent contemporary Australian/New Zealand theologians)

Collaborating Hope: Joining the In-between Spaces by Joretta Marshall (an article published in the Journal of Pastoral Theology 26.2 2016 Available for download through the Camden Theological Library)

News & Views...



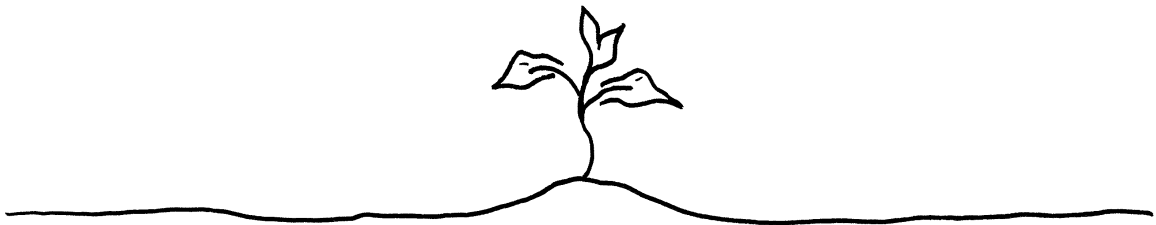
On 30th. January we held the **Scattered Community Gathering** in Dubbo! (previously the Rural Presbytery Gathering). People from across the synod gathered to listen, to speak, to be encouraged and to think about our life as part of the wider church.

Gathered were people from small congregations, small and larger towns, larger congregations, from Pathways, Project Reconnect, Presbytery Chairs and Ministers/Pastors, Uniting Mission and Education, Uniting, and the Moderator. We heard from each of the large, western, rural Presbytery Chairpersons, (Will Pearson, Kevin Barrington, Andrew Thornley). We heard from Makes You Wonder (Ian Robinson), Pathways (Kath Merrifield and Melanie Dicks), Project Reconnect (Charles Pope). We also heard from the Interim Executive Director of Uniting

Mission and Education (Tara Curlewis) and from the Moderator (Simon Hansford).



The image for the day was the parable of the Mustard Seed (Mark 4: 30-34) and believing in that which may seem impossible and where we find those places of hope!



Perhaps most importantly as one whole group we started to talk about the difference between being "scattered" and being "disconnected" and how we imagine the shape of the church in the future.

Over many centuries the church has put a lot of effort and energy into the gathering which is primarily what we call "worship". This has been expressed in the way we train Priests/Ministers, the expectation placed on liturgy (the service) and most certainly in the importance and grandeur placed on buildings. It is of course good to gather, but as Christians and as the church we are to be a "scattered" people, sent out, within and amongst, not apart.

"The Gospel creates community and must be lived out in community with those it is trying to reach".¹

In terms of the vastness of the land on which we live it is also easy for individuals, Christian communities, gatherings to feel isolated and disconnected. It is easy to be mindful of the demands of the present, the people who surround us and the place where we live, drawing ourselves away from the wider community of the church and the needs of others.

The Scattered Community Gathering in Dubbo was a reminder of the breadth of the church and the way we are connected, each with our roles and gifts, but it is only a step in the larger challenge of the way we become Christian community in the 21st century, valued in our diversity, both scattered and connected.

Around the day of the gathering the Presbytery Chairpersons met with the Moderator, the Interim Executive Director of Uniting Mission and Education and the Director of Rural and Remote Ministry Initiatives. As well the newly formed Rural Ministry Unit met and will meet again twice this year.

