

Ruminations

Winter 2025



SALTBUSH
UNITING THE SCATTERED COMMUNITY

Bush



Contributors

Lenore Hodgkinson lives in Canberra and is a musical lay leader in her local Uniting Church and has been involved with Landcare for many years.

Rev. Dr Jione Havea as part of Uniting Mission and Education is responsible for creating an environment of theological reflection, strategic planning, advocacy, education, community engagement, and collaboration focused on our responsibility as Christians to care for creation.

Robyn McPhail sees her key education as what she received growing up on a sheep farm in a community with strong church presence and later a doctorate in philosophy plus a love of biblical study. As a parish minister she stayed rural from start to finish. In retirement her mission is supporting rural ministry regional and internationally, and doing clinical work and chaplaincy for St John Ambulance.

Rev. Sam Sadrata is in his second placement and his first rural placement in the congregations in Tamworth. Sam has been in Tamworth for a little under one year.

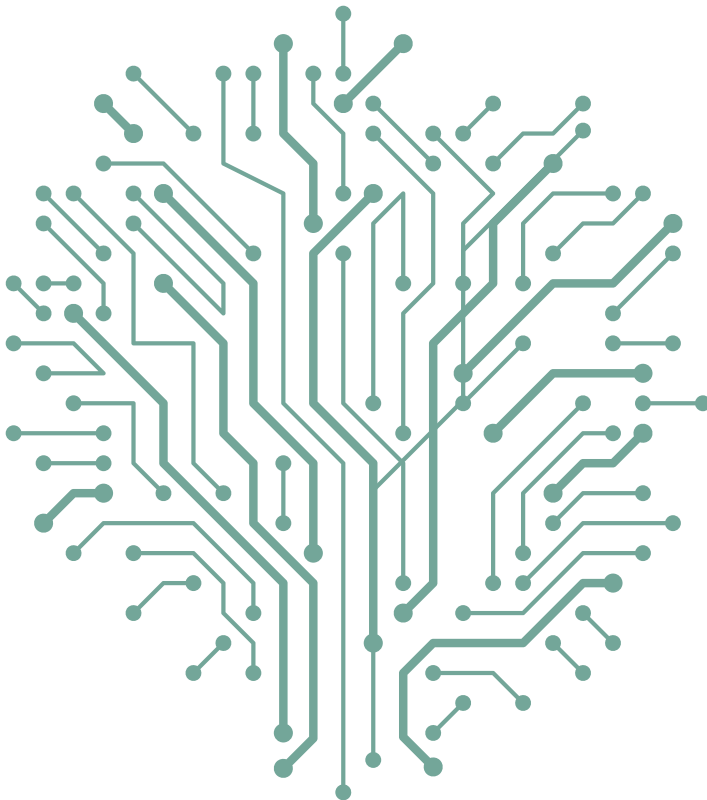
Brian Beasley spent his working life as an Industrial Design teacher at Junee Highschool. In retirement Brian is a musician, poet and carpenter using bush wood and traditional hand tools to shape rustic furniture. Brian continues to teach others these skills using woodwork and the bush to encourage, renew and open people to a spirit within and beyond themselves. Brian is a member of Junee Uniting Church.

Liesl Homes is the mission development worker for Bowral Uniting Church. She is passionate about community connections and sharing the love of God through her everyday interactions.



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Editor's Introduction: Bush

Rev. Tim Jenkins | Scattered Community Minister

The theme title 'Bush' is a word that evokes many feelings from the romantic and adventurous to the fearful and strange. To First Nations people we acknowledge that the bush holds a deep connection to country, history and ancestry, something that many since have come to appreciate and have a similar appreciation. For others the bush is 'out there' and it has the element of being unfamiliar, foreign and frightening. I recall a story from the early 2000's of a European journalist being taken to a station in western Queensland. After a bumpy ride in a single engine Cessna, he was dropped off on the airstrip and had to wait for the station manager. He recalls that during those thirty minutes he was overwhelmed by the silence, by the land's apparent emptiness and the endless horizon. It took him days to adjust but once he had, he was hooked. In the words of Henry Lawson "The simplicity of the bush is what makes it so beautiful".

In our Winter issue of Ruminations, we have such a varied range of perspectives from those in urban areas to those on different shores, we gain a glimpse into people's experience of the bush and how they live, work and speak of what it means to be in the bush.

Lenore Hodgkinson writes about the work of Landcare and her role in the North Belconnen, Canberra. Irradicating noxious weeds while restoring native grasses and trees. Lenore reflects on the importance of connecting our care for the bush with God's desire for caring for all creation. For Lenore "'bush" brings to mind God, our precious and unique environment, and the beauty of the world', emphasising the importance of caring for that which God has created and is so intimately engaged.

Jione Havea recalls a visit he made to the home of the late West Papuan artist Donatus 'Donét' Moiwend and his time with local activists known as scholars with dirty feet with whom Donét was also a teacher. A devout catholic, Donét's artwork connects with West Papuan understanding of ancestry. Depicting ancestors as our roots and children as our fruits and leaves. Giving a different perspective to that of a western lens in how we connect with our past and appreciate our future.



