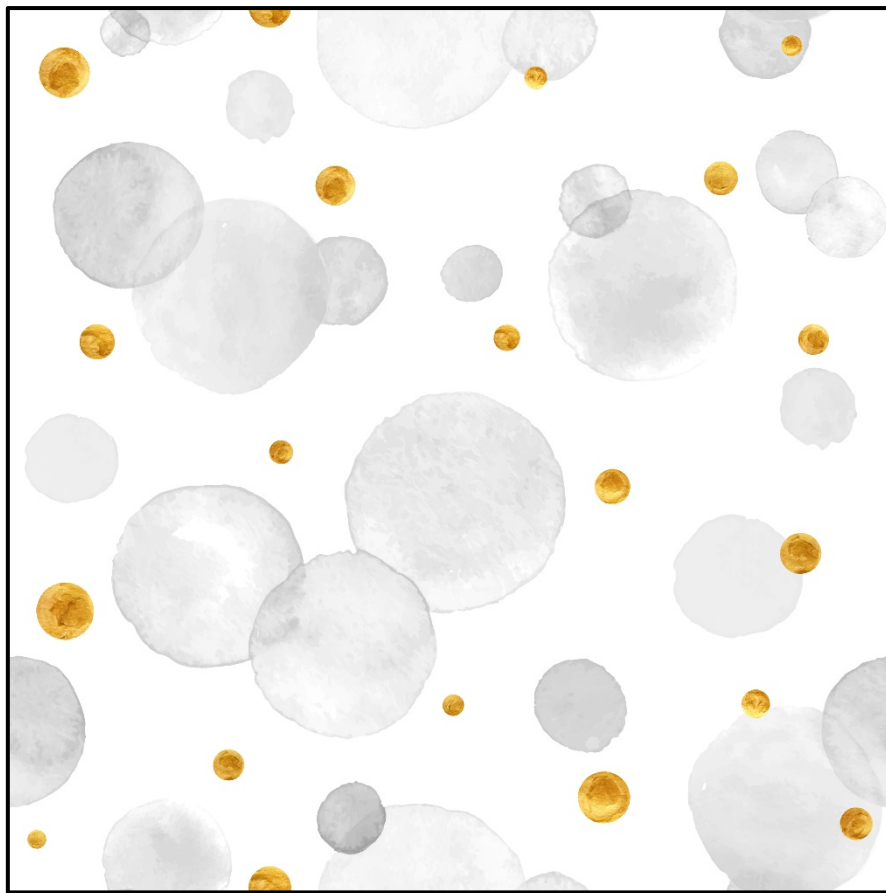


Ruminations



Small








Spring/Summer 2018.



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

Rev. Mark Faulkner
Director of Rural and Remote Ministry Initiatives
Uniting Mission and Education.









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Editor's Introduction

Welcome to your spring/summer edition of Ruminations
with the theme of

Small!

Throughout this edition there are a number of contributions from people who lead and gather in small Christian communities which, on the whole, represent the majority of Uniting Church congregations. In my mind "small" is the future of the church. There is nothing that I read, no social demonstration, no institutional example that indicates that big is best, works more harmoniously, achieves its goal or is enduring.

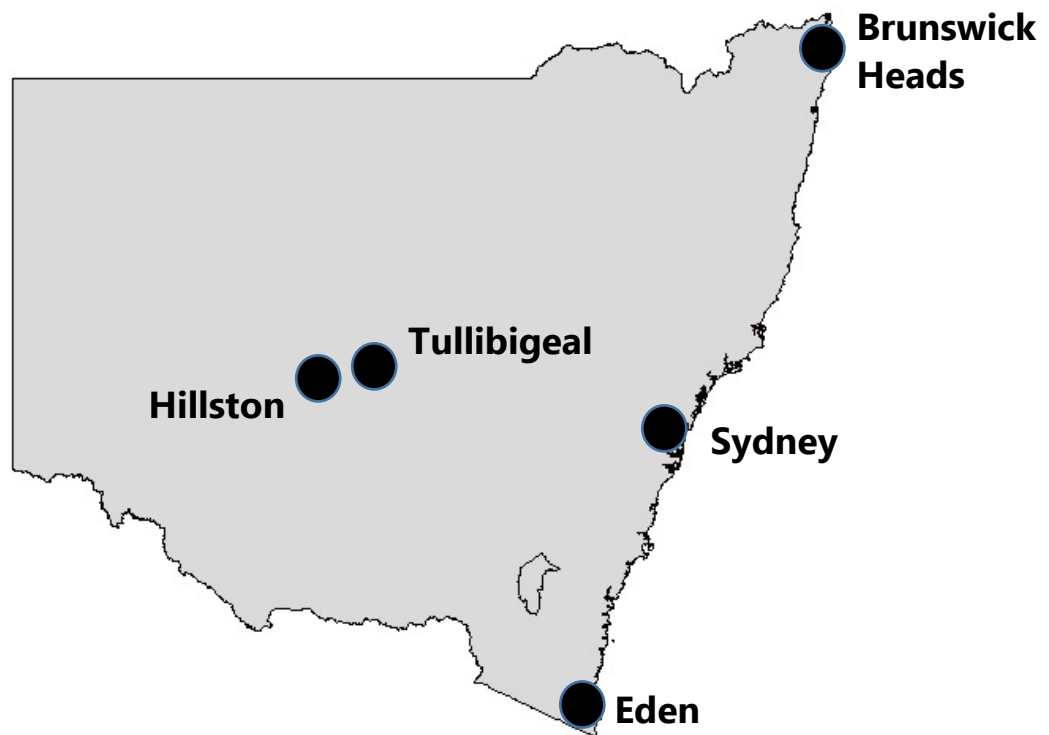
It's interesting to ponder in your own minds whether you believe that large shopping malls, mega music festivals, multinational corporations or powerful institutions are the essence of what humanity needs and finds wholesome. Or is it personalised street shops, music in cafes and pubs, services that are personal and local, and organisations that are about the people, rather than the process, that draws us and speaks to our needs as humans?

