

# The Link

ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF ARMIDALE

2022 OCTOBER/NOVEMBER



## The Parkers go forth

**AFTER 24 YEARS SERVING GOD IN THE NORTH-WEST OF NEW South Wales, Darrell and Elizabeth Parker (above) are opening their horizons to travel to the north-west of Australia.**

As the newly elected Bishop of North-West Australia, Darrell is taking his love of Jesus (and his willingness to drive long distances) into a new ministry opportunity. It is new for Elizabeth as well, even though her father, Tony Nicholls, was a former bishop of the same diocese.

So this ministry will be new, but also the same. "Keeping the Bible and Christ Himself as the foundation of all we do is the central challenge of ministry," Darrell said. "It's a fact of Christian history. Places which once had the gospel – whether it be a diocese, a church or even a country – somehow manage to lose it. There is enormous pressure

on Christians to sell out to the world. But if we don't have Jesus, the atonement, the resurrection from the dead and the forgiveness of sins, then we have nothing to offer them. We are just another voice in the wind. We must stay true to what God has told us in the scriptures. We must keep preaching the truth, and as the world gets darker, my hope is that the gospel will shine ever more brightly."

While Darrell and Elizabeth are looking forward, they are also taking time to look back, and to reflect on their years in the Diocese of Armidale. "The decision to leave our church in Tamworth was hugely difficult and still grieves us deeply. This diocese has been our home and place of service for a long time. Leaving here feels like leaving home for the first time." When we asked Darrell to tell us the

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highlight of his time in the Diocese of Armidale, he could not name a specific event. “The whole thing has been wonderful, not because it’s all been terrific and easy, but because God has grown us as his servants through good times and hard, and amazingly, he has used us to grow others. What could be better than that?”

Bishop of Armidale Rod Chiswell was asked to write a reference for Darrell. He said, “I have known Darrell Parker for over 25 years as a fellow clergyman in the Anglican Diocese of Armidale. He began his ministry on the Northern Tablelands in Walcha as a deacon in training for a year. He was then sent by the Bishop to the very warm, very flat Boggabilla where he ministered as vicar for nearly five years. From there he moved east and up the hill again to Tenterfield where he served as vicar for eight years. He then took on the vicar’s role at the University of New England Chapel parish in Armidale for five years, before moving finally to St Paul’s West Tamworth where he has served as vicar for the past six years. In every place that Darrell has served he has seen people come to know Christ and grow in Christlike maturity. In every place he has done a fine job of shepherding God’s people according to His word. Indeed, Darrell’s greatest joys in ministry are in seeing people ‘get the gospel’ for the first time and become followers of Jesus, and then in helping them to grow and mature in Christ according to God’s word so that they let go of this world in preference for the next. Darrell has been well loved in every place that he has served and highly respected in the Armidale Diocese more broadly as well. This is reflected in the fact that he served for 18 years as an archdeacon which involved pastoral care for clergy in surrounding parishes, and the care of lay people in parishes which had no clergy. As an Archdeacon Darrell also served on the Armidale Diocesan Council for 18 years giving him extensive experience in broader church governance matters. Darrell’s strengths, as I see it, are his obvious love for the Lord Jesus and for God’s people. He has very good people skills and is kind and godly in the way he relates to others. He is a good listener and empathises well with people in need. Darrell is also a good preacher and an able administrator, though he probably prefers the people work to the administration due to his large pastoral heart.”

Darrell and Elizabeth will be using the next few months to make their farewells and finish well at St Paul’s, West Tamworth. Darrell’s consecration service will be held in Sydney on Friday February 3<sup>rd</sup> 2023, and they leave for Western Australia the day after. His new role as bishop begins in mid-February.

Of course, they will need our prayers, but what should we pray? “For wisdom, grace, patience and love to rule over us by God’s Spirit. We have an awful lot to learn, and we need to give ourselves time to adjust to being the new kids on the block. We know so much about our home diocese here, and it will feel somewhat strange to suddenly be leading a diocese where we know so very little.” they told us.

Please keep Darrell and Elizabeth in your prayers.

*What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.*

2 Timothy 1:13-14

# Much to thank God for

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Bishop Rod Chiswell

**DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST,**

Greetings from Armidale. As always, we have much for which we can thank God!

## A wonderful season

Firstly, there is the wonderful season we are enjoying across the north-west of New South Wales. Over the past year-and-a-half Jenni and I have enjoyed visiting every parish in our diocese. And as I talk with lay people in every patch the frequent comment that I hear is that this is the best they’ve ever seen the land. It is a marvellous season that brings to mind Psalm 65.

