

**A summary of a meeting with St John's Parish, Te Awamutu  
with Christchurch, Orakau  
at St John's Church Lounge, Te Awamutu  
on 21 March at 3.30 pm**

**WHERE IS GOD LEADING US?**

**Present** Orakau: Barry, Kathie, Bonnie, Barbara, Rev Murray

Andrew, Tony, Paul, Murray, Christine, Hilary, Jocelyn, Judith, Bev, Steve, Roz, Dave, June, Janice, Barbara, Coral, Merle, Mary, Rev Julie; Sue Burns.

**Prayer** Rev Julie Guest opened the meeting in prayer.

**Introduction :** At Synod 2019 Bishop Philip presented a vision that made mission and ministry in rural towns, and rural districts a priority. He and Sue are visiting the parishes to listen to what God is doing so that the diocese can resource and support. When we have listened we will pray and discern how best to go forward.

- 1. Everyone thought about things that have happened in the past and now, what God is doing and what's important to the people.**

**Orakau**

- After vicar led ministry we went into Local Shared Ministry, and continue in that model until now.
- We were guinea pigs in the diocese, it was successful but now we are coming apart without team members.
- We were country people, doing it together. The team did everything.

**St John's**

We are a committed community

- We outgrew old St John's and built new St John's in 1965. During the building we met in the old Town Hall. We raised the money ourselves from the congregation. People gave because the money went to something specific. As the people of God we were committed to our faith and to giving sacrificially to meet the need, it generated enthusiasm and a feeling of a common purpose.
- When the Queen Mother came to Hamilton she came to church here because we had the biggest church.
- There were services out at Te Kawa and Tokanui as well as the churches there are now.

We are family and children focussed

- There was a Young Wives' group, this was tied to our faith. It gave us companionship, it was a community for us and we brought our children to church. There was also a Plunket mothers' group as a social group but ours was based on our Christian faith. Orakau didn't have enough women so we came into the one here. Our common Christian belief grounded us. It built our church community, we shared meals together, the men were involved too.
- More recently Lorel and others started MOPS – Mothers of Pre-Schoolers but this has stopped.
- We have a youth group that continues, this is a priority and unusual for an Anglican church.
- Messy Church, but it stopped for Lockdown.

We are focussed on welcome and social justice

- Monday evening meals  
We provide a meal and fellowship for anyone who wants to come.  
Rough sleepers, single people, some working people come now because of hardship.  
Anyone can come, we are rostered to cook.  
We need hosts.
- Foodbank  
We contribute to Foodbank – the need is increasing.
- Op Shop – open three times a week with good stock and low prices.
- Health shuttle - parks bus here.

We use technology for study group

After the Christchurch tragedy Julie encouraged us to look at other faiths. About 20 people in the course, we look at differences and similarities.

It's been an eye opener. Julie said, if you explore others you become more secure in your own faith.  
We have started pilgrimages to walk the history and faith in the district

We are hosting groups brought to Te Awamutu wanting to know the history of the land and faith.  
This is growing.

**New people who have been in the church less than 6 years respond:**

- St Saviours : I came because I saw a photo of Bishop Philip sitting with children in front of the altar at St Saviours. 'that's where I'm going, it was from God.' After Vacion left I came into St John's  
We came because we live locally to the church.  
Pirongia has artistic people. The church is beautiful and attracts people. The Cross is made of timber from the church, its been prayed over, it means a lot.  
I've been in Otorohanga for 45 years, we moved to town and go to Pirongia, it's a country church with children.
- St John's : I came because Julie invited me. I
- Hairini (added afterwards) We went to Hairini because our daughter, who had decided at age 16 that church was no longer for her, went one Sunday morning not long after she and husband bought their farm. She phoned us to tell us she had been to a little country church; there were about 6 old ladies who had been really kind to her and delighted to have (a) wee baby in church.... When we started Hairini had a congregation of 6-8, now it is usually about 15.  
3 years ago, we suggested having supper following the Carol Service in mid-December and we have had about 90 at each of those, followed by 50-60 on Christmas Day. At Easter we usually have 30-40. So, there is a community around Hairini that values what the church offers.

**2. What has changed in Te Awamutu, or your part of the parish or Kihikihi?**

Economics, Employment and Population

Kihikihi

- People used to be employed in Waikeria or Tokanui but these closed.
- And the rest were connected with farming. This has changed.
- Subdivisions with people moving in for affordability and access as commuters.
- Fastest growing place in NZ. 25% growth.

Pirongia

- It's not a farming community anymore.
- It is now a dormitory suburb of Hamilton, it doesn't face Te Awamutu.
- There are lots of children.
- The Anglican church is the local church for everyone, Roman Catholic and Methodist closed.
- Began as a military settlement and has significant history.

Te Awamutu

- It is growing, with sub divisions and people moving in from cities, Hamilton and further.
- People looking for a rural feeling, lifestyle.
- There is now traffic congestion.
- It used to be a cow town, rural servicing township, now it's changed.
- It is a farming hub but this is lessening, growth is not in farming sector.
- Commuters for Hamilton, particularly hospital.
- Newly retired aged people.
- More groups and clubs than you can go to. Many older service clubs, sports clubs struggling for volunteers.
- Schools attract families : more than one primary school, good choices.
- Good shops.