It is healthy to ask ourselves where we see the church in this setting of small and large?

Thank you to all those who have offered encouragement to Saltbush as it engages in the challenge of affirming and

connecting smaller Christian communities; both existing and new. Thank you to all who have contributed to this edition and helped edit and shape it.

Please read on and hear about the life of small Uniting Christian communities from Tullibigeal and Hillston out west, Eden down south, way north to Brunswick Heads and yes, even from a mustard seed in the heart of Sydney!



Peace to you all.

Rev. Mark Faulkner

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of stylized, overlapping letters and a long horizontal flourish.

A word from the Moderator

Rev. Simon Hansford

Moderator of the Synod of NSW & ACT.

Greetings to my friends in rural congregations and faith communities across the Synod and the whole church and community!

I have had the privilege of spending time in the Riverina recently, as well as engaging in conversations about Saltbush at a gathering in Tamworth. I am thankful for the friendships I have made and the ones I have renewed in the last few months. I continue to celebrate the faithfulness and good humour throughout our rural church.

The season has not improved, and many folk are facing a difficult summer ahead, if the forecasts are any indication. We are called, as we follow Jesus, to be there for each other - weeping and laughing and caring together - as Paul reminds us in Romans 12. Our hope is located in Jesus, and we live out that hope, even in the driest times.

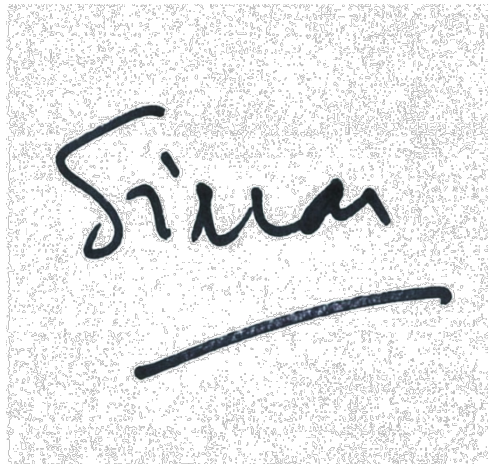
I am really grateful for the generosity of our church and community, with people giving more than \$100,000 to my Moderator's Drought Appeal, so that we can let people who are struggling know that many, many others are remembering them and offering what support we can to them and their communities.

As I drive around our Synod, I am passed constantly by hay trucks and am reminded of people's goodness and generosity to others because they have received generosity in the past. Our lives are frequently parables of the mercy and generosity of God.

Be assured of my prayers for our rural church, of my thankfulness for your witness, and of my hope in Christ for the days ahead.

May God's Spirit bless, inspire and renew you, always.

Cheers

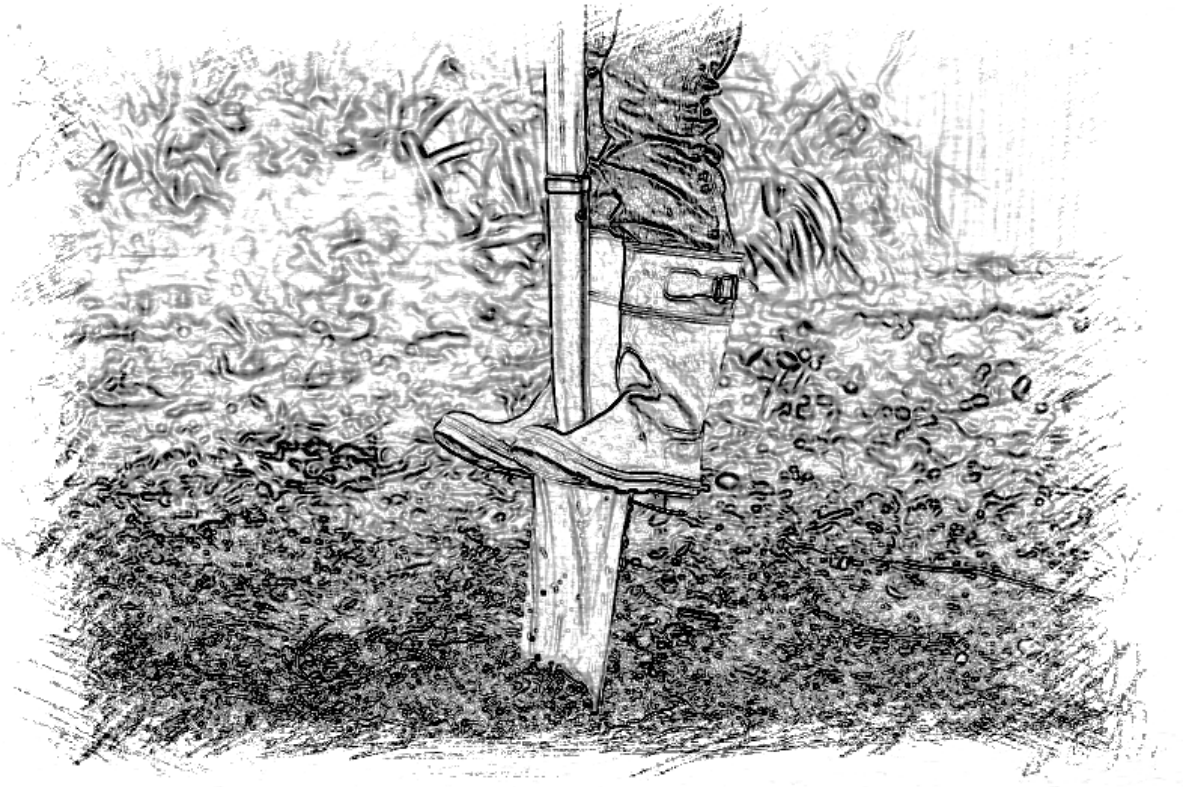
A handwritten signature in black ink on a light, textured background. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style and reads "Simon". Below the signature is a single, slightly curved horizontal line.