*“You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly. The streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with grain, for so you have ordained it. <sup>10</sup>You drench its furrows and level its ridges; you soften it with showers and bless its crops.*

Thank God for his goodness in refreshing the land with rain, and pray now for dry weather so that crops may be harvested safely and successfully.

## A great clergy team.

Secondly, we can be thankful for a great team of clergy. We are particularly thankful for our brother Darrell Parker and his wife Elizabeth who have served faithfully for many years in the Diocese of Armidale and have now been called to serve on the other side of Australia where Darrell will take up the job of Bishop of North-West Australia. This is great for the gospel but sad for us. Pray for wisdom, love and strength for them as they take up this daunting task.

Another leadership change sees Archdeacon Adam Draycott stepping down from that role to focus on the newly combined parish situation of Inverell with Ashford-Delungra. Thank you, Adam for your good work over the years as Archdeacon. I’ve asked David Robinson to step up

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Bishop Rod Chiswell, Bishop-Elect of North-West Australia Darrell Parker and Bishop of Bathurst Mark Calder.

as the new Archdeacon of the McIntyre and thankfully he has agreed to do so. In other clergy movements, Tom Melbourne from Lawson in the Blue Mountains has joined our clergy team to serve at St Mark's UNE in Armidale. This is great news and a huge answer to prayer as the UNE chaplain's role is a strategic one as we look to raise up gospel workers from the country to serve in the country.

We are sad to lose Dan Avenell who is retiring from the Parish of Barraba at the end of the year. Richard Newton will also finish up as chaplain of TAS and move to Thomas Hassall Anglican School in Sydney. He has done a magnificent job over the past 17 years and they will be hard shoes to fill indeed. The last of the clergy movements is Lou Davies who has moved from the Calrossy chaplaincy team to become the new chaplain at NEGS from the start of Term Four. Please pray for wisdom for me in the reshuffle that all these moves bring within the Diocese, and the recruiting that will need to happen. Looking to next year as well, I am also looking for up to five new curates to take up positions that will become available in 2023. Currently we have one locked in with three strong possibilities currently being explored. I'm still finding that interest in serving in the Armidale Diocese is strong. Pray that this continues and that the interest bears fruit so that we see a growing team of godly clergy who love God's people and faithfully preach God's word.

### A training and sending vision.

Now, while looking after the gospel work in our own diocese is vital, over the past year I've also been working on a plan to raise up gospel workers for the harvest in rural Australia more generally. In mid-September I was in Sydney and had the opportunity to speak at Moore College at an event entitled *Three Bush Bishops*. At that gathering the Bishop of Bathurst Mark Calder, the Bishop Elect of North-West Australia Darrell Parker and I came together with Greg Harris, National Director of the Bush Church Aid Society. We'd been talking about working together as evangelical country bishops to recruit and train clergy straight out of theological colleges like Moore and Sydney Missionary and Bible College. There are currently gospel opportunities everywhere in rural Australia. For example: Bishop Mark Calder has 28 parishes but only 14 have clergy currently. An

additional problem for him is that he only has one curacy training place! Now, in the Armidale diocese we have 34 parishes and 11 places where we can train curates under experienced country ministers. This is the legacy of over 50 years of evangelical bishops recruiting clergy who have faithfully taught God's word and loved God's people.

The vision that we have is for Armidale to become a curate training and sending diocese, whereby we recruit curates with the understanding that they will train with us for two years and then go on to serve in Bathurst with Bishop Mark Calder or Rockhampton with Bishop Peter Grice, North-West with Bishop Darrell Parker or The Murray in South Australia with Bishop Keith Dalby. We now have a window where a number of rural Anglican dioceses around Australia have recently elected evangelical bishops. We believe that by working together we can place well trained clergy who will faithfully teach God's word, shepherd God's people, and proclaim the gospel in communities all over this vast land. I'm pleased to announce that the first of our fully trained curates will head to Bathurst Diocese at the end of this year. Ben Connelly has accepted the Parish of Cowra and will move with his family and commence work in January 2023. Friends, this is great news, but just the beginning. Can you pray that this vision to raise up gospel workers for God's harvest right across Australia is continues to move forward? In Matthew 9: 37-38 Jesus said to his first disciples. *"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."* The exhortation of Jesus back then remains just as important now.

