

ELEVEN. THAT'S ALL WE NEED



Eleven people for our parishes without clergy¹.

Ministry in the Bathurst Diocese is different. Our shepherds smell like their sheep because of the time they spend with them.² They quietly build connections that last. They understand that everyone has a story worth listening to. They value the individual, not just their role or contribution. They embrace flexibility, as life in a small town can be unpredictable. They nurture a sense of belonging, where everyone feels valued. They gently guide, rather than direct from a distance. They invest in the lives of others and watch them flourish. They journey alongside, through life's joys and challenges. And they keep it real; being authentic in all interactions.

"That's not so different," you may think. "City churches and ministers aspire to those priorities and values too." True! And yet out here in the west, these are essential. And there is more time and opportunity to make them a focus.

Many people who have only lived in the city have limited exposure to life out west. They can envisage the challenges but haven't experienced them. And there are many! Our congregations are aging with some wedded to tradition and unwilling to change. There are few families or young people in our churches. There is isolation from family and friends. And finances are challenging³. And yet believers have been making similar sacrifices to work remotely for the sake of the gospel for centuries. Just as we still need to be sending people to Africa, Asia and Europe, so do we need people for Condobolin, Coonabarabran and Coonamble.

The costs are real, but so are the needs and opportunities. Believers here are hungry for the word of God and clear teaching. Many have an increasing Jesus-like compassion for the harassed and helpless. They want to share Jesus so that others will find the joy and life and hope and forgiveness they have found. The schools here are full and flourishing and there have been opportunities to link parish roles with chaplaincy and SRE. God is good and has graciously provided financial support for some of our ministers through BCA⁴, family, friends and past churches⁵.

And there are many delights when ministering in a small country town. Rural life and ministry occur at a vastly different pace to the city. Hardly any ministry happens at night. And the Bathurst Diocese policy and expectation (as of 2023), is that ministry happens five days a week (of course understanding that at times, flexibility is needed). There is a close connection with neighbouring clergy, even though they may be an hour or more away! There is help available – from me or a senior colleague - whenever there's a need. There are fortnightly zoom training sessions for our new ministers and monthly zoom meetings for all clergy for fellowship, prayer, and support. There is a powerful sense of gospel partnership and collegiality in the Bathurst Diocese, which is proving to be such a blessing to all.



We are seeing the Lord marvellously at work here. In the last three years, some congregations have doubled in size or more. Children's work, youth work, kids' clubs, and playgroups have been established or reestablished in some churches. People have become Christians. The number of Bible study groups is growing. Giving is increasing. Most of our parishes are planning strategically for the future. Safe ministry policies are up to date and have been embraced. Clergy are trained, supported, and encouraged. Licensed laypeople are also being trained and set free to minister in new ways. There is greater engagement with diocesan events such as our annual conference and camp. There is an increasing excitement and passion for our diocesan catchphrase, Sharing Jesus for Life.

"That all sounds great," you may ask, "but what does this have to do with me?"

Firstly, would you please pray that the Lord would continue to raise up gospel workers for his harvest field here in the west?

If you're on a staff team at a big city church, might you consider a move to the country? Or do you belong to a city church that has the vision and heart to serve the west by sending one of your (willing!) clergy out here along with some funds to help support them?

Or would you consider coming out as a children's and youth worker (with funds to support you). You could come as a women's pastor to teach and disciple women, or men's pastor to teach and disciple men. You could move out as a layperson and join a church to volunteer as a Bible study leader or licensed lay minister.

Has your church thought about partnering with one of ours? You could pray, give, send a mission team, or send one of your ministers for a couple of weekends a year to bless a congregation that rarely has a minister visit. Or if you are a retired clergy person, you could consider serving for a month or two at a time as a locum.

Or has the Lord blessed you financially? You could consider purchasing a property in one of our towns which has no rectory, so that a significant financial burden in appointing a minister is diminished; or simply donate a portion of a stipend to assist a parish.

I would love to have a conversation with anyone who would consider joining us. If you would like a taste of rural ministry, we can set you up in the holidays to be involved in one of our churches. The challenges are real; the opportunities greater! Please email me to arrange a time to come to visit you in person, or even just to begin with a phone or video call!

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Bathurst Diocese
SHARING JESUS FOR LIFE

¹ Bourke-Brewarrina, Condobolin, Coolah-Dunedoo, Coonabarabran, Coonamble, Cumnock, Gilgandra, Nyngan, Trundle, Warren, West Wyalong

² Thanks Luke Merriman, our new minister in Narromine.

³ We could not continue as a diocese without the generous support from Sydney Diocese, supporting the bishop and business manager. We are very thankful. The initial 6-year gift has been extended to 2030.

⁴ We are so grateful to the Bush Church Aid Society for partnership in West Wyalong, Cowra, Cobar, the Cathedral, and next year in Kelso.

⁵ Three of our clergy are supported by the generous support of individuals and churches outside the diocese. Thank you!