Across the ditch in Aotearoa New Zealand, Robyn McPhail explores the life and faith in the 'bush' from a Kiwi perspective. Finding both strong similarities and the subtle and not so subtle differences (the weather) between the two southern nations. Robyn finds, as many in Australia do, that caring for the land is in itself a sacrificial act, to walk gently and purposefully on the land, mindful of the presence of God, and that no matter where we are we see the glory of the Creator. Robyn concludes with 'Living well on the land in Aotearoa is about being gentle with the land, as with other people and with oneself.'

After 10 months in placement in Tamworth Samuela Sandrata reflects on the challenges and the blessings of ministry in the bush/rural settings. Sam has been working with PALM workers and alongside his colleague, Geoff Flynn, they have developed ministry and worship opportunities with those from Fiji and South India. Sam's experience has been a great encouragement to his ministry and he would hope that many more ministry agents and exit students would consider rural ministry placements.

Last year's Candidates Rural Ministry Intensive, at the end of October, gave candidates the opportunity to experience the bush and rural life with Dubbo as a base. Leisl Homes gives us a rich impression of how they encountered the bush in their contemplations around the impact on First Nations people's, how farmers use diverse ways of farming to safeguard the soil and maintain moisture with the 'sacrifice crop' - a great modern-day parable and those images unique to land outside the cities.

We hope that as you read you will also be filled with a sense of our shared connectedness with the bush and of the God who continues to reveal the beauty of creation and the uniqueness of the land on which we give thanks and praise to God.

Tim





Bush

Rev. Mark Faulkner | Saltbush Ministry Team Leader

In many ways Jesus was a man of the countryside, spending far more time wandering about The Way than in the temple or the biggest city Jerusalem. In Australia, two generations ago, it was not uncommon for people on the land to see swagmen walking the dusty back roads and even calling into houses asking for food or work. That's how I imagine Jesus; when walking about the dusty roads, he found himself sitting on the well talking to the woman, he found himself amongst grief at Nain and Bethany, he found himself face to face with the religious when he and his followers were picking their way through the grain fields and where in a deserted place he fed the crowds from little. Jesus was a rural man of the dusty, long track.

It's in these rural places, amongst those people, where the deepest conversations about faith and life unfolded because it seemed that in the biggest city and in the most religious places, Jesus struggled to have the conversations of greatest depth.

The parables of Jesus are also part of images and conversations of depth and of course, most all of them are in the rural setting. The Sower in the field. The prodigal brother off the farm. The wicked tenants of the vineyard. The weeds and wheat. Treasure hidden in the field. The labourers in the vineyard, amongst others.



The Saltbush team chose "Bush" as our theme for this issue because Australia has, of course, through our indigenous people and their ancient history, a long

presence lived around the bush. And in the mere recent times of colonisation, Australia still has had a strong bush presence throughout our vast landscape; mostly more rural than urban. As the church too, there has been a strong rural presence amongst rural communities alongside rural people, so that even though the voice of the city is loud, as a broad church we are shaped and formed and made up of the people of the bush too.



Robert Capon in his book on the parables, Kingdom, Grace, Judgement¹ writes that with Jesus, the parables are “used not to explain things to people’s satisfaction, but to call attention to the unsatisfactoriness of all their previous explanations and understandings. ... What they had previously thought of as solid stuff consists almost entirely of holes!”²

Just as the parables pull us and urge us beyond ourselves, our comfort and satisfaction into an unsettling experience of the God unconfined by our religious institutions, our social norms or our own person opinions, so the experience of being in the bush, alone in the bush, takes us beyond ourselves. People may well find silence terrifying especially when some people, day and night, live with constant noise. People may find being alone in the bush fearsome, especially when they are beyond the comfort of home and the bustle of crowds. People may find the bush journey time too monotonous, especially when it’s the busyness of life, the quick result, that hides our impatience and becomes an addictive reward.

In my mind, the Jesus of the rural road gave himself on those walking journeys a presence of mind so that the way of the dusty road, became his going about The Way of the Christ.

1 Capon, Rober Farrar. Kingdom Grace Judgement
Eerdmans Publishing, 2002.

2 Ibid. P.5

As he withdrew from the crowds, outside the little towns, to the hill or under the tree, he gave himself a place for prayer and wonder.

As he sat by the lake, or found himself thirsty by the well, or accepted hospitality by friends and strangers alike, he opened himself to the conversations and stories of both humanity and faith.

I also imagine, in my mind, that as Jesus walked past the field, or the vineyard, watched the birds gathering behind the farmer sowing seed, or saw the labourers arriving for their work, he found himself mulling over the way of the Kingdom of God, shaping those thoughts into little parables to poke and prod listeners into the challenge of faith and life and the “unsatisfactoriness of all their previous explanations and understandings”.

Our theme of Bush invites us to ponder the rural Jesus, the man of the track and the weaver of the rural life into stories of life and faith. For us entering into this space is an art, a decision, a movement of both body and mind. To take ourselves for a walk, or drive into the bush to be alone (outside the car), to sit under a tree, crush gum leaves in our hands and notice the movements of clouds, birds and breeze.

To conclude, a little poem by the early 20th. Century Irish/Australian poet, Roland Robinson, who was a man of the bush and while he was a poet he also worked as a roustabout, a railway fettler, property fencer, dam-builder and gardener.



Perhaps as you read this poem, the Invocation, you can imagine Jesus the bushman!