Can you pray that we will get the Armidale curacy pipeline filled with able ministry candidates so that at least four curates can be recruited each year and so that half of them can be sent on to other dioceses? So far, we are finding that students who hear this vision resonate with it strongly. But there is much work still to do, so please pray and keep praying.

Thank God for his great kindness to us here in the Armidale Diocese. Pray that we will continue to use what He has entrusted to us well to build Christ's church both here and further afield for His glory.

With love in Christ,  
Rod

# Much joy in North Kigezi

Nick Stone

Church Missionary Society Northern NSW  
representative and vicar of Boggabri

**WE ALL REMEMBER THE EARLY MONTHS OF 2020. FIRST,** some faint reports out of China, then by March the whole face of the world and our lives as we knew it had changed. Andrew and Margie Newman had experienced upheaval in the preceding year. They had been accepted as Church Missionary Society workers, having completed training at St Andrew's Hall in Melbourne. They had visited link churches and then, in early 2020, travelled across the globe to start life and ministry in the Diocese of North Kigezi, Uganda. Six weeks in and...COVID-19 lockdown!

And so, they had the somewhat unusual and isolating experience of spending much of their first term on location without receiving visitors from home, apart from a pastoral visit from Elizabeth Richards (CMS-Australia).

They therefore expressed much joy when they received a team from the Armidale Diocese in July this year. Sharon Kirk, Laura McLean, David Thomas, Ben and Ruth France with their three boys, Simon Carter with Cody, and I were joined by Ken Noakes from Lower Mountains Anglican Church in Sydney and Trace Akankunda, currently a student at Moore College who was born in North Kigezi. Our primary purpose for being there was to partake in a clergy

conference and clergy wives' conference, as well as to assist in the library at the Canon Ndimbirwe Bible College.

It had been many years since the clergy of the diocese had gathered, and it was a joy to see how they were encouraged to be able to meet again. Ken spoke at the clergy conference on 'Discipleship: keeping the main thing the main thing'. Ben, Trace and I moved around the discussion groups which happened each afternoon and it was wonderful to see how the Nextgen training that has occurred in previous years has taken root in the lives of many of the pastors. Many of them commented about how helpful Ken's teaching had been, giving them a clear focus going forward, after the difficulty of Bishop Benon's death, the subsequent findings and COVID-19.

Ken writes - *Under God it is partnerships like this one which keep us all sharp for the gospel as we lift our eyes outside of our own circumstances and serve brothers and sisters across the seas. We share in the same great commission to go and make disciples of all nations, baptising in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching all to obey everything that Jesus commanded (Matt 28:19-20). Whilst that commission will play out differently in our ministries, it is the same commission which all disciples are given. What a helpful rebuke and*



The Reverend Brian Muhereza, Deputy Principal of Canon Ndimbirwe Bible College, translated for Simon Carter on a radio station which broadcasts to south western Uganda, DR Congo and Rwanda and has around five million listeners.



Clockwise from top left: Travelling- North Kigezi; Sharon Kirk in the Bible College library; The North Kigezi team; Sharon Kirk with some of her Ugandan sisters in fellowship together.

encouragement to get to the end of a Bible talk and be asked by a Ugandan pastor: ‘Now that you have taught us what Jesus said, will you also ask us to commit our lives to him?!’ Indeed. We went to Uganda to encourage the saints to ‘keep the main thing the main thing’ – and they helped us to see that Jesus is the main thing. Thank you God.

Sharon Kirk was the speaker for the clergy wives’ conference. She spoke on three women from the Bible.

Sharon writes - *For as long as I have been the wife of a clergyman in the Armidale Diocese, there has rarely been a year when we did not have a Clergy Wives’ Conference. The name of that conference has changed over time, but the outcome of the Conference has always been the same: ministry wives are greatly encouraged and refreshed through the teaching from God’s word and fellowship with their sisters in Christ. For our sisters in North Kigezi, there has been a bit of a drought in recent years. The last time the clergy wives in that Diocese had the opportunity of gathering together was in 2016, and then it was just a one-day event! So, it’s hardly surprising that over 60 women were eager to attend the five-day Clergy Wives’ Conference that took place in July this year. The opportunity for these women to come together at the Conference was invaluable. Many of these women come from difficult situations. Life is hard. Ministry is challenging. During this week together, however, they were reminded that they are not alone. They have the Lord Jesus Christ: He knows their situation, He hears their prayers, He gives them his peace and his comfort. And they have each other: they are sisters in Christ, who walk a similar road as they follow Jesus together.*

Talks were also provided by local Ugandans John and Ruth Senyoni. Until recently John, an Anglican minister, was Vice Chancellor of Uganda Christian University and Ruth is a trained counsellor. They spoke on partnership in ministry.