Small

Rev. Gereldine Leonard

Nagambie, Victoria.

In a school veggie patch, where I volunteer there is a small girl, a very small girl, a very determined small girl. When there is a job to be done she pushes up her sleeves in a business-like way and steps up. She always picks the biggest spade. The longer the handle, the bigger the mouth the better, it seems. So armed, she attacks the ground furiously and to be truthful, most of the time not a lot of dirt is moved.



Other children, annoyingly tall for their age, are always telling her to go and get a smaller shovel. When she hears these words, all the time pretending not to hear, her face screws up and she hunches over into a 'I am never going to go and get a smaller shovel' position - because we all know that the smaller shovels are really toys that only Kindies use. She is very definitely not a Kindy.

She runs harder, she climbs higher, and dares more, because she is small. I don't even know her name yet, but I am full of admiration. It is no good saying that size does not matter, it does, but she is never going to let being small hold her back. Never! When I grow up, I want to be just like her.

Small is not something people generally want to be. It has negative connotations. When it is applied to churches people fall to: limited resources, aging remnant, few people with too much to do. I am sure you could add your own list of negatives.

There are draw-backs to being small, but there are also advantages. It is harder for people to be lost in a small congregation, Small congregations are more intimate. People have a higher opportunity to participate. Again you can, and should, make a list of positives. What is good in your place? What is positive about your congregation? How can you celebrate these things - not only in your head right now, but Sunday by Sunday in your congregation?

No-one is going to dictate to my young shovelling friend what her life will be like based on her size, though maybe there is a shovel somewhere between toy and super-sized that would

make her life easier and her efforts more effective. I am waiting for smart to catch up with determined. What a day that will be!

What would smart look like at your place? What does it look like? My guess is that it does not involve trying to act like a big church or congregation, but delighting in who and what you are and drawing on the strengths this offers.

What does smart look like to me? I'd like to say that in a small congregation formal worship isn't everything, though I have yet to find a small congregation that agrees. Maybe we need to be on the lookout for the right-sized shovel – the way to gather that will make our lives easier and what we do more effective. I suspect you will find some clues in the list you just made. If you are a family sized church, how do families operate? How do they make decisions? How do they celebrate things that are important? The way that families do things give a clue to the way small congregations can do things.

She may yet surprise me, but right now, my most enduring memory of my small gardening friend is the look on her face when she has climbed higher than anyone else in the veggie patch mulberry tree. Imagine that for a minute.

Small had everything to do with it.

Our stories...

The Best Little Scrub

Rev. Michael Palmer

Eden NSW



Eden is a town with a significant timber industry, so when I took up my role as a supply Minister of the Word at Eden Uniting Church I was drawn to some poetry by the 'Lumberman's poet', Douglas Malloch. (May 5, 1877 – July 2, 1938)

*If you can't be a pine on the top of the hill,
be a scrub in the valley - but be
the best little scrub by the side of the hill
Be a bush if you can't be a tree.*

It's always good advice 'to be who you are', and especially good advice, if you are a small Church community. It's simply too easy to become anxious about reduced membership and small budgets and to fall back into a longing for a yesteryear when attendance was strong and our children and youth work was vibrant. It is a longing, which often sees an ageing membership 'have another go' at recapturing the past only to fall exhausted again with little result. Could it be that this backward longing, and its subsequent activity, distracts us from new opportunities which changing circumstances have brought to our churches- opportunities which long for a new twist to our mission and witness.

Like all rural churches, the Eden Uniting church has needed to respond and adapt to the changes confronting its town. We have sought to listen to our community and respond to the opportunities which change has brought us. There are significant stresses evident in the wider community as it struggles with both the downsizing of its stable industries, fishing and forestry, and the seasonal nature of the tourist industry. Under and unemployment, substance abuse, lack of affordable housing, and rising energy bills have beckoned the church to respond with the 'bread and butter' of Christian witness, namely, 'acts of charity' and 'hospitality'. Eden Uniting has discovered afresh the vibrant space of food hampers, community lunches and hospitality. It is following the lead of others in setting up a community pantry. All these have stirred within us a deep sense of 'rightness' as we

are drawn back into the generous love towards a hurting community - a love which our Lord Jesus so clearly demonstrated for us when he trod the dust of Palestine.

Changing circumstances have also seen some significant adjustments in our worship services in Eden. Small numbers of children combined with infrequent attendance makes a Sunday School impractical. But we have refused to give up on providing appropriate content for children and youth. Our new opportunity has been 'Interactive' - a short dialogue talk which follows one or other of our Bible readings. With open ended questions, visuals and story the congregation shares briefly in conversation. The interactive presenter prepares for children and youth, even providing an activity sheet which can be completed at the church entrance during a conventional 'sermon'. The congregation appreciates that a dialogue with visuals and story will easily be enjoyed by everyone. Did not our Lord teach many an adult, to great effect, using dialogue, visuals and story? The conversational method also acknowledges that as at Pentecost, the gift of the Spirit has been poured out on all believers. The church now gathered' has a capacity to discern the teaching of Christ, both its original meaning and its vibrancy for contemporary contexts. During an Interactive we explore together God's love. We listen to one another. We laugh. Our imaginations are stirred and we appreciate one another, even as we glorify our Lord.

