

## “Adopt-a-Church”

Many rural churches in NSW are struggling. In cities such as Albury, Dubbo and Lismore, large populations and infrastructure have cushioned the effects of drought, population transfer, and economic downturn. However, in other towns the difficulties are considerable.

If effective Christian witness is to remain and develop in rural areas, much more will need to be done. One way of helping is to "Adopt-a-Church". There are churches where the Bible is taken seriously but where the emphasis is on survival rather than mission. Ageing congregations, the disappearance of youth to the coast, and inability of some churches to support a minister, are just some of the problems. Sometimes a church's history is allowed to stand in the way of genuine progress.

There are churches and ministers who would welcome help. There must also be Christians with a love for Christ and a servant-heart who are willing to do what they can. That combination has been part of the Christian scene since the early days.

The Bible contains a number of references to Christians helping Christians in other places. (e.g. 2Cor 8;1-6). This is true "fellowship" (*koinonia*), "participation"/"sharing", in the broadening ministry of the gospel. e.g. 2Cor 8;4 9;1-2 9;12-15 11;8-9 Phil 1;5.7c. These other references are also helpful: Gal 6;9-10 Eph.1;15 6;21-22 Phil 1;4-5 2;25,29-30 Col 4;12-13 1Thess 4;9-10 2Jn 3-6.

Broadly speaking, there are two possibilities. Firstly, Christians can take up residence in a country town and become involved in the life of a church of their choice. Secondly, they can stay where they are and help their adopted church in various ways. We will use the terms: "Resident Helpers" and "Non-Resident Helpers".

### **A. RESIDENT HELPERS**

(1) In general, the culture of a rural town is different to that of Sydney and suburbs. Some features are:

- appreciation of the history of the town and district
- recognition that most people know one another and interact in ways unknown in the city. Indeed, many are related to each other!
- there is a love of the land that city-dwellers often don't appreciate
- people are preoccupied with the weather. This is because those in town and out of town rely on rain for their livelihood
- usually there are several cultural groups in the town and its surrounds
- community-minded Christians are soon noticed
- sport is an integral part of community life
- many still have respect for/attachment to a church

All these features can provide openings for gospel ministry.

(2) There are more opportunities for self-funded individuals and couples than others, because of many churches' financial difficulties. However, in some cases, travel costs might be reimbursed, when a salary could not be raised.

(3) Those who would help rural churches need to be committed to the Bible as the

unique and sufficient Word of God and have a solid track record in previous church commitments.

(4) Opportunities and situations vary greatly, from larger churches in cities of up to 100,000 population, right down to house churches of 5-6 people (who have no Bible church with minister to go to in their town or area).

(5) Some of the ministries that are needed (they are in no special order) . . . . .

**a. Specific ministries:** (usually requiring some previous experience and/or special qualifications)

**SRE**

**Sunday School**

**Youth group**

**Preparation.** Many teaching activities use outlines, aids, and crafts, which need to be prepared. This can take pressure off the teachers, and make lessons interesting for the learners.

**Sharing the Faith** with various age and interest groups, using different venues and approaches

**Prayer** - running regular/irregular prayer meetings, promoting prayer, teaching about prayer, convening prayer conferences, providing regular prayer-points, reporting answers to prayer-partners, telephone prayer chain

**40s marrieds**

**Seniors' Ministry** including talks, outings, various activities, Seniors' Vacation Bible School

**Photography** to record church activities and items of interest. Reminders of good times

**Pastoral Visiting** (with prayer, Bible reading, handout literature) shut-ins, bereaved, sick, hospitalised, newcomers, nursing home residents, etc.

**Hospitality** ( incl. for small church functions, cttee. mtgs., accommodation for missionary or visiting speaker)

**Lay preaching**

**Leading services**

**Musical accompaniment**

**Men's ministry and outreach**, e.g. "Blokes and Their Sheds"

**Women's fellowship**

**Home Bible Study**

**Bookstall and/or Library**

**Leadership Training**

**Walking Club** for contacting new people

**Meal Supply** for new mums, families in crisis, etc.

**Servant-Leadership** wherever needed

**Church Administration****Cassette/CD ministry and/or library****Transport** for the elderly and disabled**Finance** Accounting and Book Keeping**Property, Buildings, Grounds and Equipment** maintenance/repairs**Relief ministry** to allow pastor and family to have holiday**"Timothy"** (offsider and mate) to **"Paul"** (the minister)**Ministry in branch churches and out-centres** if needed**Weekly news sheet****Crisis Ministry Coordinator**, with team able to act quickly in case of severe illness, accident, death, or other major emergency.**Community Service**, practical support for fire-fighters, SES, in time of crisis**b. General ministries:**

Men and women with a servant-heart

General encouragers

Ready and willing to help in whatever ways they can

Support and encouragement of the ministry family and other leaders in the church

**B. NON-RESIDENT HELPERS**

(1) Some of the above list have been repeated. Other items have been added. It goes without saying that helpers who live at a distance from the church they are helping can benefit greatly from personal contact from time to time. Even to spend a weekend in the town and attend services and meetings is mutually encouraging.

(2) It is a good idea to have a photo/photos of the church membership - if possible with names attached. This can be a help in praying for people. Try to obtain a list with names, addresses and phone nos. so you can contact at special times.

(3) PLEASE NOTE: A rural church can be "adopted" by an individual, family, group, or church. The last three can share tasks between them.

**a. Specific ministries:** (usually requiring some previous experience and/or special qualifications)

**Letters of personal encouragement** arising from your own Bible reading**Preparation.** Many teaching activities (esp. SRE and Sunday School) use outlines, aids, and crafts, which need to be prepared. This can take pressure off the teachers, and make lessons interesting for the learners.

**Sharing the Faith** with various age and interest groups, using different venues and approaches. This can be done as a 'one-off' weekend.

**Prayer** - one of the most valuable ministries. Be a prayer-partner for a church in the country. Disciplined, regular prayer for the adopted church and the progress of the gospel in the town and district.

Ask for regular prayer-points and answers. (Don't expect long letters/emails - a couple of lines or a phone call are more likely).

A carload or two might go from your home church to run a prayer-weekend in that church. It doesn't have to be intensive. You would have time to meet with the people and encourage them at a personal level as well as pray with them. Such ministry has been greatly appreciated where it has happened.

**Ideas** - when you come across ideas that might work in your adopted church, share them with the minister.

**Give** some financial support from time to time. Sponsor a ministry. Many towns have lost ministers because the remaining church members can no longer support them. You can support a particular faithful minister or church.

**Literature** - Send copies of handout literature that might be used in pastoral/hospital visiting shut-ins, bereaved, sick, hospitalised, newcomers, nursing home residents, etc.

**Cassettes/CDs** send occasionally to the minister

**Join a "Countryserve" team** once a year for maintenance/repairs to buildings used for rural ministry

**House-swap** with the minister and family so they can have a holiday, and you can spend time in your 'adopted' town

**Participate in special events** in the town such as a church mission, kids' holiday programme, evangelistic weekend, etc.

**Give Christmas toys** to ministers who are take the Word of God to people in outback areas long affected by drought. They will be given to children who have very little.

**Suggest** combined houseparty with your home church and your adopted church coming together.

**Encourage** your church to 'adopt' a church. A team might go out there for a long weekend or a week of school holidays and run some activities. You could doorknock the town, share the gospel in an outreach meeting, give your testimony, etc etc. Return visits are especially valuable.

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