Alongside the conferences it was great to receive reports from the kids – Fletcher, Hudson and Lincoln France, and Cody Hicks – about their presentations to local schools, as well as their skills in the library, assisting David Thomas and Laura McLean, who did a superb job cataloguing the books we had taken over.

On three evenings Brian Muhereza, deputy principal of the Bible college, invited Ken to deliver some lectures on leadership. These were accompanied by a question and answer session. It was good to spend time with the students as they prepare to serve throughout the diocese.

The two Sundays saw us spread across several parish, preaching,

sharing testimonies, teaching Sunday School, and being well fed before and after the long and lively services.

We were very well hosted by Bishop Patrick and Mama Eva, as well as Andrew and Margie Newman, and we continue to give thanks to God for this fruitful partnership. Please continue to pray for our brothers and sisters in North Kigezi – that together we faithfully follow and proclaim Christ.

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# Melbourne in Armidale

*Tom and Alison Melbourne with Ted, Zach and Rosie.*

**TOM MELBOURNE HAS BEEN APPOINTED AS THE NEW SENIOR Minister for St Mark's Chapel at the University of New England. As he was preparing to leave his church in Lawson on the Blue Mountains, we sat down to ask him about how he ended up so far from home.**

I grew up in Western Sydney in a lovely family that didn't really know or trust Jesus. (My parents have since become Christians, but that's another story for another day!). In Year 8 at High School a friend invited me along to the Christian lunchtime group, with the added lure of free hot chips. I went for the chips, stayed for the wonderful conversations and care that the leaders of the group gave us, and by 2003, Year 11, I had put my eternal hope and trust in Jesus.

*After many years as a regular parish minister, why university ministry?*

I've got a deep love for Uni ministry, because that's where I grew the most as a Christian! I went to Macquarie University to study Ancient History, and arrived as a baby Christian. In God's great kindness, I was found on my enrolment day by the Australian Fellowship of

Evangelical Students group, and they wonderfully disciplined me and encouraged me and trained me over the next three years. I learnt just as much about my faith at Uni as I did about the ancient world, and it was wonderful. Ever since, I've had a big soft spot for what God does through Christian campus groups - he used it to change my life in so many good ways, and I am so excited to get to be a small part of that for the students God brings to UNE in the coming years.

### **Who is coming with you?**

I'm married to Alison, who is a primary school teacher. We have been entrusted by God with three great kids - Ted (8), Zach (6), and my little Rosie (3). Oh, and the family is rounded out by a puppy, Toffee, and a grumpy old cat named Ninja.

### **But how did you end up here?**

I'm good friends with David Robinson, the vicar at Glen Innes. He has been on my case for years to follow through on my passion for country ministry and to make the move out of the Diocese of Sydney. Through Dave I found myself meeting with Rod Chiswell, who so generously came and met with us and told us all about what God is doing in the diocese and in particular through St Mark's UNE. Though we could see how wonderful an opportunity it was, we decided at that time to decline to be considered for the role, mostly because we didn't feel ready to leave our precious church in Lawson.

A few months later I was chatting with Rod about a Bush Church Aid matter and learnt that he had still not been able to find somebody to fill the UNE position. I honestly was dumbfounded, and a bit saddened, I guess. Alison and I spent some more time chatting, and praying, and seeking counsel. We realised that God has given us a clear passion for country ministry, and so if a family like ours wouldn't make the move out of the city, how could we expect others to do so?! And so, we agreed to be considered. After meeting with many people at St Marks, and hearing more about the church's passions and opportunities, we were happy to accept the position.

### **It's a big move!**

Leaving our beloved church at Lawson in the Blue Mountains has been one of the hardest things we have ever done. Painful, in so many ways. But we have been so thankful to God that he has provided a wonderful new minister for Lawson, who will start in the new year. We are so thankful to God's people at Lawson, who have sent us off enthusiastically, with their love and blessing and prayers. When you're surrounded by such generous, gospel-hearted people, it makes it a bit easier to say yes to a costly move like this.

### **You look a bit like a country bloke already.**

Well, it's strange - many people assume that this long-running interest must have come from growing up in the bush, but eventually I have to sheepishly admit that I've only ever lived in Sydney and surrounds!

