

Mallee Patrol News

June – to August 2009

A CHANGE OF SEASON

One sometimes, as you travel the distances, fight the flies and other insects, shiver through cold nights away from warm beds, and (more often than not) does not see the result of one's efforts. One wonders if ministry to those out in the bush is really worth the while.

Let's face it: anyone involved in the cold "canvassing" of the Gospel will understand the disappointments of well-meant efforts. Especially if you know you have the best News, the Truth that stood the test of time, the best advice anyone can have to share with people – and many seem to doubt the Message, or prefer to believe the popular belief of the media or public opinion – or just plainly couldn't care less!



Autumn vineyards



Sunset colours on a gum tree

In the back of your mind there is this constant awareness of how much it costs to continue in a ministry like PIM's. Is it not better to give it up, go home and concentrate on the strengths you already have? (Or could home just be another way to shelter in the comfort zone of the known? It is after all fairly expedient to over and over again explain the Gospel to those who already believe!)

Then, just after lunch you show up at the front gate of a stranger again. There is a sense of anxiety within you. "How will I be accepted?" "What about them letting the dogs loose on me?" "Is this going to be the same story?" "They did not even know that I was coming, and they may be busy; I am just in the way!"



Promise in a cloud

The lady appeared from the front door and walked up to the yard gate. I gave her time to read the sign on the vehicle while I grab my hat, calling card and the PIM pamphlet.

"And what can I do you for?" She sounds friendly. I am encouraged.

"Good afternoon. No, the point is what I can do for you!"

"What do you mean?" I'm in trouble, so I thought, and decided to get right to the point and be as honest as possible. Looking her straight into the eye after I introduced myself, I said:



Lake Cullularaine

"I am concerned about your spiritual well-being, knowing that people out in the sticks sometimes have to do without the services of an established church." I said it!

"I think you should come in. There are things I need to say and you need to hear."

Over the next more than two hours we shared many things and I was a shoulder onto



The last remains

which she could offload many burdens of her heart. There was the loss of nothing less than six relations in a fairly short period of time. And there was the hurt about someone who caused many sleepless nights. On top of that, the nagging question about the drought and just one decent size crop which might bring some security of living out there. Her husband was just then pushing hard to get the crop in while there was the promising signs of some rain in the air. How much longer will he be able to take the strain of maybe losing the property which has been in the family for generations?



Bright morning over the Murray River

I listened, try to give advice, listened more and in the end we both bowed in prayer. And to the throne of God we could take the

concerns of those doing it tough.

The distance between the sun and the horizon was getting narrow as I left, knowing that God appointed the time and purpose of me being there. And that made up for all the disappointments along the road.

I picked a place to stop the trailer and set up camp. The wind cut right through me. Starting a campfire and cooking over the flames was not an option. I resorted to gas-cooking, and later put on thermal undies and thick socks before I disappeared under the doona.

I am content to be a PIM padre.



Hope and misfortune

ANOTHER STORY

I arrived at the homestead just as John (not his real name) was about to get into his ute. Leaning on the door and waiting for me this man epitomised the outback cocky.



Road sign outdated!

He must have read the sign on the door of my car, and said, fairly loudly, "You're welcome if you don't talk to me about that rubbish."

I know I was in for trouble and sent a prayer for help to heaven.

He was friendly but very definitive about religion – he's got his own: on Sundays he would go to his friend and drink the day

away!

I asked him about the sign just down the road. "No, that's outdated! Four people moved out and three dogs died." It's getting pretty lonely out there, methinks!

John held to his guns: no religion on his property. My eyes caught something in his shed and enquired about it. The conversation shifted to the shed where we spend the next 45 minutes. We talked about his veggie garden, his toolshed, the drought, and of course politics. I was just trying to gain his friendship. But when I tried to wrap it up and return to the real business,



Desert daisies

he dug his heel deeper. "No religion, Mate! When I die they will stuck me away six feet and I will be pushing up daisies. That's the end of it."



I thought it was time to dig in my heels too. "John, my friend, you know it is not true. And I want to talk to about it. I am worried about you."

"No need to, Mate. She'll be okay."

Deep inside of me I cried. This is the response of so many men in the bush. I left some reading with him and returned to a congregation who promised to pray for John and others like him. We need to trust God to do his work of salvation in

his own time.

WHAT DO YOU DO?

Not many people know instantly what a patrol padre is. It usually takes a bit of explaining. I usually take a \$20 bill and explain the story of John Flynn from the pictures on it. There is Dr Flynn himself, the camels of the first patrol padres, the flying doctors' airplanes and the pedal radios. The children love to hear the story, and may others admit that they have never noticed what was on the bill.



Blue tongue lizards are common this time of the year

When I entered the showers the other day in Murrayville, an old



Room with a view

chap asked me what I am doing. He had noticed my vehicle with the sign "Presbyterial Inland Mission" on it. It also states "Pastor Rudi Schwartz". It was obvious to me that he had no idea what the Inland Mission was; neither did he understand the word "Presbyterian". He was definitely not sure what a pastor is either. I know, because he asked me if it was my job to track and pinpoint the nests of mallee fowl! I assured him *that* was not *my* job, and wondered if I should continue to explain to him what my real job is.

SPRING HAS SPRUNG

Travelling through the outback during spring is usually a pleasant experience.