Invocation

Last night I spoke to you from where I lay
under a banksia tree at the top of the gully.
Come, I said, out of the distances of cliffs
in the mists of after sunset, out of the gully
filled with the light of the soaring insects, come
out of the saplings standing against the sea,
against the mountains of clouds, come from the south
with cold first breath. And then, above the sea
appeared the pale gold evening star, swimming
with its smaller companion into the trailing rain.
Come, I said, and you stirred the trees and wreathed
the smoke of my fire and came in the night with rain.³

Mark .

³ Hart, Kevin (ed.) The Oxford Book of Australian Religious Verse.
Oxford University Press, Melbourne. 1994.

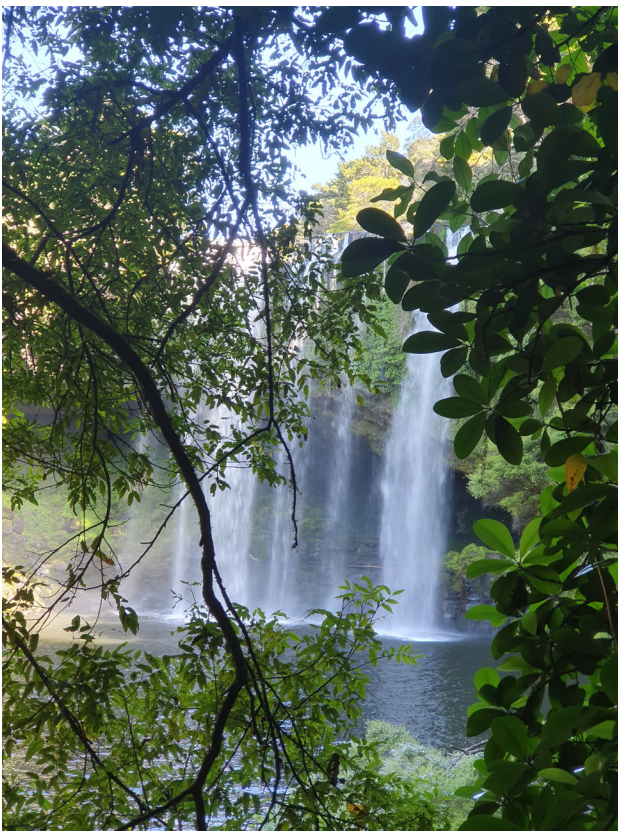
Reader's Letters - Experiences - Photos

We'd like to hear from you!

Send in a story of up to 200 words, or photo with caption to:
saltbush@nswact.uca.org.au*

This can either be on the Ruminations theme's for 2025 which are Lost, Saltbush and Joy, or on the topic of your choice.

*We will endeavour to include as many stories as possible, but cannot guarantee all submissions will be published.





Saltbush: the plant

Old Man Saltbush (*Atriplex nummularia*) is a familiar sight over large areas of the dry inland of Australia. It is a sprawling grey-blue shrub, up to 3 metres high and sometimes spreading to 5 metres wide. A long living plant, it grows strongly after periods of summer rain, producing long tassels of flowering seed heads.

Long time inhabitants mostly collected the minute Saltbush seeds to grind and roast for damper but these days we utilise the large fresh or blanched Saltbush leaves as a wrap around meat or fish, in salads or as a leafy bed for grilled meat or vegetables.

The leaves are also dried for use in bread, as well as low sodium seasoning on grills, pasta and dukkah.

If you want to watch ABC's Gardening Australia's segment on Saltbush, go here:

https://www.abc.net.au/gardening/how-to/plant-profile-saltbush/104320538?utm_content=link&utm_medium=content_shared





The Bush

Lenore Hodgkinson | North Belconnen Uniting Church

"Bush" recalls various ideas depending on one's worldview and location. For most Australians "bush" has strong cultural associations; in addition to plants and animals there are important cultural aspects.

For me as a Christian, "bush" brings to mind God, our precious and unique environment, and the beauty of the world. As a keen follower of Saltbush Ministries "Word about the BUSH" means a mini-sermon with fresh perspectives teased out of the bible readings. Bush in this context means a special message to those who live in regional areas, but equally enjoyed by those in cities, like me, who tune in to the zoom meetings offered by the Saltbush team.

Spending time in "the bush" is an antidote for the stresses of modern life. To live in "the bush" or outback parts of Australia often brings different stresses in our land of fires, droughts, and flooding rains. People on rural properties usually have a closer connection with "the bush" and community than city dwellers. People living in cities and towns must work harder to find the connection to "the bush" and may need to depend on small remnants of bush and nature reserves to foster their connection with "the bush".



One way this can happen is by joining a Landcare Group. Landcare is an Australia-wide movement, started in 1989 by the Australian Government as a by-partisan initiative and with the support of the Australian Conservation Foundation and the National Farmers Federation. It began as a rural movement but later evolved with Landcare groups becoming increasingly popular in cities and towns. There are now over six thousand

Landcare groups in Australia. Landcare helps to connect volunteers with their bush heritage. Caring and action to regenerate areas of land that has been degraded is the goal. I enjoy my involvement with this activity and try to support "the bush" in urban Canberra.



