



St Ronan's Presbyterian Church
Eastbourne

Record

December 2021

5 December	Graeme Munro.....	9.30am
12 December	Pageant/Reg Weeks.....	9.30am
19 December	Graeme Munro.....	9.30am
25 December	Anne Manchester.....	9.30am
26 December	No Sunday service.....	9.30am
2 January	Graeme Munro.....	9.30am
9 January	Reg Weeks.....	9.30am
16 January	TBA.....	9.30am
23 January	Lionel Nunns.....	9.30am
30 January	Doug Rogers.....	9.30am

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Power Hour – Sundays 9.30am

Breakfast Prayer – Tuesdays 7.45am

Mainly Music – Thursdays 9.15-11.15am

For pastoral care needs, please contact our Pastoral Care Co-ordinators,
Colin Dalziel 562 7238 or Mary Williams 568 3216

Advent...

Today as I write is the first Sunday in Advent, and I came across a little piece by Brian Zahnd, a Christian writer in whose work I often find pearls. This is what he had to say:

"Ours is a secular age. The sacred is pushed to the periphery. To keep the sacred at the centre of our lives is a heroic act of defiance. Spirituality is not enough. Amorphous spirituality too easily becomes little more than a mood with a sprinkling of "wellness" techniques. We need something more rigorous, something more deeply rooted, something that draws upon the deep wells of ancient wisdom and practice."



This is what we find in the Great Tradition of the Christian faith. Within the Great Tradition we have a sacred calendar — a way of marking time through the course of the year by telling the story of Jesus Christ. We have a secular calendar to coordinate our lives within a secular age, and we have a sacred calendar to form our lives through the gospel story.

Of course, Christmas is now firmly entrenched in the secular calendar as well, but the ways the sacred calendar and the secular calendar approach Christmas are quite different. The demand of the secular "Christmas Season" is to be in a great hurry, while the aim of Advent is to instill a quiet slowness into our souls. Advent is four weeks of longing for the coming of the Messiah. Advent is about waiting—a practice most of us in our secular age struggle with. Yet patience is a holy virtue we need to cultivate.

So, on the first Sunday in Advent we embrace the slowness and we lean into the waiting. And this is good for our souls. May you have a blessed Advent!

What shall we do on Sunday? At a recent Church Chat the parish council shared its reflection on the growing pressure to fill the various roles our normal Sunday services require, with the current small size of the congregation. One solution was to have our normal Sunday services on only two Sundays of the month, thus cutting in half the number and frequency, of the need to fill those roles such as musician, bible reader, prayers, door duty, sound, data projection and one or two others, and finding folk to fill the roster of preachers would also be less burdensome.

But the council was also aware many would be concerned if there was nothing at the church on the alternate Sundays – folk not being quite sure whether church was happening this Sunday or not. So a hybrid model was suggested: Two Sundays using our regular pattern of worship with all the usual roles and a preacher, and on the alternate Sundays a less formal gathering with more participation and sharing, depending on the chosen format.

Both Reg and Diane have had experience with various formats for this type of service while in Wanaka, and although those were usually evening services, this was due to the smaller numbers attending in the evening rather than anything particularly related to the time of day. These services were given various titles somewhat descriptive of the formats.

There was:

- “What’s the Word” which was shaped around a chosen passage from the bible read out loud while people listened for the word or phrase which caught their attention. This was followed by discussion on the perspectives shared. The traditional name for this type of bible study is *Lectio Divina*.
- Another was based on 1 Corinthians 14:26 where Paul suggested that when the Corinthians gathered for worship they should each come prepared to share a song, a bible passage or other writing, an experience related to the theme, and to share it when the moment seemed appropriate. We called it a BYO service.
- There was also a healing and communion service from Iona, and occasional services based around one of Rob Bell’s short inspirational ‘Nooma’ videos (the phonetic spelling of the Greek word for Spirit). People usually met in a circle with a worship focus in the centre.
- We think that fifth Sundays could include a shared meal.

Folk at the Church Chat were supportive of the concept and an appropriate time to make the change for a trial period of three months would be the beginning of February. Please share your response or questions with one of the local ministry team or email Sandy.

The Kowhai Community Centre: Another proposal shared at the Church Chat was something of a rebranding exercise, by proposing that the hall and education block be given a name which picks up St Ronan’s long-term vision of serving the community.

This has quite a history dating from the 1903 initiative of members of St John’s in the City to establish the St Ronan’s congregation. But more recently with the establishment of the Toy Library 25 years ago, then of the ever-popular Mainly Music. More recently still the shifting of the gate and installation of the play equipment to create a children-safe, outdoor play area and, still later, setting up a community fridge.

It now includes the relocation of St Alban’s Pop in and Play and their monthly Seniors’ lunch to our facilities due to the earthquake status of their own premises. That’s not to mention all the other regular and casual bookings by a number of community organisations.

It’s hoped the new name will also facilitate funding applications to help support our continuing work.

Reg Weeks

Clerk's corner...

Church chat: We had a Church Chat on 7 November.