Visiting areas south west of Kerang (around Charlton, Wedderburn, Wycheproof)

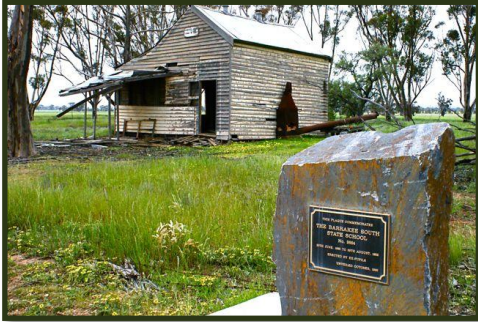
where there was abundand (or at least above average) rain, I was struck by the beauty of

the wildflowers. Gazanias and dandylions covered the fields. It was indeed a sight to see som of the little streams with water in it, while some farm dams are full. The cerial crops in the area look very promising after many years of failures.

At one property I found the lady mowing the lawn. She stopped the mower as I got out of the car and greeted me friendly. We made conversation and she told me about the dry years and the constant concern for her husband. "He is a very positive fellow, but there were times that he just got so quiet. Now, after the rain, everything looks so good. We are very grateful."



Gazanias in the wild



School's out!

I explained to her the purpose of my visit and found out that they attend a local church. That brought some warmth to our discussion.

Although those areas would not be classified as a typical PIM patrol area, this lady was convinced that she had never seen a clergyman going out to see people on properties. She was convinced that there is room for what the PIM has on offer.

Before I gave her the usual reading material, I handed her a pamper package prepared by ladies of congregations in the cities and other places. She was taken away, and unashamedly she started crying. The thought of other people in other places thinking of them in the bush was overwhelming.

A SURPRISING FIND

It is not only churches in the country areas of the county which suffers from depopulation, I found numerous deserted school sites. What is left of a once vibrant local community, is the odd monument of where the school once stood. In many cases nothing else but the monument is left. I have also come across the ruins of many little bush churches, now nothing more than a vague memory. Like the stone church right across the school where the founder of the Australian Inland Mission, Rev Dr. John Flynn attended. It was indeed a surprise to hear that the



Is this the house John Flynn was born in?

John Flynn Memorial to mark the birth place was not far away. I made it to Moliagul and could not help myself to take a picture of the monument. The plaque on the monument said he was born on the opposite of the monument. I found the ruins of a little house, but could not verify that fact of John Flynn was actually born there. I took a picture nonetheless. I feel very honoured to have walked where this great Australian walked.



The John Flynn Memorial at Moliagul

LONELY AND DESTITUTE

I found the old fellow home only after I have knocked a few times and waited a long time. He shuffled to the back door with his trusty dog, now deaf, on his heels. When was the last he had visitors? Is he cared for? Is it the right thing to do to let the elderly live away from it all on a farm, all by himself? I was concerned, but he assured me that he was fine. Half of what I told him, he could not hear, and half of what he told me I could not follow. What can be done for people like him?

CONCLUSION

I was content when I returned home. The contact I made with many people was good. The people were friendly – apart from the fellow who told me he does not want to see me again – and I think follow-up can only be positive.



This was once a castle...



The harvest is plentiful

The outlook for the season is so much better after the good rain. If only the next season can be as good, or even better, than this one. And – if all the areas in the Mallee looked as good as the one I just visited; but unfortunately, this is not the case.

SOMETHING PERSONAL

Saturday 24 October was a memorable day for our family: *Heidi*, our youngest, got married to *Phil Drager* in Ipswich. It was a beautiful occasion and both families, who worship the Lord, and other relatives enjoyed God's grace in answering our prayers for Christian spouses for our children.

Heidi and Phil will settle in Townsville where both of them work. Keep them in your prayers so that they will be a blessing to those around them.

PRAYER POINTS

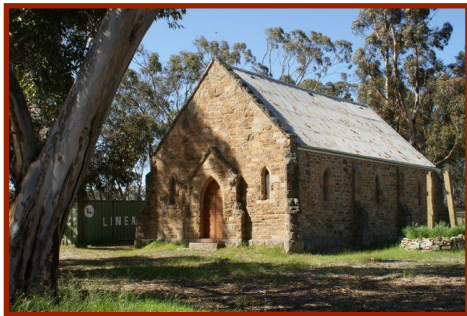
- Thank the Lord for the good rain in certain parts of the Mallee
- Praise the Lord for positive contacts made with people of the land
- Pray that the cereal markets will reward the farmers with good prices after the devastation of the drought
- Pray for "John" – his heart is hard and he tries to resist the grace of God
- Thank the Lord for safe travelling
- Pray for labourers in the harvest of the Lord, and for the means to finish the work till the Lord comes.



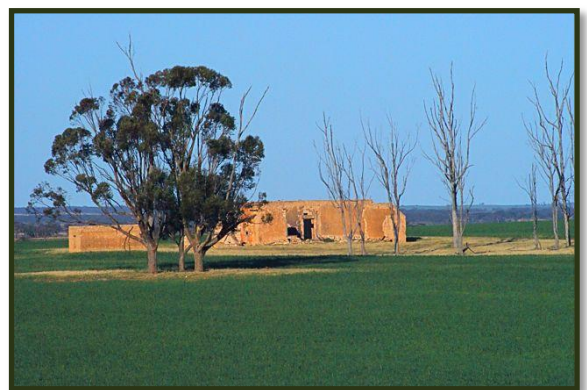
A lily of the field in God's care



Philip and Heidi Drager



Church at Moliagul



Life and death



My trusty Santa Fe chewing up the tracks