



Growing Together: International Rural Churches Association Conference

15-21 April 2108 in Lincoln, New Zealand

IRCA is an informal network of people engaged or interested in rural life and ministry.

- Founded in August 1998 at an inaugural conference on rural life held in Durham, UK.
- Holds a major conference every 4 years, in a different part of the world. Previous conferences were in Chennai (South India), Brandon (Canada), Altenkirchen (Germany) and Lilongwe (Malawi).
- Currently working on development of regional networks – IRCA-Europe was established in 2010 and has held two conferences in Sibiu, Romania (2012 and 2016).
- Resources and information are shared on the website <https://irca.online/> and Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/IRCA.News/>

Notes on Conference 2018



‘We came together to encourage each other and learn from one another, in our work of serving God and our communities so that they can flourish. Sharing deeply, in a great variety of accents and perspectives, inputs reflected both our diversity and our commonality as rural people. Our common goal is for our churches and communities to live the vision God dreams for the world.’

(IRCA Conference Statement)

- The conference showed that rural churches around the world are in good heart and have great confidence for the future, despite some obvious challenges that are facing all rural areas.
- Input included keynote speakers from NZ on ‘Dreaming God’s vision’ and patterns for rural ministry, and ‘Learning Community’ material from Jerry Marshall.
- Morning and Evening Prayers were led by people from different continents – Romanian Orthodox Evening Prayer was new to many.
- Visits were arranged to local parishes and projects (farms, community gardens, environmental projects) and to Christchurch., including afternoon tea and a welcome by Bishop Victoria to the transitional cathedral.
- Evening entertainments came from different regions and cultures – the UK offering was a short panto on Cinderella, a Scottish song and an explanation of Cornish culture!
- The informal conversations at a conference are always interesting and valuable, with stories and reflections for future consideration.





The UK 'Learning Community.'

The UK group spent three sessions together as part of the 'Learning Community' experience. We talked about our own rural churches and identified key issues to reach the vision that we had for 2022 – thinking about what is, what could be and what will be.

At the next IRCA conference, we expect to share stories of:

- A church that is partnering with God and embraces partnership with others, knocking down walls and barriers.
- A church bridging the gap between urban and rural by facilitating mutual respect and activity.
- A church that is excited about future possibilities, has learned to tell its story well and invites others to join in.
- A church that is open and engaging, supported rather than suppressed by its structures.
- A church that is experimental and prophetic – prioritising the small, local and contextual and leading the way instead of reacting defensively.

Common threads and issues

- The difficulty of making a living from farming wherever you are in the world.
- Water – too much (flooding), too little (drought), wrong time (impact on crops), who has access, pollution & clearing of waterways, rising sea levels, movement from coastal villages.
- Impact of demographic change and movement of people – depopulation & ageing of rural areas, migration and integration.
- Finding genuine shared, collaborative ministry / leadership models that work and re-thinking the role of the clergy.
- Some frustrations about the 'hierarchy' and decision-making structures that too often don't understand the rhythms and flows of rural life and hinder rather than enable flourishing.
- New ways of being church – being imaginative and creative, making use of skills and gifts within the local context rather than bemoaning what you don't have, not sticking to the normal ways if they don't fit or work.
- The importance of working together – ecumenically and with other partners.

