

November 2006 Newsletter

from Neil and June Prott



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Supporting and encouraging gospel ministry, including listening, resourcing, strategizing, trouble-shooting, brain-storming, networking. Our work is: Bible-based, freelance (supported by friends), trans-denominational, strictly confidential.

Dear Friends,

May we suggest that you read this letter with a highlighter pen in hand. This can be useful to mark points for your prayer.

The crisis across our State has continued and deepened over recent months. On a trip to the west I witnessed firsthand the ordeal being experienced by our brothers and sisters in the bush. In some areas the drought has continued with little relief since 2001. The unrelenting demands of stock have meant that many farmers and their wives have been hand-feeding and carting water every day. Because I have done this I know how exhausting and demoralizing it can be. On this last trip one farmer said to me: "Neil, we are surrounded by death." A faithful pastor said: "We have reached a new phase now. The psychological impact is greater than we've ever seen before." "A farmer's wife from ---- said to me: 'Whenever my husband's running late for dinner, I check the gun cabinet'." Can you imagine the stress that lady is trying to cope with every day? When you pray, please don't forget to pray for the wives. A farmer said to me on an earlier trip: "We'd spent \$73,000 on feed for our stock. I was adamant that we had to get a bank loan and buy more. My wife said to me: 'Darling, I have sold everything I've got. This is the next thing to go'. She pointed to her engagement ring. That was my wakeup call."

Every part of the community has been affected. In some places crops have completely failed providing 3 or 4 days' grazing for the few sheep that are left. Sheep and cattle sales are breaking records in terms of their size, but the prices are so low that it doesn't pay some farmers to truck their stock to market. Apart from tiny patches around water troughs, etc, there is not a blade of green grass to be seen.

Many churches were struggling before the drought. The exodus to the big cities and to the coast has continued. The rural economy has fluctuated as wool and wheat prices have gone up and down. Although city-dwellers have continued to pay high prices for meat and milk, graziers and dairy farmers have often received but a small percentage of the retail price. At the same time, costs of farming equipment, chemicals, and labour have increased. Businesses in the towns are struggling because much of their income is derived from farming activities. A sizeable number have already closed down and the staff have moved out. The ageing population and the decline in church attendance have meant that maintenance of old church buildings and ministers' residences has been difficult. It has been hard to maintain a minister's salary during these tough times. However, it is in such times that pastors should be freed up to take the message of Christ's love to the wider community.

It has been inspiring to see how Christian people are praying and pulling together. While there is no end in sight, they are committed to serving the Lord and those around them. As I write this letter, forecasters predict that there will be no significant rain until next June! In a particular situation, the Bible records the marvellous answer to a prayer for rain. In case we think that OUR prayer might not be so effective, we are told: "*Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops*" (Jas 5;17-18).

Yours in the service of Jesus Christ, the Lord of everlasting life.

Neil and June

INTERVIEW WITH A RURAL PASTOR

On a recent trip I put some questions to Geoff and Vivienne Steventon. Geoff is the pastor of Peak Hill Uniting Church and both are doing an excellent job of leading God's people there. They were happy to

answer my questions spontaneously to give our supporters some idea of what is happening.

1. What is your passion in relation to your congregation ?

That all should know Jesus as Lord and live for Him. We want every member to find their ministry and do it.

2. Can you tell us some encouraging features of your church ?

We have a lot of mature Christians who believe the Bible and are very generous. Quite a few are missionary-minded and outward-looking. It's a very caring church with a keen interest in evangelism. We have five organists, and other musicians as well. The church is a very safe place where people are allowed to have a go at things and make mistakes. They are encouraged to share openly, and many are able to preach. It is a family church with all ages represented.

3. How important do you see the Bible teaching ministry to be ?

Vitally important. A matter of life and death, you might say.



4. What are some of the effects of the present drought on the families in your church ?

The size of our weekly prayer-meeting has doubled. Some families are distressed and suffer from low morale and tension between family members. But many see the drought as part of God's sovereign plan.

We see it as a warning from God that our nation needs to turn back to Him. This is a hard experience to go through, but we believe there is a purpose in it. "It was the drought in 1982 that made me realise I had to depend on God."

5. Do you see some areas of church and family life that need to be addressed ?

There is a need for genuine care of each other in the congregation in both good times and bad. Some don't realise the importance of meeting together with God's people every week.