I lead the North Belconnen Landcare Group, and we meet twice a week to remove environmental weeds such as African Lovegrass and Chilean Needlegrass, and other weeds. In their place, we plant and nurture native plants or seeds thereby improving the habitat for birds, reptiles and insects. In dry times we water recent plantings from water cubes filled for us by the Government.

Restoration of native grasslands is our focus because this was the original vegetation. Little creatures like the grassland earless dragon are on the verge of extinction as the development of urban roads and suburbs robs them of their homes. Clearing land for agricultural and urban development needs to consider the needs of voiceless creatures that cannot defend themselves. As well as grassland restoration, we also plant trees and shrubs. The joy of participating in a Landcare session with Landcare friends to help restore and nurture nature is very satisfying.

Sometimes weeds can be useful in the scheme of things in God's Kingdom. Recently, I was contacted by a Wombat Rescue lady who had been given my name to assist her in locating sites of African Lovegrass. These weeds have a use as habitat in her wombat enclosure for the rehabilitation of orphaned or injured wombats. This was a massive surprise to me that even the dreaded African Lovegrass could be rehomed for a useful purpose! She went to our site where a big pile of lovegrass had been dug up that same morning. She collected, soaked, and replanted it in her wombat enclosure! The wombats do well on this tough survivor that evolved to feed animals in Africa.

Bush needs a good burn to reduce unwanted fuel loads, and a "cool burn" as advocated by First Nations Peoples, does minimal damage and has great benefits. I can see a connection between the rejuvenation of the bush with cool burning fires, in the same way as God and the Holy Spirit can cleanse and benefit us in our spiritual journey.



Many wonderful land carers and wildlife carers are motivated to care for the land and the native animals without an obvious connection to any Spiritual Movement or Church. We all need to be mindful of caring for the environment, whatever our motivation. My motivation to care for our environment in God's world, is summed up beautifully in the excerpt of the well-known Christian song by Shirley Murray (lyrics) and Colin Gibson (melody) which opens with the words "Touch the earth lightly, use the earth gently, nourish the life of the world in our care" and ends with "God of all living, God of all loving, God of the seedling, the snow and the sun, teach us deflect us, Christ re-connect us, using us gently and making us one." (Together in Song number 668).

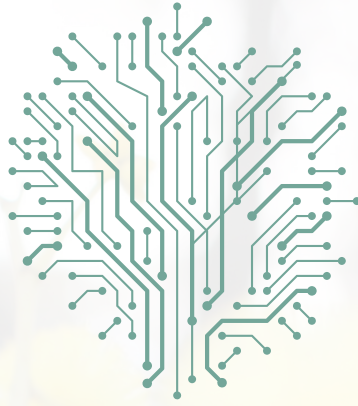


If Jesus was a Carpenter

Brian Beasley | Junee Uniting Church

If Jesus was a carpenter
shaping bits of wood,
to make a table or a chair;
I think that's really good.
For don't you know that as we go
through life, and all its cares,
that we are like those bits of wood
he made in things like chairs.
We have been grown from seeds he's sown
As are those magic trees.
To people, who like me and you,
Just may be hard to please.
For we are too, our whole lie through
Just like those bits of wood
that Jesus shaped, those chairs to make,
and that is why we should
be grateful, and find peace
in this great miracle of life.
And we will know that as we go
God moulds us through this strife.





SALT BUSH

UNITING THE SCATTERED COMMUNITY

Lay Leaders' Retreat with Saltbush!

Saltbush invites all Uniting Lay Leaders to retreat with us from 3pm on Monday 25 August until after lunch on Thursday 28 August 2025 at St. Clement's, Galong. This is a time of support and encouragement, listening and silence, conversation and hospitality, for any lay leaders (irrespective of your role) within the life of the church. This time together has been subsidised by Saltbush through generous donations and the \$100 cost includes all meals and ensuite accommodation. Feel free to email us at saltbush@nswact.uca.org.au if you have any queries or want to discuss the cost.

Scan this QR code to register.





Roots and Leaves

Subversion by Donatus Moiwend (Donét) of West Papua

Rev. Jione Havea | Mission Catalyst - UME

I once had the privilege of visiting the home of the late West Papuan artist Donatus Moiwend, who signed his artwork "Donét." I was a guest of his daughter Rosa, who wanted me to spend time with local activists better known as scholars with dirty feet! They are the Papuan version of "bush scholars."

Donét was a devout Catholic. His artworks conveyed a deep belonging in Tanah Papua (Land of Papua, home of the native West Papuan people). For instance, he painted angels with Papuan faces and hair, adorned in local attire and colors. Instead of a horn for Archangel Michael, Donét gave him a tifa (an indigenous drum), the instrument that Papuans use to communicate through beat (which has to do with time and space) and the language of music (which has to do with flow and fluctuation).

His larger works include murals on churches and cathedrals, but the walls of his living room are dominated by smallish works on "roots" and "leaves." These works subvert the western understanding of the ancestors as our roots, and so our children are our fruits and leaves.

For Donét, the ancestors are the leaves, and the children are the roots. Why? Because when Papuans are sick, they find medication and healing from the leaves of trees. And they breathe in the air that comes from the leaves. Through the leaves, the ancestors heal and accompany them.



Donét with Rosa

The children are the roots because, in the plant-world, new life begins from the roots. A new plant takes root first, before it could grow. Plants depend on the roots, for support and for nourishment, and new plants begin from the roots.