Hairini

*St Paul's is one of the oldest churches in the Diocese, built by Māori for Māori and Pakeha.  
The church has been embedded in the rural district. It is the site of the Rangiaowhia tragedy*

- Most of the new people who come to Hairini are life-long Anglicans who have bought a life-style block... having a faith community active in the country like that has got to have a positive influence in the area.
- The church is growing, some people come out of town, it is a friendly community.

### 3. What has changed in our context?

#### Economics

- Student debt is carried forward plus high house prices means young adults have to work.
- Food bank is serving working people who cannot make ends meet.
- 1980's onwards – Rogernomics, user pays, rural changes in farm size, pay out etc all flow into our situation.

#### Patterns of family life

- Women work and do not have time to do things we enjoyed, join groups, bring children to church.
- Weekends are precious family time and have to do everything that used to be spread across the week, parents are stretched.
- Parents are time poor and children do more activities than they used to.

#### Travel and Choice

- People travel to the place / church / group they like, not simply attend the local.
- There are so many options people have to make choices, do this by what suits me.
- Lost a culture of serving, volunteering.

#### Changing patterns of commitment

- Some people commit but this is tied to what works for them – volunteer in sport as long as their child is in it.
- Change sports' codes as interest changes.

### 4. Which Christian Communities are there in Te Awamutu?

Roman Catholic, Methodists, Presbyterian, Brethren, Bible Chapel; AOG; Zion; Recharge

### 5. What are you like now?

A snapshot Sunday morning (21 March 2021)

Old St John's	6
New St John's	20
St Paul's	12
St Saviour's	22 ( including 7 children)
Orakau	17 meeting twice monthly

#### Tikanga Māori, partnership

- A comment was made that everyone at the meeting was white, suggesting that the division of the Anglican Church into three strands had made it weaker because the strands did not weave together.
  - The group described where there is partnership in the parish and services.
- St Paul's Hairini share the building with Tikanga Māori.
  - Once a month Fr Cruz Karauti Fox holds a service with his people in Te Reo Māori. It is advertised and open to anyone.
- New signage – St John's and St Paul's shows who we are and our history, in Te Reo Māori and English.
- Julie is in regular connection with Māori leaders, working with them and responding to them to open our relationships and begin to address the history.

#### Resources

- ⇒ People, people, people
- ⇒ Our buildings, people want to look at them,  
People are interested when they are open, ie part of heritage walks  
Our buildings are beautiful, people come in and wonder at them.  
Orakau : people say they have driven past for years and are so pleased to be able to come in.  
Pirongia : the Dr has a satellite consulting room in church room, people who have never been before come in and look at the church.
- ⇒ Our history  
We are working hard to tell our faith story as well as the heritage story.
- ⇒ Mainly Music
- ⇒ Technology: sound system and screen mean we can offer excellence in a funeral or other function.
- ⇒ Youth Ministry.
- ⇒ Orakau: our Hall has always been used by the community. It still is.

## 6. Are there local issues or history that needs attention?

This location is central to mission stories and land wars: we have taken initiatives with pilgrimages.

## 7. Challenges?

- Four churches and one vicar, ordained people are thin on the ground.
- How do we enable vicar to have time after the service with the community?
- How or where do we provide points of contact and fellowship that used to happen through Young Wives?
- Addressing the history in this area.
- Some people will never use technology, how do we continue to connect with fewer people and resources?
- People changed from landlines to mobiles and don't let us know; we can't contact them.

## 8. How have we responded to change? Sue noticed most people carry a mobile phone, we can do it 😊.

- \* We don't like change!
- \* We adapt.
- \* Examples: Lockdown – Pastoral care – phone lists.
  - Worship on-line – well produced services.
  - Diocesan Webinars – versatile approaches to viewing options 😊 including exercycling!
- \* Farming sector is adapting all the time, changes in seasons, pay out, government policies.
- \* At St Saviour's we wanted to take out the pews – talked with all the people who had donated the pews; explained why we wanted to take them out, offered the pews back to them; reviewed funding; took action, all but one family OK with it.  
*Sue's Summary: Communication is important when going through changes, explanation, bringing people together in decision and action. Then even if not a person's preference more likely they will stay because they have been heard.*

## 9. In light of what's important to us and the challenges - what ideas do we have for the future.

Orakau : continuing 2 services a month, with good attendance

Stay connected with Presbyterians, currently 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday and maybe more connection.

Parish of St John's

- \* It is a stretch for one priest to be able to participate fully on a Sunday in 4 services in 3 different places. We need to seriously address this issue over the next 12 months.
- \* Find more ministers.
- \* Continue to use technology.
- \* Continue to develop connections with communities, outward facing.
- \* Continue developing the pilgrimage that tells the faith story and faces the challenges of our history with Bishop David's support and local iwi.
- \* Continue our priority of focus on children and young people.
- \* Connect with Tikanga Māori at a pace set together.
- \* How are we prepared to work together?

## 10. How could the Diocese support you?

- We like being part of the Diocese, it is the Anglican way, we are not separate units but part of the wider Diocese.
- Now we are isolated, we miss Diocesan events where we met face to face.
- We would like to see of more Bishop Philip and the Archdeacon.

*Sue thanked the people for coming, and said that the Bishop will review the reports.*

*There will be further area gatherings with the Bishop in the mid to late part of the year.*

*All interested people will know what is happening and have the chance to be part of further discernment.*

The meeting closed with prayer 5.30 pm.