I guess the truth of it is that God has laid this on our hearts and has fostered it through different opportunities and experiences. Two of my grandparents lived on a property in Peel, a tiny village on the outskirts of Bathurst, and so visiting them constantly during my childhood certainly grew in me a love for the wide-open spaces and different pace of life that comes with the country. Alison, for her part, spent a chunk of her childhood in Bathurst, where her Dad was Anglican Chaplain to Charles Sturt University, and remembers it fondly.

Bush Church Aid is also responsible in a big way. When finishing up at Moore College we spent a lot of time chatting with BCA about ministry opportunities, but the timing wasn't quite right. I was encouraged to stay involved by way of joining the BCA NSW Committee, which subsequently led to involvement on the BCA National Executive for the past seven years. That involvement with

BCA has been so good - it has stopped me from getting too much city-centric tunnel vision, and has helped me to be aware constantly that God is at work across the nation, in all sorts of smaller places, through all sorts of people, all united in proclaiming Jesus. The big diverse group of Christians who God has assembled to reach country Australia seem to be a pretty great bunch, doing work whose true significance will be seen in eternity, and so we are excited to join that team. It feels good and right to finally be following through on this interest that God has laid on our hearts.

### **So, what are your plans for the next few years?**

That is a hard question to answer, because it's still such early days in us getting to know St Mark's! I guess 'grand plan' is the same grand plan as every church has, because it's the grand plan that Jesus gave us - that we would make mature disciples, in ever-increasing number, generation-by-generation, so that people can find eternal peace with God. So I would love the prayers of God's people for St Mark's UNE church, that this church would be a community where that happens!

What we are well aware of is that St Mark's has a brilliant and rare opportunity to be seeing uni students grow in knowing and trusting Jesus. Obviously there's much more to St Mark's than just the uni ministry, but we do meet on campus, and have been entrusted with this responsibility! I keep on meeting people who have been blessed by St Mark's during their uni days and beyond - praise God for this wonderful history. And so one particular hope and prayer is that St Mark's will continue to do this, continue to see students come to Christ, and put their roots down deep into Christ, and be sent out to serve Christ. I am hoping that in the coming years we can particularly see lots of graduates who set off down a path towards a life of vocational ministry in country Australia - the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few, especially in rural and regional and remote areas! The prayers of God's people will be a key part in seeing that happen.



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# New initiative for the Global Anglican Future

*The GAFCON meeting in Canberra.*

Russell Powell  
Anglican Media Sydney

**“THIS CONFERENCE COULDN’T HAVE** come at a better time,” said Bishop Richard Condie, the chairman of GAFCON Australia, as he looked out over hundreds of Anglican leaders at the National Convention Centre in Canberra. “We are at an important moment in the history of the Anglican Church in Australia.”

The 350 Anglicans from Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu had gathered for the Global Anglican Future (GAFCON Australasia) Conference.

Bishop Condie said one of the goals for the conference and GAFCON leadership was to “get on with the task of reaching Australia for the gospel through Anglican churches”.

To that end, he formally announced the formation of the Diocese of the Southern Cross. It was a response, he said, to an emergency in the Anglican Church.

“You know as well as I do that there is an emergency,” he said. “When some of our bishops have failed to affirm basic biblical teachings [on marriage and sexual ethics] at the recent General Synod – when 12 of our bishops failed to uphold what Christians have taught for millennia – you know there is an emergency.”

But Bishop Condie said the issue was wider than marriage and sexuality. “The issue for us is the authority of the Bible.”

The Diocese of the Southern Cross is a new structure for Anglicans in Australia

who can no longer sit under the authority of their bishop. The initial bishop of the diocese will be one of Australia’s most experienced church leaders, Bishop Glenn Davies, who was formerly the Archbishop of Sydney. The diocese was described as a new ecclesial, extra-provincial structure for Australia.

Just 24 hours before the conference began the first church of the new diocese, Southern Cross Anglican Beenleigh and Logan in Queensland, met under the leadership of the Rev Peter Palmer. “The Diocese of the Southern Cross is thoroughly Anglican,” Bishop Condie said, which drew applause from the audience. He then announced the commissioning of Bishop Davies at the end of the conference on Thursday, which drew further acclamation.

“We have been led by the faithful example of Anglicans in the US, in Canada, in Brazil and in New Zealand,” he added. “We long to see all Australians come to know the love of Christ. This love of Christ cannot be known unless our witness is faithful and clear.”