Change can be difficult and lamentable. But change has also brought blessing. It has enabled us to see afresh the mission and witness, appropriate for young and old, of hospitality and acts of charity. It has allowed us a conversational learning in our worship

services and has brought laughter more broadly back into our gatherings. Old truths of the lumberjack's poet have proved true,

It isn't by size that we win or we fail,
be the best of whatever you are.

Or perhaps more poignantly, the truth of the 'carpenter come Lord' has been felt afresh, 'I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly.'

Starting new in Byron Shire

Carole Tansley

Brunswick Heads NSW

Being small has not stopped Uniting Church congregations in the Byron Shire from being adventurous. Most adventurous, perhaps, has been the Brunswick Heads congregation which recently made the difficult decision to travel to Mullumbimby to worship, freeing its buildings for a 'Fresh Expression' of church, engaging with people in their community.

The area is diverse and the diversity of the people is reflected in the "spirituality of the Shire with 'new age' approaches being popular with residents and with visitors who attend various 'spirit' festivals. Despite this, churches are holding their own.

The Uniting Church congregations in Brunswick Heads; Mullumbimby; Bangalow and Byron Bay, supported by ministerial team Greer and Phil Dokmanovic, have been thinking about their future for some time. As a consequence, Mullumbimby now majors in congregational worship on Sundays alongside its missional activities through the week. In the seven months since the decision was taken to make Brunswick Heads a 'Fresh Expressions church', seven new ventures have been developed as the result of much prayer by many.

Kid's Club: Greer and Phil, supported by several congregants, manage a Friday afternoon Kid's Club with Christian creative play. Children are picked up from the local primary school and walked to the church. For some, this is their first experience of a relationship with 'church people'.

Songwriters Club: Phil is capitalising on his own and others' interests and gifts in music to work with a member of the congregation to organise this innovative offering for people in the Byron Shire.

InterPlay: Greer leads regular 'InterPlay' days. InterPlay is an embodied, creative arts, improvisation practice. It helps reconnect body wisdom, mind, heart and spirit and enables a deeper knowledge of the self. It also develops participants' creative potential. Additional workshop weekends are held annually at Brunswick Heads church, led by individuals well known in the global InterPlay movement.

Hush - one hour contemplation retreats: A Monday afternoon hourly 'retreat' calls on the ancient wisdom of Celtic spirituality. Its liturgies, prayers, blessings and meditations seem to be making a connection with those who attend. The church is also opened an hour before Hush for contemplative prayer.

Hush - Winter, Spring, Autumn and Summer retreats: While the weekly Hush contemplation retreats tend to attract practising Christians one-day retreats are aimed at unchurched people. These attract seekers longing for 'time-out' to rest in spiritual contemplation.

A Wesleyan Fellowship Band has been reconstituted to foster the spiritual life of its members through spiritual direction and mutual accountability practiced in the power and presence of God's Spirit. It seeks to develop authentic mission focused spirituality. The results from this one small Band have been extraordinary. Fresh Expressions are not about challenging the

status quo, or changing the church. Our aim is that Fresh Expressions should be part of the Uniting Church operating in different ways to connect with different parts of the community.



Not so long ago, it seemed that each of the four churches in the Byron Shire were becoming so small that the effort to develop each church was too great and closures might be inevitable. By taking a different view we are beginning to see seeds of growth. Now, we feel like pioneers, drawing on old wisdom about what works and new knowledge about what might work differently. We are older people attempting to learn again how to be radical in our worship and radical in our activities. It is an exciting time to be here in the small towns of the eastern hinterland of New South Wales.

From Little Things

Rev. David Gore

Ultimo NSW

Being small has not stopped the *MustardSeed* Community in Sydney's Pyrmont from having a big impact on its local community. Like many of its rural counterparts the *MustardSeed* has always been small and, perhaps, because of this it has looked for and found its niche - coordinating significant life-events in both Pyrmont and in neighbouring Ultimo. It does things it is good at on a scale it can manage and its community has responded.



The *MustardSeed* congregation began 15 years ago as a weekly Bible study led by Robin Davies. In the ten years since its recognition as a congregation of the Uniting Church its numbers have grown to somewhere between 20 and 50 people gathering for Sunday worship.

Taking up the story, its current minister, the Reverend David Gore, says this small band of people has a meaningful impact on the Ultimo and Pyrmont communities through public events and the creation of caring community.

We hold a 'Live Nativity' in mid-December and with the help of a live donkey, a few sheep and three wonderful camels. Among the otherwise local participants, we remember and retell the nativity story. This event is attended by upwards of 600 people - mostly locals but with an increasing number of outside visitors. We lead the community in carol singing and wondering about a God who might chose to be among us in the most vulnerable of ways.

We also lead is the annual ANZAC morning service in Union Square in Pyrmont. Again we host a crowd of about 600 people along with community and political leaders, as we remember and honour those who have been killed in the theatre of war. Here the focus is on self-giving for the sake of others exemplified by the self-giving of Christ. Small as it is, these two public events give the *MustardSeed* congregation a great deal of recognition in the community and locals are very appreciative of our leadership.