By caring for the leaves, and upholding their many gifts, we are reminded that we live in the world of the ancestors. The ancestors are not removed from us, but they are in the air and food that keep us alive.

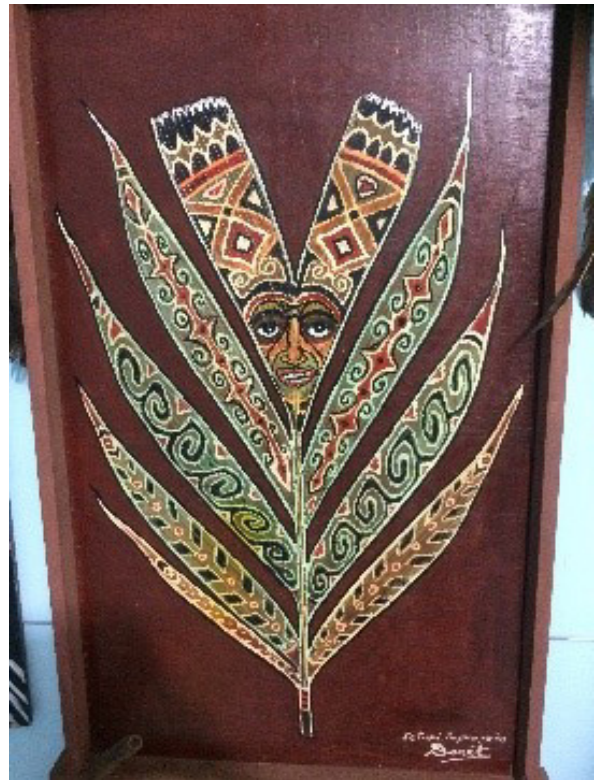
And by caring for the roots, we live in hope for the rise of new plants and for the continuing of the circle of life. Our children, as roots, keep us connected to the ground. They give us stability, and access to the resources of the land.

Donét's artworks invite us to rethink our usual and traditional ways of thinking. Donét was one of the teachers for the scholars with dirty feet, whose key motivation is the occupation of West Papua by Indonesia. The future of Tanah Papua requires that the scholars with dirty feet take root, in order to bring new life and new hope.

*the ancestors are
the leaves, and
the children are
the roots.*



One of Donét's works that connect roots with leaves



One of Donét's works on ancestors as leaves



Faith and the Bush

an Aotearoa New Zealand Perspective

Robyn McPhail | Retired Parish Minister

What's different about faith and rural life in that land across the ditch?

I'll start with what we have in common. Australians and New Zealanders both have a reputation for being keen to hear from tourists about how much they love our country. For we are definitely worth travelling long distance to visit. We each have a distinctive landscape, with a few concentrated population areas and majority wide open spaces. What is different for us in New Zealand are the short travel distances between a diversity of land- and sea-scapes. A tourist landing in Christchurch and heading to the Southern Lakes, then through to Fiordland or the West Coast travels the whole range of plains, hills, mountains, river valleys, lakes, and forests.



I grew up in the rich farmland of Southland and worked in ministry in Central Otago, Mid-Canterbury, and Northland, each rural and classed in Aussie terms as "the bush", being in the hinterlands and regularly forgotten about by decision-makers in the cities (church as well as government). Now I've retired back south, living beside the mighty Mata-au/Clutha river, which flows from the lakes Whakatipu, Wānaka, and Hāwea, each fed from the mountains.

We (like Australians I believe) are very much outdoors people, even if confined to city life, e.g. the tinnies you see out on the Manukau Harbour in Auckland, fishing for a feed. Wherever you are there's easy access to the bush for day trips and weekend tramps. Bicycle sales have boomed in recent years, with families and superannuitants out and about on cycle tracks the length of the country. For those who live rurally, the outdoors, and the weather, are the focus of every day.

But how does this relate to faith?



I do wonder what this means for the inner life of those who thrive on working the land or just enjoying being out among the variety of our natural treasures. It is certainly good for the soul. Connecting with church, however, is another matter. Although I'd say that for those who are part of church, their faith carries a strong sense of praise and gratitude for God's good creation.

Among those who work the land, it is interesting to observe a kind of faith that is not always articulated in religious terms. "I to the hills will lift my eyes" is a real experience for our farming people, as wherever you live there are hills or mountains on the near or far horizons. Finding livelihood on the land means focussing on more than the here and now – the weather could be different tomorrow, or even in the next hour or two. Living with the variables – my "unholy trinity" of markets, government, and weather – is a rural reality and that means a level of trusting what the future may be. The word "God" may not feature, but knowing one's not in control means living with a kind of faith in the unknown.



For me spirituality is about being relational: my variation on Descartes' "I think therefore I am" is "I relate therefore I am". Relationships are at the heart of church life and the trinitarian faith we share, and we need to stay well connected to ensure we keep being relational/spiritual people. Connections are important for most if not all rural people in New Zealand – connections as local community and connections to the land. This was my own experience growing up and I see it in the current generation on the farm. Changes in land use have made it hard to keep communities cohesive and strong, and loneliness is acute if the connections to community are not happening. The local church, even if small, can make a big difference, ensuring community events keep happening and all-comers are included.

