

Growing Together: International Rural Churches Association Conference 15-21 April 2018

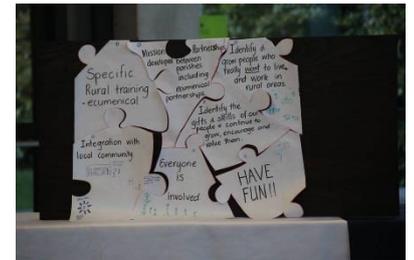


‘A great experience – this was my 5th IRCA Conference and it was, by far, the one that gave me most to bring home.’ Roger Greene



Rural churches around the world are in good heart and have great confidence for the future. That was the message from the International Rural Churches Association (IRCA) Conference held in Lincoln New Zealand in April 2018. For six glorious autumn days, some hundred people from around the world, including a group from the UK, met to share stories and experiences and reflect on what it means to be the presence of God in our rural communities.

‘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 time together included worship led by people from different continents, cultures and denominations (Romanian Orthodox Evening Prayer was new to most of us), input from Jerry Marshall (then CEO of Germinate: Arthur Rank Centre) and local keynote speakers on rural vision and ministry. Interesting visits were arranged to Christchurch and local rural projects. A particular highlight was a generous afternoon tea and warm welcome to the transitional ‘Cardboard Cathedral’ from the Bishop and members of her congregation. The city and its surrounds are still recovering from the earthquakes in 2010-11, but the role of the churches then and in their on-going provision for the needs of their communities is inspirational.

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 (when the next IRCA Conference will be held) – thinking about what is, what could be and what will be. When we next meet, 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.



And we had a lot of fun too as friendships were renewed and formed, warm Kiwi hospitality enjoyed, and an insight into Cornish culture provided as part of the worldwide village evening. If you missed this conference, be sure to book for 2022. Sign up to the eNews at irca.online to be kept in touch with resources and events.

‘We shared ideas, experiences, and inspiration that we pray will be transformational for us, our areas and our nations. We were inspired by the strong convictions expressed that God is active in our rural church communities and is leading us into new pathways.’ (IRCA Conference Statement)

The full conference statement can be found at irca.online/blog/conference-statement. Conference materials are at irca.online/conferences/2018-conference.