Quiet - Someone raised the point they liked to spend a quiet period of a few minutes before the service starts. Too often this time is over busy, getting things set up for the service (data projector, sound system) with too many, too-loud distracting voices. •It was agreed, the Christ candle would be lit at about 9.20am. During the 10-minute lead up to the service, the pianist would play, and we should all do our best to be un-busy, or at least quietly busy, and conversations (after all we are supposed to be really pleased to see one another again...!) should be *sotto voce*.



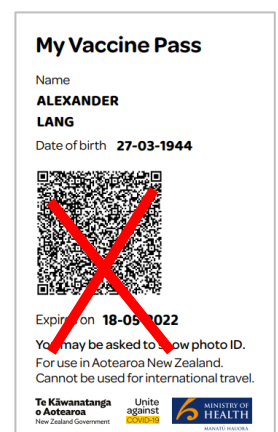
Fortnightly - The parish council/local ministry team introduced the idea that we might run our regular church services fortnightly (not weekly), starting in the early New Year. On the 'off' Sundays, we'd try various less-formal arrangements (see Reg's article above). •An underlying motivation for this change is the amount of work that goes into delivering a regular Sunday service – too much work, for too few people. •But with this change also comes the opportunity to explore exciting new ways of being together on a Sunday.

Kowhai - The idea was raised that we might rename the Hall and Education block the *Kowhai Community Centre*, with signage from the road (see Reg's article above).

COVID: The COVID risk is increasing and new variants are emerging (omicron) but vaccination rates also rising and covering increasingly young children.

Traffic lights - As I write, New Zealand is about to move to a new 'traffic lights' system for managing the COVID risk. Parish council is still discussing our response. I will send an email to all congregation members when things are determined.

Vaccine Passes – But you **will** need a vaccine pass. Don't delay getting one. If you are having difficulty, one of us can help you. Do ask...



Safety – Meanwhile, the COVID virus is spread through the air, so the same ways to keep safe continue to be: •Do wear a mask (even when singing). •Do respect personal distance. •Don't come if you have a cold. •Do scan.

Masks – Incidentally, a 'disposable' mask is much more effective at stopping virus getting in our out than a triple-layer fabric mask and it remains so even if you wash it out 10-times...!

About the only disadvantage of a 'disposable' mask is it may not complement your summer outfit – unless you like pale blue...!



Christian World Service: Last Sunday, we lit the first Advent candle of HOPE and considered our response to the twin emergencies that now beset the world: •the COVID pandemic and •climate change.

The Advent period is when St Ronan's supports the work of CWS. While it's important our mission is focussed on our immediate neighbours (just across the road), New Zealand is one the world's most blessed nations it's also important we look to our overseas neighbours (just across the ocean). Many of our own troubles pale into insignificance when we do this. I commend this CWS mission outreach to you again this year...

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Sandy Lang

Moderator's Advent message in a time of COVID



As I prepare this message, the Scripture that resonates with me is Isaiah 9:2

'The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned.'

We approach this Christmas season under the long and dark shadow of COVID and an intense focus on the growing threat of climate change. And, Pope Francis, reminds us that these dark clouds, these shadows of death, are but the tip of the iceberg. The following quote is from his book *"Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future"* - surely a great title for an Advent series this year:

"The COVID crisis may seem special because it affects most of humankind. But it is only special in how visible it is. There are a thousand other crises that are just as dire but are just far enough from some of us that we can act as if they don't exist. Think, for example, of the wars scattered across different parts of the world; of the production and trade in weapons; of the hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing poverty, hunger and lack of opportunity; of climate change. These tragedies may seem distant from us, as part of the daily news that, sadly, fails to move us to change our agendas and priorities. But like the COVID crisis, they affect the whole of humanity."

In terms of the Isaiah passage, what is it that lights the pathway to a better future? We Christians believe that light comes to us in the Christ child. And we light the four-fold wreath of love, peace, joy and hope to remind us of this. This year the lighting of these candles is particularly loaded with meaning and relevance for us.

As we light the **love** candle, we ask ourselves hard questions about what does Jesus-like love mean at this time? What does it mean to die to self and follow Christ in this situation? Do we care for our neighbours with agape-like self-giving and sacrificial love?

As we light the **peace** candle, we ask ourselves searching questions about how we maintain unity and a welcoming posture to all when there are deep divisions in society and our churches between the vast majority of vaccinated and the small minority of unvaccinated. May we avoid the labelling, demonising and summary dismissal of those we disagree with and instead find creative ways to live together in peace. In this, I am reminded of a passage similar to the one in Isaiah where Zechariah talks of his son John the Baptist in terms of:

'Shining light on those living in darkness, and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.' (Luke 1: 79)

As we light the **joy** candle, we ask ourselves where is the joy in times of such weeping and anxiety? This is a difficult one indeed! There are superficial answers, for example, the joy some have found in the slowing down and appreciating of beauty and relationship-building that has come from the lockdowns. But there is also the deeper resilient joy in the Lord, regardless of circumstance, that is so profoundly modelled for us in the writings of Paul.