How farmers relate to the land is, for me, important in the story of faith in rural New Zealand. Again, it's not always expressed in traditional church terms, in fact it is probably a minority who would speak of how they farm with anything like religious language. But to farm well is to nurture life. It involves understanding who and what you are nurturing – soil, plants, animals. It is about giving and receiving. "Blessed are the gentle¹, for they shall inherit the land." (Matthew 5:5) Living well on the land in Aotearoa is about being gentle with the land, as with other people and with oneself.

¹ According to An Analysis of the Greek New Testament, the word usually translated "meek" also means "gentle", a word I find much more relevant to the practice of living God's way.



'Bush'

Rev. Sam Sadrata | Tamworth Southside

Psalm 23.

'The Lord has definitely been my shepherd; I indeed lack nothing'

Coming out 'Bush' has always been something that was daunting - ministry wise and especially for my family. Being far from everyone, support networks and a sense of familiarity. Four hours and a bit from Sydney was, and is, tough. Just as Jesus fell face down and pleaded with God that if it was possible to take away this cup from him, yet God's will not his. Sometimes I find myself being too overwhelmed by 'Bush' Ministry.

Setting aside emotions and answering my call to be part of a Ministry team has been a blessing. Here I am, a phase 3 Minister of the Word being called to go bush and be in the team Ministry; I looked forward to it. I get to soak in all the Ministry experiences from our Senior Minister and learn what it means to be in a congregation in a rural setting and explore some of the struggles and how we do church in the bush.

Here I am ten months later reflecting on my journey in the Tamworth Regional Uniting Churches, and my God has it been a journey. I definitely see and feel the growth in Ministry and in the life of my family. Standing on this side of the spectrum reflecting back on the last ten months, I can say and strongly advocate for Ministry agents to take up placements in the bush.



'It makes a difference to have our Minister pop in for morning tea, now to have two it is such a huge blessing' - member of one of our congregations highlighted. This is true. I can feel the importance of the presence of Ministry agents as they bring with them a sense of completeness.

I was blessed and fortunate enough, with the help and guidance of our Senior Minister - Rev Geoff Flynn, to be able to start up a Fijian worship service; inaugural service on the 17th November 2024. Some of the struggles/challenges included finding resources for Palm workers, building trust, networking and how that informs Christ's work being done in this context. Despite this, I truly believe that prayer and faith as little as a mustard seed can move mountains. We are slowly growing as a worshipping community but like good tasting wine, it takes time.

Though our workload has increased by two - as we saw the start of a Fijian and South Indian worshipping community, It has definitely been a growth point in Ministry in Tamworth.

Another challenge is finding ways to engage youth and young adults. I still do not know where to start, or how I am going to do it, but I know one thing is for certain 'the best of all God is with us. The best of all God is with me leading me beside still, calm waters; God who restores my soul each morning.

Despite all these challenges, I am in love with the 'Bush' or rural Ministry. It has given me confidence; it has shaped the way I express and bear witness to the Gospels in the community - raw and real. I also want to encourage Ministers and exit candidates to at least take up 'Bush' ministry.

As my late grandfather used to tell my siblings and I 'The tougher the struggle, the sweeter the reward'. I never imagined myself doing what I am doing now, but in all things, I give thanks to God.





Rural Ministry Intensive Reflection

Liesl Homes | Student Minister

Thinking back to the Candidates' Rural Ministry intensive to Dubbo, Narromine, Nyngan and Wellington last year, a kaleidoscope of images come to mind. Food and conversation, country church hospitality and generosity. The Saltbush team being our chauffeurs, giving us 6 days of their lives, sharing rural life and ministry with us. Emus! in the wild, plains and rivers, tall trees and short bushes, the Big Bogan, silos and trains, towns and businesses and services, crop farms and massive machinery, worship by the river, rainbows and sunsets, more food and conversation, time together growing relationship. A taekwondo lesson on embodied leadership, a Tongan feast and the blessing of a local Aboriginal dance troupe – a family – performing, and teaching.

I'm grateful for the welcome of the many people who hosted us, sharing their church and life experiences, and the congregations (including Mudgee and Orange) graciously enabling our leadership of their Sunday worship.

I'm in awe of those who serve in country churches, of the lay leaders leading worship, preaching, learning new technologies to stream Saltbush services, as well as contributing to civic life through CWA, Rotary, local council, etc. People faithfully meeting, faithfully worshipping, faithfully caring, faithfully in action.

We heard of joy in community, the land, relationships, and also heard grief over closed churches, tiredness of lay leaders, concerns for grandchildren and their mental health, for aging and



shrinking congregation numbers, financial issues, and the struggle of getting ministers willing to serve “out west”. We were reminded of the importance of land – it sustains us, of water – it gives us life and living, as well as death and dying; of earth and the whole of creation being interconnected.

Two memories stand out.

Driving into Narromine, the welcome sign says Narromine, or “Ngarru-mayiny” in Wiradjuri means Honey-People. Then we pass multiple hives, proving the point – introduced bees thriving as well as native bees had previously. I think of Israel, the “land of milk and honey”. Both lands created by God, given for nourishment and colonised for gain. Yet both fertile and abundant enough to share. Aboriginal elders have told me that the land remembers. It remembers the blood spilled, and it remembers when reparation and reconciliation occur, like at Myall Creek. How do we right the historical wrongs, and live in peace together? What do we need to give up and repent, what can we learn from Aboriginal stewardship of the land, and what joys await when we do? I’m reminded of the importance of relationship - the Aboriginal dancing we were blessed by was offered as a result of conversation as we were sitting in the Dubbo church sharing and reflecting.