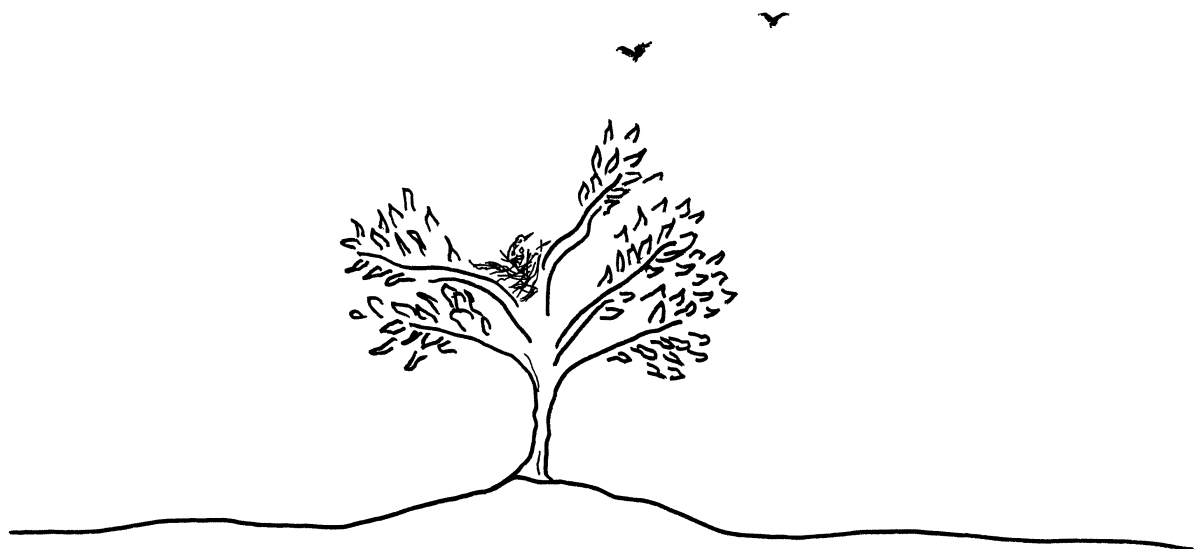
These Scattered Community Gatherings will be an important part of our life as we seek to encourage and enable smaller, rural Christian communities. These days will unfold over time to be more creative, more participatory and help shape the grounded reality of our life as the rural church. It is important to remember that these gatherings are not just for rural people, or people with specific roles, but for anyone who is interested in working as the

¹ Reggie McNeal
Missional Communities
Jossey-Bass 2011. P. 63

wider church, together, to shape and discern the future of meaningful Christian community, irrespective of size and location.

The Scattered Community Gathering concluded by sitting around the table and sharing in the breaking of bread and the wine poured into the cup. It is around this table that we all belong and are invited. It is around this table that all humanity is invited.

We look forward to seeing you at the next Scattered Community Gathering!



Where are we up to with Saltbush?

Rev. Mark Faulkner

Director of Rural and Remote Ministry Initiatives



One person from the Riverina told me that it is amongst the Saltbushes that their sheep go to give birth to the lambs. Another person from the Pilliga said Saltbush was the plant that fed the cattle in the drought when no other plant survived. This is the image that has been used to talk about how as a church we live out our faith in the challenge of our current environment.

Saltbush is not a project, program or plan. Saltbush is not a strategy or a new model and it doesn't come with cheap pens and mugs. Saltbush is not being imposed, there are no forms and there are no rules.

Saltbush is, as the tag line says, about Uniting the Scattered Community. Working as a whole church to encourage and affirm the place of all our Uniting Christian communities irrespective of size or location. In particular, Saltbush is about connecting hundreds of smaller, mostly rural, Christian communities and encouraging them in their place within their local communities. Saltbush is about encouraging grounded Christian community in the 21st century.

Saltbush affirms that each Uniting congregation already has everything they need to gather and live out their faith and that together it is our role to encourage, connect and support each other.

The challenge

Transforming ways, people, attitudes and even the very practice of our faith is still the challenge of the Way of Christ for both the church and Christian today. For us there is almost an ease with which we read the Gospels where Jesus touched the leper, told the story of a Samaritan caring for a beaten Jew, surrounded

himself with men and women who were the least likely and confronted the crushing disconnect of religious practice.

Yet there is no ease in the reality of the Way of Christ and the often confronting challenge is real for Christians, our congregations and the wider church.

Saltbush might challenge comfort, tradition, practice and the values we place on aspects of our church life, but as Easter people there is always the opportunity for new life through Christ.

So what does Saltbush – Uniting the Scattered Community look like in practical, down to earth terms?

Firstly, in my role as Director of Rural and Remote Ministry Initiatives I am committed to working with all people; individuals, congregations, presbyteries, synod and other agencies so that we can own as one body the work of Saltbush and the encouragement of smaller Christian communities. For me personally it says a whole lot about us if we are unable to work as one and encourage those who can be seen as the least within the body of the church.

It is also important that we recognise that our world has changed and continues to change and that many of the traditions and practices of the church no longer connect. This is not a criticism of tradition or practice, but when they are all we cling to and want simply for ourselves then we have lost the reality of the Way of Jesus Christ. It is easy just to continue as we have done and it is difficult to honestly reflect on who we are and how we are the

church, but the reality is that all congregations, presbyteries and synods are facing this challenge.