We also run an op shop with a community focus where people, in addition to a bargain, can find a much appreciated listening

ear and practical help. This is particularly appreciated by people on the fringes of our diverse community and on more than one occasion we have had people come to donate and stay to volunteer. Some are also drawn into the worshipping life of the congregation as a natural development of ever-deepening relationships of mutual appreciation, respect and love.

The *MustardSeed* congregation also works with the Uniting Harris Centre, hosting a number of community groups and activities including a much loved annual Second Hand Saturday - buy, swap and sell – festival. In these ways we show our interest in the well-being and flourishing of the broader community offering spiritual depth to events that are important to everyone.

We are a small church. Not everyone in the community attends our services each week. But most people know we are here and I believe they are glad of the fact.

Small and Ordinary

Jennifer Rose

Hillston-Gunbar NSW



Hillston-Gunbar is a multi-linked congregation with Merriwagga, Goolgowi and Gunbar, all considerable distances apart, (Gunbar 94km from Hillston). A feeling of belonging as a church family is important. A monthly Bulletin aims to keep everyone connected with a segment of 'news from around the parish.' Church Council meets for fellowship three times a year for a meal before meetings at the Merriwagga Black Stump Hotel.

We have been lay-led for 16 years. I remember when the last Pastor left the congregation asked me, "What should we do now? Go to the Baptists or the Anglicans?" With trembling faith, I

suggested we give it 6 months and see what God would have us do. God thawed out his frozen assets and our congregations grew in faith and number as people became involved worship and service.

We have a 'Caring and Sharing' segment in worship where joys and concerns are named and spontaneously gathered into a communal prayer. Because we are small in numbers, we are well known to each other. Each Holy Communion Sunday people write their name on a small prayer card. These are collected with the offering and distributed at the end of the service with the instructions to please pray for that person every day until the next Communion service. This way everyone gets prayed for.

We have good ecumenical relationships of trust and respect which are made stronger in our need for each other. The Hillston Baptist Church combines with Uniting each first Sunday of the month and the Anglican Church is involved when they can arrange a service. Last Easter all churches combined to celebrate 'resurrection' as a community event. Eighty people attended and many stayed for a BBQ lunch. It was wonderful!

Last year I was asked to baptise a baby knowing the mother attended the Baptist Church. The Baptist lay leader said: 'we dedicate – you baptise, go ahead.' The parents were supported by 12 sponsors, a mix from both churches, the body of Christ united in a small community.

Hillston's church notice board includes the caption "Sharing God's Love in our Community."

To encompass the needs of the wider community - we have a prayer-chain ministry and a relief account ready to help families in crises. The Gunbar ladies know how to bake the love of God into their cakes and biscuits and these and other random acts of kindness are a welcome surprise at Christmas to every person in an aged care facility. Small things with great love!

Pastoral care takes time and energy, but is so rewarding. I have been delighted to discover God in the small things we do and see every day. One day I was massaging a hospital patient's hands, suddenly I found mine were the hands being massaged, gently, firmly. She was ministering to me! And I let her! The lady had no speech but her smile and shining eyes affirmed love and life, the sacredness in the ordinary.



Then, there are those stressful times when invited into people's lives with all their chaos and loss. A tragic funeral for a precious two-year-old boy was followed by a request to marry a terminally ill bride. One becomes very vulnerable in and to these moments. Troy and Marie were married in the lovely old Gunbar Pioneer Memorial church. The wedding was fast-forwarded by two months on the advice of Marie's oncologist. In the couples' words the ceremony was an 'amazing and happy celebration'. Their love, tenacity, courage, honesty and hope was inspirational and I was enriched by being part of their journey. Strange how that happens! Recently Troy interrupted Marie's frequent texting to me that "every day was a blessing" to let me know that Marie was now in palliative care at Hay Hospital and I was welcome to visit. I imagined they might want to plan a funeral, but no! They wanted to seize the present moment. Love and laughter filled the hospital room as together they recounted their honeymoon adventure. Before I left them with a prayer and holding cross, they asked if I had received the business cards they had sent as a 'thank you'. Until that moment I had no idea who had sent them – a colourful design with just "Jenny Rose" with phone and email details. No entitlement, just plain and simple. A lovely gift to remind me of 'small and ordinary' and how blessed I am to be just that!

Even though we have no heralding angels or bright stars to guide us, God is at work among us. God still intervenes in the 'small' and the 'ordinary', for that's where we are mostly.

We can see glimpses of the kingdom when we pay attention to the mundane and everyday places and people. We can witness God's living, loving presence working through people and tell

others when and where we saw God at work and point to God with us - Emmanuel.

Our difficulties are that we are becoming tired and ageing fast and have no succession plan.

Hillston-Gunbar has recently become part of the new Northern Region of the Riverina Presbytery and, when appointed, will be under the leadership of a 'Presbyter' based in Griffith. We look forward to being part of Northmead UC's Rural Engagement Plan with Rev Niall Reid coming to provide ministry support and 'enabling' in the next year. This all meshes with the goals of "Saltbush - Mobilising ministry with the Scattered Community". We are not sure what all this will look like. But we can pray that the energy of God's creative love will flow in and through us, as we trust God for the future.

“Small church? Just the right size”

Jean Worland
Tullibigeal NSW



Tulli congregation began using Project Reconnect DVD's regularly about 2010 when we found ourselves without a Minister of the Word or Lay Pastor and little prospect of having one in the foreseeable future. Tulli is part of the Lake Cargelligo Parish in the Riverina Presbytery with a faithful attendance of around 9 and if we are all there, about 14. The motto of Project Reconnect resonates with us – “Small church? Just the right size - reconnecting Christians with each other, with their faith stories, with their community”. Our congregation is friendly and inclusive with an older demographic with one young family and a couple of grandchildren.