Then Geoff Wellington, standing in front of a crop of oats, a foot high, sharing of trying a new farming technique, which he was sceptical about initially, but which works; the planting of a sacrifice crop. The crop in front of us had been poisoned, and a new crop planted among it, tiny green leaves sprouting. The roots of the sacrificial crop hold the soil together, the stems and leaves provide shade and retain the moisture in the soil, increasing irrigation efficiency. The new crop grows, protected and nourished by the crop that has been killed to create space and not compete with it.

Jesus sacrificed himself for us, that we might have life in abundance. And I wonder, what are we being called to sacrifice, to enable the young and new to grow up and thrive, to have life in abundance? Individually, of our own wants, desires, opinions, as well as corporately, with our church traditions and structures?



I think of the possible “death” of twelve presbyteries, creating space to nurture three new ones. I wonder what new models of worship and connection God is planting, and what old models will create the safe environment for that... but which also need to die? I wonder, what holds, protects, nourishes you?

These memories remind me: God’s Spirit is in the land, in the waters. The spirit of love and reconciliation, forgiveness and joy. The heart of our God, the heart of this land, the heart of all being, is relationship and love. Resilience, stewardship, cycles of death and life, the sheer beauty, magnificence, harshness, and abundant life of this land, is all part of God’s plan for God’s people and God’s earth, which God loves, immeasurably.

May you encounter the renewing, pruning, refreshing, replenishing spirit of God in this land, too.







News from Saltbush

Rev. Natasha He | Scattered Community Minister

Mālō e Lelei and greetings Saltbush Community!

I hope you are all well and keeping warm. As I wake up to cold mornings and feel the chill in the air, it's a clear sign that winter is truly amongst us.

The Hunter Presbytery hosted its first Saltbush gathering at the welcoming Singleton Uniting Church. We shared in worship, engaged in biblical conversations, and pondered both the significant joys and the considerable challenges faced within our congregations. The space was filled with grace and mutual support, as everyone listened attentively to each other's stories, offering comfort and encouragement. We look forward to collaborating with other presbyteries, congregations, and faith communities in the second half of the year.

Saltbush are long-time members of the International Rural Churches Association. We had the privilege of attending the Oceania Conference in Lautoka, Fiji. It was wonderful to be part of a group from across the Pacific, Canada and England.

We heard the multifaceted challenges confronting rural ministries, focusing on the experiences of indigenous peoples and spiritual community leaders. Representing diverse backgrounds and geographical locations, they shared invaluable insights into a range of pressing issues impacting their lives and communities.

Presentations highlighted the consequences of modern-day slavery and forced migration, detailing examples of the human cost of these exploitative practices. Concern was raised regarding the often-exploitative nature of seasonal worker schemes, where vulnerable populations are frequently subjected to unfair labour practices and basic human rights violations. The escalating threat of climate change, and its disproportionate impact on our Pacific neighbours was a central theme, describing the erosion of coastlines, the loss of traditional livelihoods, and the increased frequency of extreme weather events.



We heard about historical accounts from Aboriginal mission stories, with insights into the long-term impacts of colonialism and the ongoing need for reconciliation. A critical component involved strategies to ensure the safety and well-being of women and children within these communities, addressing issues such as domestic violence, child exploitation, and access to healthcare and education.

Through our talanoa, we reflected on the significant lack of care, love, and compassion, highlighting the interconnectedness of these issues and the urgent need for collaboration. While these realities deeply saddened us, we recognised that we cannot solve these problems alone; they are larger than any one of us. Our goal is to raise awareness about these challenges and share our resources to shed light on them. The talanoa continues...

Mother Theresa said, "The greatest disease in the West today is not TB or leprosy; it is being unwanted, unloved, and uncared for. We can cure physical diseases with medicine, but the only cure for loneliness, despair, and hopelessness is love. There are many in the world who are dying for a piece of bread but there are many more dying for a little love. The poverty in the West is a different kind of poverty — it is not only a poverty of loneliness but also of spirituality. There's a hunger for love, as there is a hunger for God."

The Tongan National Conference was recently held at the Katoomba Christian Convention Centre. This event brought together approximately 1,000 Tongan members of the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) from across the country. It was a blessing to attend on behalf of Saltbush and be a presence of the rural churches in NSW/ACT. It was especially fitting that the following week we celebrated the 40th anniversary of the UCA's declaration as a "Multicultural Church."

As we approach our lay leaders' retreat from August 25th to 28th at St. Clements in Galong, please register as soon as possible, as attendance is increasing. Join us as we take time out from the business of lay leadership to draw into a moment to stop, breathe, and wonder.

That's all from me for now! Let's continue to hold one another in prayer and support.

'Ofa atu moe lotu

Natasha



Saltbush Relational Resources

Saltbush Cafés

In regular series of three or four nights the Saltbush team hold online cafés centred around diverse themes or readings. Saltbush cafés are easy to attend, relaxed and an encouraging way to meet other and explore life and faith together.