The diocese has been recognised by the international GAFCON movement, which embraces the majority of the world’s worshipping Anglicans. Sydney Archbishop Kanishka Raffel was among the first leaders that support the new diocese. “I’m happy to extend the hand of fellowship to the Diocese of the Southern Cross and may God bless Bishop Davies and his work.”



*Bishop Glenn Davies new Bishop of the Diocese of the Southern Cross.*

Bishop Rod Chiswell echoed those sentiments. “While some were dismayed at the establishment of the new diocese, I believe that it was a sad but necessary step. The reality is that some Anglican evangelicals in dioceses led by liberal bishops who have a different view of the teaching of Scripture on matters concerning human sexuality, are looking for alternative episcopal oversight. Sometimes this is because they are being put under pressure by their bishop to step into line with the world’s way of thinking, other times it is a matter of conscience as they do not want to be led by bishops who they believe are leading God’s people contrary to God’s word. It is important to note that the Diocese of the Southern Cross has been activated solely as a safety net for these evangelical Anglicans. Now, I suspect some evangelical clergy and laity in those dioceses will leave, others will



stay. I don't think that there will necessarily be a flood of evangelicals leave the Anglican Church of Australia to join the Diocese of the Southern Cross, but I trust that those who do will have good reason to do so. The leaders of GAFCON Australia have made clear that the Diocese of the Southern Cross will only remain while it is needed. If all Anglican bishops across Australia were to agree to the plain teaching of the Scriptures the parallel Anglican structure would no longer be needed.

I stand with all other evangelical bishops in Australia when I say that we have no reason to abandon the Anglican Church of Australia. The ship as launched by Archbishop Crammer in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century is a good one. Its constitution is sound, having excellent fundamental declarations and ruling principles that uphold the authority of the Scriptures as primary. In all of this we need to remember that God is still sovereign, Jesus is still King and He will build his church. Please pray for the Anglican Church of Australia, particularly that God will work in the hearts of bishops who have failed to uphold the plain teaching of the Scriptures. Pray also for the Diocese of the Southern Cross as they seek to care for clergy and laity who have felt the need to leave the ACA. Finally, pray that none of the current upheaval in the wider church will distract us here in the Anglican Diocese of Armidale from the main game of Introducing all People to Jesus and Helping them Home to Heaven.”

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2022

## A city boy loves Armidale

Archie Poulos  
Head Ministry Department  
Moore Theological College, Sydney



Although I grew up in the country, I have lived all my post-school life in Sydney, but I was recently invited to be part of the *Lighter Fuel* gathering of Youth Leaders in Armidale. It was such an honour and delight to hear people of such a diversity of ages, backgrounds and ministry situations. I was humbled and encouraged by the stories of how God is working through youth ministries.

The stories are very different to what I see in Sydney. In Sydney we have churches and youth ministries sometimes separated by only 800 metres. Some in the Armidale Diocese are separated by 100km. In Sydney leaders sometimes only meet the youth on Friday nights, and leaders and youth come and go and cycle through the groups so that long-term relationships are difficult to nurture. This means the feel of youth ministry in Armidale Diocese is different to the feel in Sydney. And I suspect this difference sometimes makes those who have ministered only in the city either scared about serving in the regions or excited about the prospects.

God works in his people, and one visible way is creating the desire to see Christ glorified through our activities. But when you have choice about what to do and how to serve how do you make that decision? It seems we generally evaluate and choose only between ministries we have either been involved in or have seen.

But the conversations at *Lighter Fuel* reinforced that just as Sydney is changing, so is the bush. Change brings lots of opportunities and many dangers. There is especially the opportunity to consider doing something different, and the danger of giving up or forgetting the great gospel truths that brought us to Christ. I have become convinced that this time is the day to consider the opportunity to do something new, and I think the parallel with vaccinations is a good image to start with.

Vaccinations generally involve being exposed to a little of the virus so that your body can be trained to deal with the virus. Because Sydneysider's experience of the bush is sometimes non-existent, I wonder whether we should give city people the opportunity to serve and see what bush ministry is like - to be vaccinated? I teach at Moore College - the Anglican Training College. Perhaps we can create a program where our students work alongside the clergy, and youth leaders in the Armidale Diocese for a while to see the joy and opportunities? I can tell many stories of our students who, after having been part of a week-long mission in regional centres, have decided to minister in the bush long-term.