The beauty of this method of worship is that the DVD's are easy to manage for those of us who are IT challenged and with not a lot of finances to spend on more complicated methods of delivering a worship service. We simply have a TV and a DVD player. Project Reconnect has DVD's available for each Sunday, however we have two services a month, the first with the DVD, and the second is a traditional service with communion. The various sections of each DVD are simple to navigate.

There is a varied selection of hymns in the music section, sung by a choir with accompaniment of organ or piano, but when a different hymn is desired the choice can mostly be found on a variety of CD's. As soon as I am brave enough to master the mysteries of downloading music from the internet, the choice will be endless!!

All The children in the congregation, be they eight or eighty find that the "All Age Message", previously known as "Kid's Korner" interesting, enlightening and memorable. Obviously the producers of Project Reconnect understand the relevance of children's presentations for all ages. There are also four questions in a separate section that relate to the message which are useful as discussion starters.

The DVD comes with an A4 sheet which identifies the focus reading and provides a brief commentary on the other Lectionary readings. It also identifies the duration of the Messages. On the reverse side is the list of hymns and an introduction to the speaker.

All that remains to be done is to read the Bible readings and prepare some prayers with help from many online sources. In

saying that I don't mean that we stick rigidly to a set service. The bones are there and we can cut and paste, rearrange, add and subtract. Each service ends with a "cuppa" which is a great time of sharing and discussion.

To be honest, my involvement was by default. Our congregation held a meeting to discuss the way forward, whether we would fold or have a go at doing our own services. It was during the Sacraments course that I learned something that has kept me going, especially when I'm feeling very inadequate. I learned that when I do a service, God speaks to those He wants to speak to and I am always amazed to discover how many times during a service that something, even the choice of a hymn, has more relevance than originally thought.

Recently we have changed the method of receiving Communion. We now gather in a semi-circle around the Communion table and pass the elements to one another with the appropriate words. This works well with our small numbers and we have found it to be meaningful when we serve each other.

Understandably Project Reconnect speakers vary in their style of presentation which can be interesting and refreshing. Occasionally we may be presented with a message which may seem city-centric or that does not resonate with us, challenging our beliefs and interpretations. These are the times when we need to ask ourselves, what was said that we question and how do we respond.

Each Sunday we gather to worshiping God and this is what we hope to do for a few years yet.

Experiencing the Word...

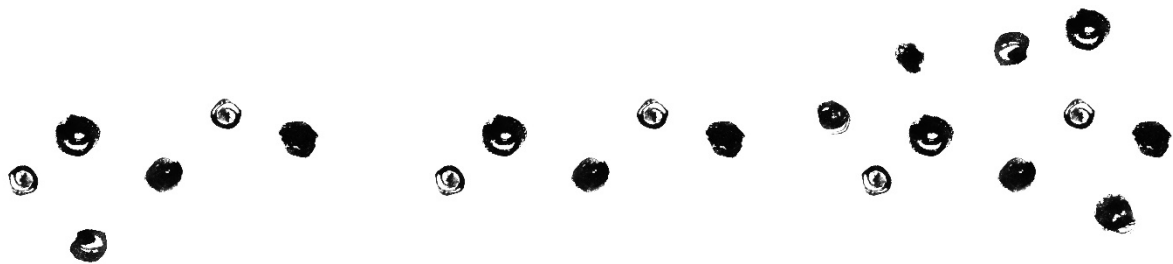
Dr. Jeffrey Aernie

Lecturer in New Testament Studies

Charles Sturt University (United Theological College)

Small Faith

One of Jesus's most well-known sayings refers to a small mustard seed: "For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you" (Matt 17:20).



For as long as I can remember this verse has been an encouragement to me. It reminds me that my personal inadequacies do not represent an insurmountable obstacle to faithful discipleship. With even a small faith I can achieve great things for God and the gospel.

Thanks to the talented musicians at *Seeds Family Worship* this verse is a regular refrain in our home and (especially!) in our family car. My wife and I are keen for our daughters to know that even though they are small (both in size and age) their faith in Christ can shape the world in dramatic ways. We do not have to

wait for our faith to increase to a mountainous size before we can begin to act for God. Small faith is powerful faith.

The story in Matthew 17 where we find this famous saying, however, deserves some closer attention. It turns out that this encouraging word is actually a rebuke in the first instance. Jesus's disciples here struggle to demonstrate that they possess the faith necessary to participate in Jesus's ministry. What can we learn from their experience?

In Matthew 17 as three of the disciples (Peter, James, and John) witness the remarkable events of Jesus's transfiguration the remaining nine disciples are approached by a man who requests healing for his son. In spite of their best efforts the nine disciples fail to cast out the demon torturing the boy. When Jesus and the three disciples return from the mountain the man approaches Jesus from the crowd, requesting that he heal the boy himself in light of the disciples' failure.

Jesus expresses frustration at his disciples' incapacity to heal the boy before immediately restoring him to full health. Once Jesus heals the boy he and his father fade into the background of Matthew's story. Instead of hearing more about the man and his son our attention is turned to a private conversation between Jesus and the disciples.

The disciples are keen to discover why they were unable to heal the boy. They approach Jesus to gain insight on what had gone wrong. Their confusion likely stems from the reality that Jesus himself had earlier provided them with authority to heal the sick and to cure disease (Matt 10:1–8). So what had prevented them from providing restoration for this man's son?

Jesus informs the disciples that their failure was due to their “little faith” (Matt 17:20). This answer is shocking. The idea that Jesus’s closest followers—those who witnessed his ministry and were granted authority by him—had only “little faith” seems unbelievable. Surely the twelve disciples of all people would have sufficient faith in Jesus and his kingdom to perform miraculous acts.

