

Mallee Patrol News

September - December 2009

A DIFFERENT SEASON

I steer away from using terms like GW (Global Warming and CC (Climate Change). Those who find it hard to predict next week's weather but can with precision tell us what the weather will be like in 10 – 50 years (and politicians who are too willing to tax



Beautiful post office building of Warracknabeal

us to death because of it), may use these terms.

All I know is that going out on patrol in two different weeks November was like going to two different parts on the planet.



Big bales of hay destined for the dairy industry

The first time I attempted a patrol saw temperatures rise to the mid 40's. With the harvesting of serial crops in full swing, dust was flying everywhere. Strong winds carried the wheat chaff all over the place, and before long I had to resort to anti-allergic eye drops.

The big dry/heat did damage to the crops. Some could not mature and the kernels just shriveled up, leaving it without weight. Some farmers could rescue something by cutting hay for sale to the dairy farmers.

So, after just a few days I gave up and went home, but not after seeing friends I could track down after I lost contact with them in Naracoorte. They are still holding on to the good faith!

The next leg of the November patrol saw me stuck in the trailer for a whole day because of pouring rain!

The main reason for this patrol was to hand out Christmas parcels prepared by the Ladies Guilds of the Riverina Presbytery. I took delivery of about 120 boxes of presents at morning tea in the hall of Finley Presbyterian Church.



A car stacked with presents in Finley. The faces of those who donated it are bright!

Handing out these present was not hard, but some people just could not believe that others remembered them, not even knowing them!

At one station the lady protested and said that there are others who deserve to receive presents more than them. It was only when I explained to her that presents are really given when one has not done a thing to receive it, that she accepted it.

It surely makes patrol work a lot easier to arrive at a door with a present. This is the story of the Gospel

of grace: God saves not because we have earned anything, but just because He looks at us through the righteousness of his Son Jesus Christ.



Rearranging the boxes in groups in Kerang

I caught up with the husband of a lady I had met on a previous patrol (the one I told you about last who lost five of her close relatives in one year). The mere fact that the last contact had been so positive – add the fact that I had a Christmas present to give away – opened up possibilities. “Make sure to call again. There are things I would love to talk about.”

I told you the weather was funny. While caught in my trailer that day, it came on the news that Woomelang, a small town in the Mallee, had been hit by a mini-tornado. As soon as the weather allowed, I took off and befriended myself to the person who runs the local grocery shop. She informed me of people who were hit by roofs been blown off and other damage to property. I left about 12 boxes at the shop for her to hand out to those in need.



One of the houses without a roof in Woomelang

We could not put the roofs back, but at least we could help them to do it themselves with a smile on their faces.

HOW FAR IS IT?

Australia is a wide country. Distances are something one has to get used to.

To make things worse, forget about asking the farmers how far such and such is. Distance for them is something measured in *time*, not *units*. From here to there is therefore about an hour or about thirty minutes.



A promising crop

Heila and I worked our own way to determine distance: we measure it in *flies*.

Australia is blessed with flies – trillions of them. They are sneaky little things, taking a hitch in every way possible: in your ears, up your nose, behind your glasses. They love a hitch on your back, and when you get into your vehicle they get in too.

Two places might therefore be twelve or fifteen flies away from each other – that’s the time one needs to get them out the window before the next stop!

THE GREAT OCEAN ROAD AND NOORAT SHOW

We had the privilege to have Heila’s mom, Anna Groenewald, stay with us for the last six months. We wanted to show her something of the beautiful coastline of Victoria and arranged for a few days off on our way to Noorat. We went along the Great Ocean Road. Is it truly one of the best roads in Australia!

The Noorat Presbyterian Church runs a stall at their annual show. Last year they invited me to promote

the work of PIM, something they repeated this year.



What's left of the Twelve Apostles

We were able to hand out lots of show bags with tracts, information about the work of PIM and the local congregation. We were also able to talk to people and assure them that the PIM and the Presbyterian Church are “still well and alive”.



Seaweed on a beach along the Great Ocean Road

Like last year, ladies of the congregation gave me some pamper packs to hand out to ladies on farms in the Mallee. I store these in my study, and together with what's in the other boxes, I regularly break out in a sneezing frenzy (just a bit of hay fever!)

TO MELBOURNE AND BACK INTO THE MALLEE

Anna's flight back to South Africa was booked for the 9th December. We left the trailer halfway to Melbourne, fare-welled her in Melbourne and continued with a patrol, once again delivering Christmas parcels.

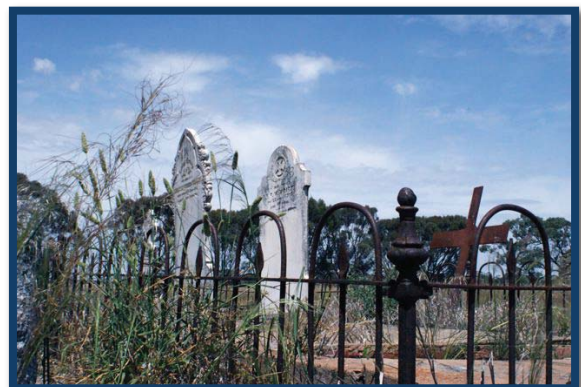
We called on a house, which from a distance looked deserted. The car parked outside made us stop. A man came out after the dogs started barking and I

introduced myself. He was apprehensive about our visit and hardly took my hand greeting him. He was lonely. We were the first people visiting him in nine weeks! We presented a gift box and the conversation started to flow. This man has a Christian background with a father who was a lay-preacher and a mother who still attends a Presbyterian Church. I encouraged him to follow the example set by his parents in serving the Lord. We left with a promise to return. Later that afternoon we received a text message from him thanking us for the visit. Pray for our future visits.

Another fellow answered the door and immediately called my name. He remembered my previous visit and still had the reading material I had given him. He wouldn't let us go before we also had a tour through his shed. This Christian man needs encouragement. Please pray for him.

The old fellow on another station said he had never been given something for nothing and wanted to know what the catch behind the gift was. We laughed and assured him and his wife that we just wanted to be good friends, also being concerned about their spiritual welfare.

A friendly lady was expecting us and made us welcome. We learned about some intrigues in their family life and she then said that the email she had send some weeks ago was actually meant to see if I could call and be of pastoral help. I apologized for being insensitive to not read between the lines.



A lonely grave somewhere in the Mallee

IN CLOSING

Now that I have been privileged to visit some of the folk a second time, I am beginning to think that, although the Mallee does not constitute a typical PIM patrol, there might just be room for this ministry.

It might just be that some folk, although closer to towns that people living in other patrol areas, fall through the cracks and never get a visit from the clergy in the towns. Also, keep in mind that

ministers of Word and Sacrament of any denomination are very few and far between in this part of the world. In many cases congregations share a ministry with another denomination, and still have worship services only twice a month – and more often than not during the mid afternoon! I have yet to meet someone who has come to the Lord at that hour of a Sunday afternoon in a bush church. But, nothing is impossible!



A little bush church – now hardly used



Candlestick plant

PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for the farmers, some of who face another devastating result on the land.
- Thank God for the good will of many ladies who prepared the gifts for the folk on the land.
- Pray for those who are lonely.
- Thank God for the opportunity to make friends, and pray that these will lead to fruitful ministry of eternal value.
- Pray that God will resolve tension between relatives.
- Pray that God will open the eyes of the lost to the free gift of the Gospel.
- Pray that God will provide ministers for this part of the world. Our presbytery is down to only one full-time minister, and myself (50%), covering an area of more than 500 kilometers.
- Thank God for a fairly good year of patrolling in the Mallee.