There is also the city pull of the already 'vaccinated'. Some people come from the bush to study in the city, never to return. Our city churches perhaps should develop partnerships with regional churches so that they help and support (through prayer, finances and encouragement to go) some of those who have joined them to return.

COVID has shown us how movable city people are: Lay people: teachers, accountants, tradespeople, professionals, can all move out of the city and are now doing so. For gospel reasons we need to encourage some to go, we need to prepare those who are going to be trained to serve in churches, and not to just sit back after they move. We need country people to paint a picture of the gospel opportunities to city people.

Just some stories: years ago an educator of school teachers used to meet with Christian graduates and tell them of the towns they should apply to for their first teaching position because they had need of youth leaders - and many went. I met a few couples at *Lighter Fuel* who chose to return to their towns so they could serve in their churches. I know of some professionals who have realised they can work from home, so home can be in the bush. They have gone bush so they can serve in church.

But I am ambitious. I want partnership between regional/rural churches and city churches. I have 2 Corinthians 8-9 in mind, where the Corinthians are urged to support those they don't even know but who are undergoing severe famine in Jerusalem. In those chapters the Macedonians, themselves impoverished, begged for the privilege to give to the needs of Jerusalem.

It is not just when city churches have excess that they should seek to serve the bush churches, but at all times.

*We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.*

*For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favour of taking part in the relief of the saints* 2 Cor 8:1-4

I guess I am calling for a partnership similar to overseas mission. We send missionaries to far places because the gospel is for all people. The same is true in the bush.

# The country road took them home

**ELLIOT AND LUCY CHAPMAN GREW UP IN THE DIOCESE OF Armidale:** Lucy attending Gunnedah Anglican church with her parents, and Elliot as part of the youth group at St Peter's South Tamworth where Tim Stevens, now vicar of Guyra, was his youth leader.

At the end of 2016, Tim left Tamworth to go to Mungindi and Elliot was making plans to study teaching at Newcastle University. Both Elliot and Lucy regularly attended and helped out at Diocese-wide youth events during their university years which meant that they stayed in regular contact with Tim.

So when Lucy and Elliot became engaged, they naturally asked their old friend Tim if he would marry them. While doing their marriage preparation together, Tim challenged them about what married life would look like for them as they sought to serve God together. Specifically, he challenged them to think seriously about coming back to the country when Elliot had finished his teaching degree.

"This is because one of the challenging features of youth ministry in our part of the world is that we regularly say goodbye to our teenagers as they head off to university," Tim said. "Sadly, the reality is that we hardly ever see any of them ever again. They hit the bright lights of the city and they just can't turn away."

Elliot agrees. "Oh, definitely! Newcastle has a lot offer in all aspects of life. There is plenty of reliable work in Newcastle and many opportunities to climb the ladder in a career. It's also a great place to live and we had a great church there with many ministry opportunities."

But Elliot and Lucy caught a gospel vision for returning 'home' to be keen lay-people and started making plans to move to the Diocese once Elliot's teaching degree was finished.

"When I left the New England in 2018, I was convinced that I wasn't going to return any time soon," Lucy said. "What a joy it is to know that God's plans are always better than ours! Once the option came up to move back to the country, we were both excited to prayerfully consider it. Suffice to say, we trusted God and made the move and it's been great!"

Tim was not really aware of the huge part he was about to play in Elliot and Lucy's lives when he suggested they return to the Diocese. "I didn't really have any preconceived notions of where they might end up. I didn't really care where they ended up to, be honest," he said.

"I just wanted to give them a vision for coming back to where they had grown up. I hoped that they might be the start of a new generation of lay Christians who will help us to do ministry into the future. You can imagine how delighted I was when, a few months ago, they decided that they would move to Guyra to be part of what God is doing in our small patch. And their energy has been felt almost immediately in our small church."

Though it has only been a short time, Elliott and Lucy have settled in to work and ministry with gusto! "I am working four days a week as a nanny for four different families around the area," Lucy said. "On Mondays I aim to catch up with people from church and the

community and build deeper relationships with these people." Elliot is currently finishing his final practicum as a teacher and will soon be working in Guyra and Armidale. "We have been taking part in church services in many different ways. Recently we have been working as a church to set up a ministry to the overseas workers in our community and will be beginning a prayer and praise night that aims to reach the many Pacific Islanders in our community," Elliot said.

And their enthusiasm for country life and ministry is beginning to catch others. "Even though they are only young, their energy and zeal for others knowing and loving Jesus is starting to rub off on all of us!" Tim said.