It turns out, however, that Jesus actually uses this same term—“little faith”—several times in Matthew’s story to describe instances of the disciples’ failure. Their little faith caused them to worry about future provision (Matt 6:30). Their little faith caused them to be afraid during the storm (Matt 8:26). Peter’s little faith caused him to sink on the lake (Matt 14:31). The disciples’ little faith caused them to misunderstand Jesus’s teaching (Matt 16:8). And here in Matthew 17, although they had been sent out with authority, their little faith prevented them from healing a sick boy.



Faith as small as a mustard seed is not an easily achievable reality. The disciples' little faith is *smaller* than what Jesus considers to be one of the smallest seeds within creation (Matt 13:31–32). Jesus urges his disciples to consider how their faith needs to increase.

How does faith increase? How do we cultivate faith the size of a mustard seed? I think that the next scene in Matthew's story points us in a helpful direction. As Jesus and his disciples restart their journey toward Jerusalem Jesus begins by predicting his death and resurrection (Matt 17:22–23). Faith is cultivated not by *our activity* (a focus on our own capacity and concerns) but by our recognition of and trust in *Jesus's activity* (a focus on the ministry of God's kingdom).

All of the instances of the disciples' "little faith" arise from a lack of focus on Jesus. Their general worry about the future, their fear during the storm, Peter's doubt on the water, and their confusion over Jesus' teaching all stem from a failure to remember the object of their faith—Jesus himself. Their faith is "little" because it is directed toward the wrong object.

The faith that Jesus requires does not need to be large because it is not something that stems from our own innovation or ingenuity. Dramatic Christian faith can be as small as a mustard seed because it has a singular focus—the crucified and resurrected Christ. Small faith is powerful faith.

In contrast to the disciples' "little faith" this "small faith" can achieve the impossible. This is not because of who we are, but rather because of who God is. When our "small faith" is rooted in Jesus's own life, death, and resurrection we have the capacity to

bring remarkable change to our community. We demonstrate our “small faith” by shaping our lives around the pattern of Jesus. This means that our “small faith” will involve sacrificial love and confident hope as we mirror Jesus’ own death and resurrection for those around us.

The capacity of small mustard seed faith to accomplish the impossible reminds us that size is not a determining factor in the power of the gospel. The impact of our faith is determined neither by the location of our church building nor the amount of people who are part of our community. The impact of our faith is determined by its singular focus on Jesus—the one who brings healing and restoration to the whole of creation.

Small faith is powerful faith.



Psalm in a time of drought...

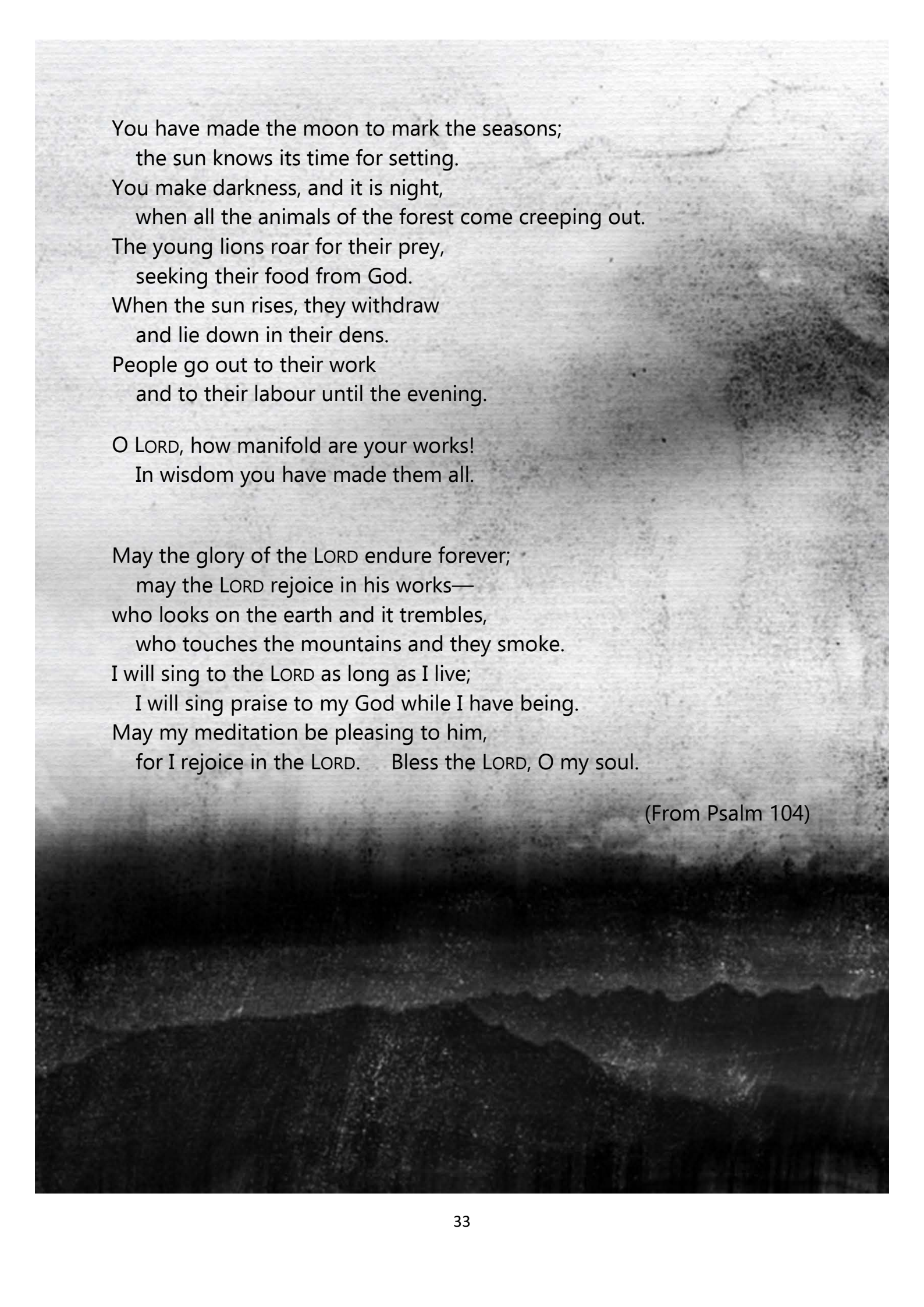
Bless the LORD, O my soul.