Saltbush – Uniting the Scattered Community will not be attractive for all our gatherings; rural or urban. There will be places where we can affirm the ongoing life of the Uniting Church and a Uniting Christian community within a local community and there will be places where this will not continue. But that choice rests with each of us and with those in the Uniting Christian community to which we belong and is not dependent on a minister, money or miracle!

To help this work we might consider some of the following:

Online Ministry of the Word. It's intriguing to think that one minister can be placed in a congregation of 60 people, but if we connected just 20 congregations with 20 people each (400 people in total) why we couldn't have a Minister to reflect on the Word (message/sermon) for all. (What about 35 congregations with 15 people?) We have the ability to be connected, in relationship, over vast distances and we should use this as a means of Uniting the Scattered Community. An Online Scattered Community Minister of the Word would be relational, relevant to the current events of our world and communities and treat each location, irrespective of distance, as part of their "congregation".

Scattered Community Ministers. This is another form of ministry that works over a vast area, is relational and supports Uniting Christian communities to reshape how, when, where, they gather and live in mission. This is not resource ministry; training congregations to do what they did in the last century. This is not about running services or saving congregations. This is a

ministry of creative, reshaping of the gathered community living out its faith within the local community and wider world.

No matter where the Online Minister of the Word or Scattered Community Ministers live, along with myself, this would be a Team Ministry, working together, in equal standing, across vast distance.

Ruminations. This publication has been an important part of rural ministry for decades. It is my hope that over time we can reaffirm its place and shape it to be an important part of Saltbush. Ruminations will continue to be in-post, but will also be available on-line. Ruminations is not simply for those in rural areas, but for everyone who is interested in encouraging smaller congregations, the rural life, creative ministry and Saltbush.

Rural Ministry Unit. The Rural Ministry Unit has been regathered under Saltbush and met for the first time in January this year. The initial members are Phil Matthews (Narrabri Patrol Chaplaincy), Kath Merrifield (Synod Pathways), Daniel Mossfield (Pastor at Crookwell), Jorge Rebolledo (Uniting Community Engagement), Bec Smith (Dubbo Congregation and Community, Marion Wilson (Canowindra Congregation and Community), and Claire Wright (Minister at Bathurst).

The role of the RMU2 is to:

- Offer support and guidance to the Director of Rural & Remote Ministry Initiatives.
- Offer vision & discernment concerning rural ministry and the way we encourage rural Christian communities.

- Oversee the publishing of Ruminations as a means of affirming and connecting rural Christian communities.
- Offer opportunities for people from rural Christian communities to gather for encouragement and renewal.
- Enhance synod awareness of the work of the RMU2, rural & remote ministry and rural Christian communities.

Scattered Community Gatherings. The Rural Ministry Unit has held field days and gatherings of different types over many years. Of course these will continue as an important way to gather as part of Saltbush – Uniting the Scattered Community.

It is hoped that over the years ahead these gatherings will be very much a part of Saltbush in terms of hospitality, encouragement, listening and renewal. These gatherings should not be “meetings” or “lectures”, but opportunities for grounded encouragement and affirmation. I’m also hoping that we can build up some financial support for those with travel costs who make the journey to attend.

Mobilising Ministry. Within the Synod there has been discussion around encouraging ministers from urban congregations to visit rural congregations to offer support. This will unfold and perhaps could be considered as part of Saltbush (Mobile Scattered Community Ministry). In my mind it would be important that this is not seen as a one off event, but over time (years) relationship between Ministers and congregations could be built. Ministers should be creative, pastoral and able to think broadly about being the church. Congregations should be those willing to consider significant change beyond traditions and practices of the present.

Mobilising Ministry is about the whole church encouraging Christian community broadly and owning our life as one body.

Our immediate tasks ahead

There are a number of significant steps ahead which are an invitation to many people from the diversity of our church.

- ▶ Establish a long term outline of the route so that step by step we can see the marks of new life. (Business Plan!)
- ▶ Continue work towards long term, committed funding for new forms of ministry, initiatives and practical expression of rural Christian community. (Funding!)
- ▶ Continue to establish those practices that provide a firm foundation for Saltbush. (Ruminations, Mobilising Ministry, Gatherings, Reference Group!)