We lose many of our young people to colleges and university and they don't come back. Those who stay are usually 'hands-on' people who aren't likely to become preachers, etc.

6. How do you see the future of Christian ministry and churches in rural areas ?

This is an extremely important issue. I think the lay members will be resourced by people who can provide materials for them. I believe there will be more cooperation and fellowship between Christians of different denominations. This will be a help to those involved as well as be a witness to unbelievers in the community

7. Do you think that denominational leaders understand the realities of country ministry?

No, not really. They haven't understood our situation. Rural populations have been shrinking for a variety of reasons. Money is in short supply. Their attempts to meet our needs have been generally unhelpful. In our area the denomination has 55 churches and 15 full- or part-time ministers, but only now do the leaders realise the need to resource lay people for ministry. They need to trust Christian people more.

8. Is there anything else to which you would like to draw attention ?

Materialism is a major problem in the Christian Church. We lose many young people to the city where there are highly paid jobs. For those who stay it can be a 2 1/2 hour journey each way to the nearest TAFE College. A farm worker who becomes a Christian is not going to improve his lot without studying in Sydney or somewhere else a long way from home. Many young people have to drive 70km each way to a youth meeting. If they are too young to have a licence, their parents have to drive them to TAFE, and to meetings.

9. Can you give me some prayer-points for use by our friends and supporters ?

- Give thanks for those who support us in prayer
- Ask the Lord to help us to persevere through the drought and economic hardship
- Pray that we will be witnesses to the community in this difficult time by the way we handle it

"IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO?"

- One of the most important things any of us can do is pray. Anyone can do that without great difficulty.

- Send letters or cards to relatives or friends in the country just letting them know you are thinking of them and appreciate the difficulties they are experiencing. Or make a phone call at 8pm.
- Offer to mind their house and their animals so they can go away for a short break (if you swap houses it won't cost anyone for accommodation). This is a most valuable help.
- With your card send a goodwill parcel of little luxuries that many can't afford (or aren't buying): nice soap, hair shampoo, personal deodorant, small Christmas treats (present, nuts, preserved fruits, mini puddings, shortbread, etc.), hankies.
- Jump in the car and spend a weekend in a country town encouraging the locals (we have some ideas if you're stuck).



IF YOU HAVE OTHER IDEAS, LET US KNOW SO WE CAN PASS THEM ON.

THE BENEFITS OF AFFLICTION

In our comfort-loving society, hardships and difficulties tend to have a purely negative connotation. On the other hand, there are Christians who give the impression that they love and long for adversity. The believer should be concerned to know what the Lord says about such an important issue. There is no shortage of biblical material. Case studies include Job, our Lord's earthly life, and St. Paul, just to name a few. Many teaching passages also deal with the subject of affliction. Of particular interest is Psalm 119:65-77. It contains two gems about adversity:

"Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word. You are good, and what you do is good; teach me your decrees." (vv.67-68)

"I know, O Lord, that your laws are righteous, and in faithfulness you have afflicted me." (v.75) The word "laws" in this verse might also be translated: "judgments", " or decisions".

The writer had been through great hardship, but as he looked back he saw that it had been a blessing to him. After the experience he affirmed what he had believed all along: God is good, and what He does is good. He had come to see that the affliction had arisen from the Lord's faithfulness.

Let us claim these great truths for the believers in the bush. Pray that when they cannot understand what God is doing, or why He is doing it, they will still trust Him implicitly as the One who is good, and does good. Ask the Lord to strengthen their faith, and enrich their lives and relationships throughout this time of testing.

To support us in our ministry

(-:) some details recently changed (-:)

you can use any one (or more) of the following easy methods

1. send **cheques** to Neil and June Prott, 18 Parr Pde, FAULCONBRIDGE, NSW 2776 but **payable to "MTS Ltd"**. (*This allows N & J to acknowledge gifts sooner than is possible otherwise*)
2. pay by **direct debit** from your bank account to:- **MTS Ltd** Commonwealth Bank Kingsford
account no. 10048657 BSB No. 62188
~~~ *Be sure to tell Sarah your payment is for the support of Neil Prott's ministry* ~~~
3. use your **credit card** (Master or Visa) and send these details **to Sarah** by letter or by fax

Card Type (Master or Visa?)..... Expiry date: \_\_ \_\_ / \_\_ \_\_ Amount: \$.....

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