Though it is still early days, Elliot and Lucy are sure they are in the right place. "We had a lot of confidence moving to Guyra, knowing Tim's experience and seeing the fruit of his ministry in different places," Elliot said. "St James Guyra is a numerically smaller church than the churches we grew up in, so we have been more able to get to know and spend time with the many faithful congregants. It has been such a joy to grow deeper relationships with people from a vast range of life stages. I think many medium to large size churches miss out on that joy because it's easy to relate to and spend time with those at church in the same life stage as yourself. One thing that we are particularly grateful for is the privilege of growing up in and now attending faithful, Bible-preaching churches."

We asked Elliot and Lucy what they would say to encourage other young people who might be thinking about moving to a regional area. "We have all been given the challenge to go and make disciples everywhere," they said.

"Ministry in the country is an amazing opportunity to do this. Often in larger cities there are many people who are trained and have the skills to evangelise to the rest of the city, to pastor others, to encourage other believers. In the country, there are fewer people to do these things. If you have been blessed to be a part of a church that has given you bible training in any regard, you are ready for country ministry! It must be said that there is great need for the 'committed congregant', meaning the people who will come to the country to support and be a part of church, not necessarily in any paid role. We think that youth ministry in particular is so crucial because we are talking about the next generation of Christians to come through our churches. Most people become Christians in their youth and early adulthood, so we need to be there to love the teens of the New England by showing them Jesus, especially at such a pivotal time in their life."

Elliot and Lucy have asked readers of *The Link* to pray for growth at St James; both in maturity and in number. We should praise God for the ministries happening around St James such as the Tuesday night bible studies and the opportunity to minister with and to our overseas worker friends. They ask us to pray urgently for more opportunities like this. We can also pray for more committed Christians to join St James at Guyra, as well as other churches in the region so that the green shoots of ministry in the Diocese can be nurtured, and might grow to bear the fruit of the gospel.

*Opposite: Tim Stevens, Lucy and Elliot Chapman and Kirsty Stevens.*





# It takes a village to fix a hall



*Working on the Warialda hall.*

**WHEN STEVE CIMAROSTI** ARRIVED AS the new vicar of Warialda in 2021, he inherited the Parish Hall building project.

The Parish Hall (which was built in 1902 and served as the old church building), had been out of action for close to five years, and was desperately in need of renovations. It needed a kitchen renovation, new toilets (which were previously external to the hall), storage space, a meeting room, an office space and a large multi-purpose deck. Parishioners were more than willing to pitch in and help, but they could not do it alone.

Enter Mobile Mission Maintenance!

MMM is an interdenominational missionary organisation that works to support churches, schools, rehab centres, church campsites and many other ministries throughout Australia and overseas, by doing repairs, renovations and construction of new buildings. The volunteers are mainly retired tradies and other people who have gifts and abilities they want to keep using after retirement. They usually travel in their caravans and stay at

each project as a group. Those who don't have a caravan, can usually find accommodation close by. They even have younger volunteers who join projects during school holidays.

Steve called MMM headquarters in Melbourne and applied for help. A team leader was appointed and he went to Warialda to meet with Steve and scope out the project. Paint and building materials were then purchased by the church and teams of MMM volunteers arrived in May and again in July. Helped by some congregation members, and fortified by good meals from others, the team worked to create a new pathway to the vicarage, sand and polish the verandah, replace many of the foundation pylons, carry out repairs inside and build a new servery for the kitchen.

Steve told us "MMM spent a wonderful time working with us on the hall to help us finish it off, but countless hours have been spent by volunteers at the church, a group of Bush Church Aid Nomads, and many other people in the local community to work on these renovations over the years. Groups like MMM

have been a blessing to us financially - our parish really would not be able to undertake the renovations otherwise.

But even if the parish HAD hired professional labourers to finish the project, I think we would have lost something very important. The truly beautiful thing about these volunteer 'barn-raising' is the quality of fellowship that we have enjoyed. Our parish is greatly blessed by the work which was done, but even more so by the people who have worked on the hall with us. And those who have volunteered have also gone home blessed by our ministry to them and fellowship with them too.

There are just a few final tasks to finish on the hall before we officially re-open it in early October, Lord willing. Once the hall has been finished, we will then be able to use it for ministry and other community purposes."

Please give thanks for everyone who worked on the rejuvenation of the Warialda Parish Hall, and ask God to use it for his kingdom work.