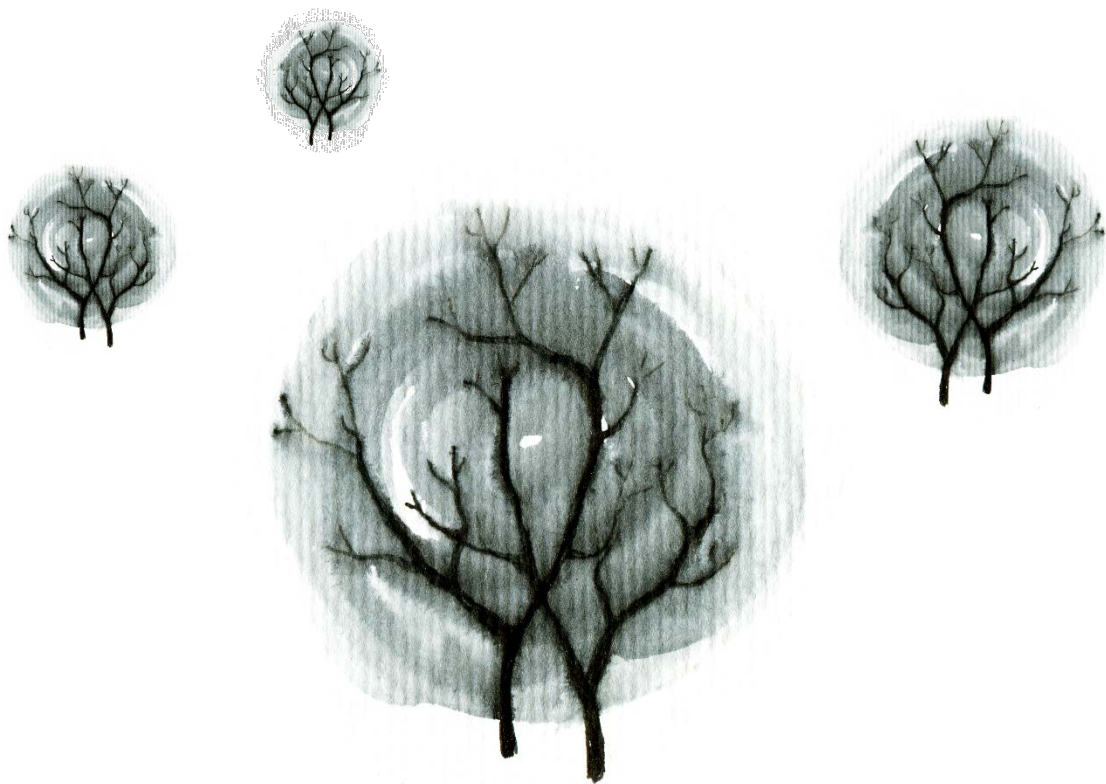
The challenge for us all towards the future of Saltbush – Uniting the Scattered Community.

One of the challenges within the Uniting Church is to embrace the fullness of a task as we begin new ways. Nothing worthwhile happens without cost, time and relationship. Not simply a cost in terms of money, but in terms of passion and endurance. Not simply time in terms of a day or a year, but in terms of years and decades.... and patience!

If together as a broad church we are realising that encouraging those congregations amongst us who are small, often seemingly the least, is an important part of our ethos then we need to embrace this work. If we are beginning to realise that the Spirit may be drawing us beyond our structures and affirming the place of simple Christian community, then we need to consider how we are passionate about this over the many years ahead. If we

believe that Uniting Christian community is made up of many, irrespective of size, location, wealth, fame and that each can be vital in their local community and reflect the Way of Christ in other's lives, then we need to see that the road ahead is long and not necessarily easy.

Saltbush – Uniting the Scattered Community will need people from across the breadth of the Church to speak up, encourage, enable this work and to affirm that new life is possible and that the Way of Jesus lives!





Please consider financially supporting Saltbush; either as individuals or as a congregation.

Your donation will be directly used for the work of supporting Saltbush and the ways we are working to encourage smaller, rural congregations.

You can donate generally towards Saltbush and this will include the cost of enabling the printing of Ruminations.

To donate please make a direct transfer:

Bank: Uniting Financial Services
Account Name: Uniting Mission & Education EFT Direct

BSB: 634-634
Account Number: 100035066

Payment Reference: **"Saltbush"**