You make springs gush forth in the valleys;
they flow between the hills,
giving drink to every wild animal;
the wild asses quench their thirst.

By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation;
they sing among the branches.

From your lofty abode you water the mountains;
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
and plants for people to use,
to bring forth food from the earth,
and wine to gladden the human heart,
oil to make the face shine,
and bread to strengthen the human heart.



You have made the moon to mark the seasons;
the sun knows its time for setting.
You make darkness, and it is night,
when all the animals of the forest come creeping out.
The young lions roar for their prey,
seeking their food from God.
When the sun rises, they withdraw
and lie down in their dens.
People go out to their work
and to their labour until the evening.

O LORD, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all.

May the glory of the LORD endure forever;
may the LORD rejoice in his works—
who looks on the earth and it trembles,
who touches the mountains and they smoke.
I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God while I have being.
May my meditation be pleasing to him,
for I rejoice in the LORD. Bless the LORD, O my soul.

(From Psalm 104)

News from Saltbush...

On Friday 14th. and Saturday 15th. September we held another **Saltbush – Uniting the Scattered Community Gathering** in Tamworth! This is our second gathering for the year. People from the Presbyteries of Sydney, Illawarra, Canberra Region, Riverina, Macquarie Darling, New England North West, gathered together with people from Uniting Mission and Education, Synod Secretariat, Uniting, Frontier Services and our Moderator, Rev. Simon Hansford.

At this gathering we heard an update on Saltbush and the foundations for change. We read and watched commentary on the reality of being church in the 21st Century and discussed this commentary as part of our own experiences within congregations, Presbyteries and Synod.



Each Scattered Community Gathering is not an end in itself, but part of the slow urging of the Spirit towards change for us as a church. Or perhaps the Spirit is “fast urging”, or has been urging for decades, and we have just been slow to respond.

In my mind the coming year will be another significant challenge for us in the way we enable Uniting Christian community in both coastal and rural congregations and in particular throughout our Saltbush Presbyteries (Riverina, Macquarie Darling and New England North West). The challenge for us is also how we encourage those who want to explore and establish diverse, intentional, Uniting Christian community experiences. These will all look remarkably different one to the other.

So what next?

If, as a broad church, we are to be creative and mission focused, grounded in reality, encouraging and enabling our rural communities, then we need the establishment of a Saltbush team. This could be talked about and written about for decades, but we are at the place of needing action.

A Saltbush team would have a number of Scattered Community Ministers and a Saltbush Online Minister of the Word. These positions go hand in glove and will work as one team. Together they will work with both existing congregations and support intentional, alternative Christian community gatherings. The Saltbush team will work at connecting rural congregations and leaders, building relationships between urban and rural Ministers and congregations, push the boundaries of creative worship and encourage the exploration of discipleship, hospitality and Christian community and worship.

Imagine if at our next Scattered Community Gathering I am able to introduce these people!

It is also my intention next year to offer a Scattered Community Gathering, but in two locations a week apart; one up north and one down south. In this way it may be easier for people to attend where the focus will wholeheartedly be on gathering people from smaller congregations for encouragement, connection, collaborative learning and as I call it, missional relationship.

- As part of the recent Scattered Community Gathering I presented a growing library which has been established with the support and generosity of **The Camden Theological Library** at the Centre for Ministry. Each book chosen for the library is a challenge and refreshingly honest. Each book is around the theme of thinking about how we are church and the changing face of both society and the church within society. Here are just three of my favourites which you may be interested to seek out for your own reading and reflection.

Steven Croft.

Transforming Communities:

Re-imaging the Church for the 21st. Century

Darton Longman Todd 2002.

David Male.

How to Pioneer

Church House Publishing, 2016.

Reggie McNeal.

The Present Future

Jossey-Bass 2003

Again thank you to all for your encouragement and reflection on Saltbush – Uniting the Scattered Community.

Rev. Mark Faulkner.

Mark .



Mobilising Ministry

Mobilising Ministry is about affirming all of us as part of the wider body of the Church; a broad church made up of both rural and urban Uniting Christian communities. In this time of change, Mobilising Ministry challenges us to consider how we encourage and connect scattered congregations, ministers, lay leaders and each other.

Mobilising Ministry asks ministers from larger congregations to support smaller, rural congregations who do not have ministers and who are actively considering change.

Mobilising Ministry asks larger urban congregations how they can enable support and encouragement to take place out of their generosity and community gifts.

Mobilising Ministry asks rural congregations to embrace hospitality, daring change and the challenge of renewed vision and mission.

Mobilising Ministry seeks to encourage over a lengthy period a relationship of support and enabling. For more information and initial enquiries about Mobilising Ministry please contact:

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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"**