Scattered Community Gatherings

Three to four times a year in different rural or coastal location the Saltbush team hold Scattered Community Gatherings. You can also attend these online from wherever you are to wherever we are. These gatherings are centred around worship, encouragement, education and the practice of discipleship.

Word around the Bush

Each week of the year the Saltbush team present a visual message based on the lectionary reading for that week. You are free to watch and use in your own congregation this message. You can also print off the Saltbush liturgy that is provided each week to accompany the visual message.

Talking about Salt

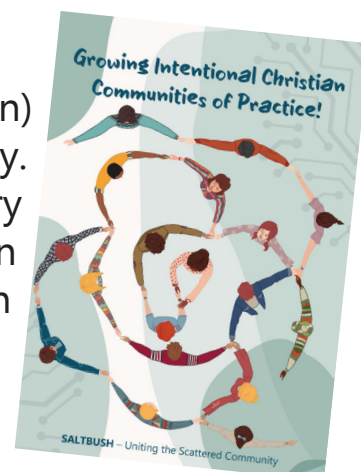
This is our publication available for any congregation or group who are willing to have some discussion around who you are, how you gather and how you live out your faith. Talking about Salt is five difficult conversations for congregations and can also be used to shape a life and witness discussion and consultation. Talking about Salt is available free to any congregation and is available both online and in post.



Intentional Christian Communities

This is our publication available for any congregation or group who are willing to think about the challenge of being intentional in how we gather as the Christian community.

Dive into any part of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke & John) and you will find Jesus intentionally going about his ministry. At times it looks like chaos and no doubt it was, but at every step Jesus acts with intention. Growing Intentional Christian Communities of Practice is available free to any congregation and is available both online and in post.



The Great Unravelling

The Saltbush team have prepared six conversations as part of our reading of the book:

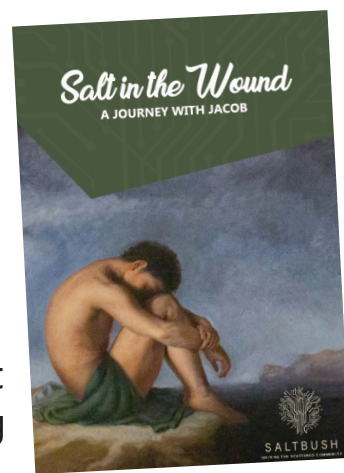
Joining God in the Great Unravelling by Alan J. Roxburgh.

However, these conversations are not a study guide to the book, but an invitation to open ourselves to deeply consider who and how we, the church, our christian communities, are participating in the ways of God beyond ourselves.



Salt in the Wound

This is an uncomfortable set of conversations. Like salt in a wound, they sting and irritate before they can soothe and heal. We hope you will sit with them – on your own or, preferably, with a small group of people with whom you are willing to explore your life and faith. There are seven chapters, each representing a particular phase in Jacob's life story and focusing on a specific theme. You can work through each in sequence or choose four significant to your current life phase or the life of your congregation for a month-long small group study.



Digital packages for congregations

If your congregation would like a Saltbush digital package so that you can use and connect with us and the wider church please simply get in touch. A digital package includes: smart tv, mobile stand for the tv, all connectors and cables, TV, camera and our support to set it all up.

Visits

The Saltbush team are always willing to visit your congregation or group to meet you, talk with you about how it is for you as a congregation or Christian community and how you seek to be part of the missional relationship with others. Simply get in touch and one of the Saltbush team will come to visit you.

Look on our website under **Word, Ruminations, Talking about Salt** or **Contact Us**.

Thanks for your donations to Saltbush!

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 congregations and people in scattered communities of faith.

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: UCA Synod Office - Saltbush Project
BSB: 634-634
Account Number: 100047049

Payment Reference: **"Saltbush"**



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.

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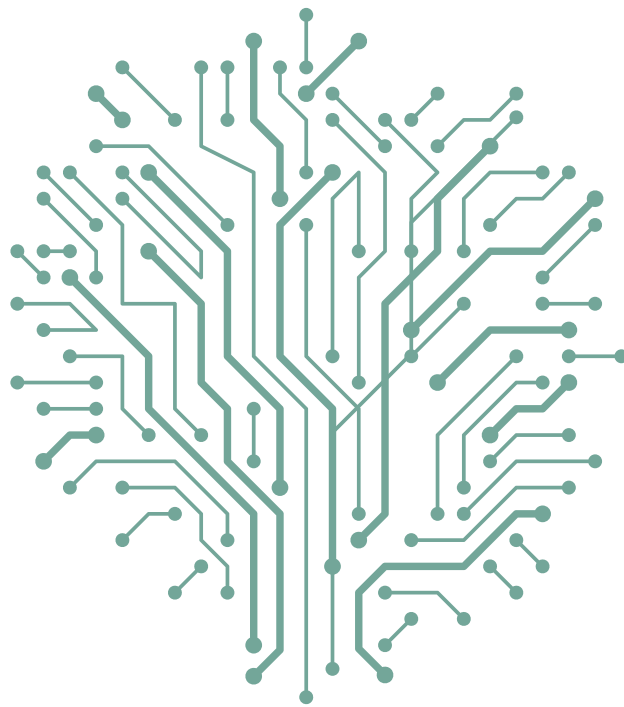
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UNITING THE SCATTERED COMMUNITY