And perhaps lighting the **hope** candle is the most powerful and significant of all. We light it with the conviction that not only is there a God, but the birth of Jesus speaks of a God who cares to the point of sacrificial engagement with our broken human condition. As we recall the powerful biblical theme of remembering, we remember that again and again, when all seems darkness and loss, God did not abandon us, and we can confidently say with John... *'In Jesus was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.'* (John 1: 4-5)

Right Rev Hamish Galloway
Moderator Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand
moderator@presbyterian.org.nz

Faith and anxiety in an age of pandemic...

A lecture by Dr Ashley Bloomfield, Director General of Health.

I (and no doubt you) missed this fascinating insight a couple of weeks ago but my daughter Hester put me onto the link on the *New Zealand Christians in Science* website. Very well worth a listen...

- Go to www.nzcis.org/anxiety-and-faith-lectures
- When you get to the right bit of the webpage, click on the word 'HERE' (just under the word 'Bloomfield').

St Ronan's gets a special mention...!



Contributed by ***Sandy Lang***

November Quiz Answer

And the Resene name of the yellow paint used on our church doors is: Kournikova...!

Anna Kournikova attracted many male fans when she played at Stanley Street in 2002.

(No correct answers were received, so the chocolate fish goes uneaten)



Simon Shaw

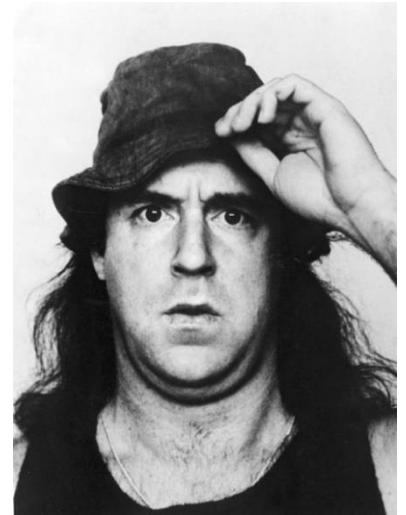
Rood screen: We don't know how lucky we are...

Our family do a 'Secret Santa' where names are drawn from a hat and each person anonymously buys just one present for just one person. To help Santa, we post a 'wish list' on the family page. It's entirely up to the giver whether-or-not they use the ideas.

It's an interesting exercise to reflect on what things we may want. That's before culling most of them due to budget constraints...!

Did you know that:

- If you had an income last year of more than NZ\$48k, you were (according to the World Bank) in the top 1% earners globally.
- If you woke up this morning with more health than illness, you are more blessed than the million people who will not survive the week.
- If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture or the pangs of starvation, you are ahead of 500 million people around the world.
- If you attend a church meeting without fear of harassment, arrest, torture or death, you are more blessed than almost three billion people around the world.
- If you have food in your refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof over your head and a place to sleep, you are richer than 75% of this world.
- If you have money in the bank, in your wallet and some spare change in a dish somewhere, you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy.
- If your parents are still married and alive, you are rare, even in New Zealand.
- If you can read this message, you are more blessed than over two billion people in the world that cannot read anything at all.
- If you hold up your head with a smile on your face and are truly thankful, you are blessed, because the majority of us who can, usually do not...



When you compare our day-to-day problems with bigger problems around the world, our troubles may not seem so large. And our 'wants' are almost embarrassing.

We are truly blessed and what better time is there to share those blessings than at Christmas?

Wishing you and yours 'A Cool Yule'...!

John Harris

Christmas memories and meaning...

Last month, I attended a workshop that explored Christmas memories and meaning with United States poet and church pastor Maren Tirbassi. Maren, a former poet laureate of Portsmouth, has served the United Church of Christ in Massachusetts and New Hampshire since 1980.

Conducted via zoom, the workshop was organised by Sue Brown from the Ngaio Union Church. It was based around Maren's latest book of poems called *Christmas Eve at the Epsom Circle McDonald's and Other Poems*. Maren describes this as 'a celebration of the ways the holy arrives in the midst of the ordinary'.



I found the workshop inspiring and aim to share some of her poems and the ideas they sparked in our Christmas Day service I will be leading. I also promise we will sing some well-loved carols – never fear!

These days, Maren is very involved in encouraging other writers and using her writing to support justice action. She works in a variety of settings, including schools, residential care homes, faith communities and prisons. Here is one of the poems from her new collection:

According to Matthew

*The star stopped,
over the place where the child lay.*

*But anyone who ever observed
a star at its rising
knows better –
knows foot-blistered, homesick,
camel-groin-sore,
searching the night sky ... better.*

*The star always proceeds,
until the wise
save ice caps, rainforests, and islands,
heal dementia, welcome refugees,
find missing indigenous women,*

*until those with the power
are disin-heroded
and enter the house of justice,*

*until the magi
bring magic gifts to the world –*

*in symphony and street art,
music and movies,
youtube, zentangle, samba and slam.*

*The star stops only long enough
for everyone to find
a place to set their presents down,*

dream, take another road

And there's another event (right) at Ngaio Union Church I might try to get to on Sunday, December 5 – Christmas Live. This tells the Christmas story in the form of a moving pageant around Ngaio Village. Always a big hit is the presence of live animals and some good musicians. It might be a fun thing for the churches of Eastbourne to try to replicate one year!



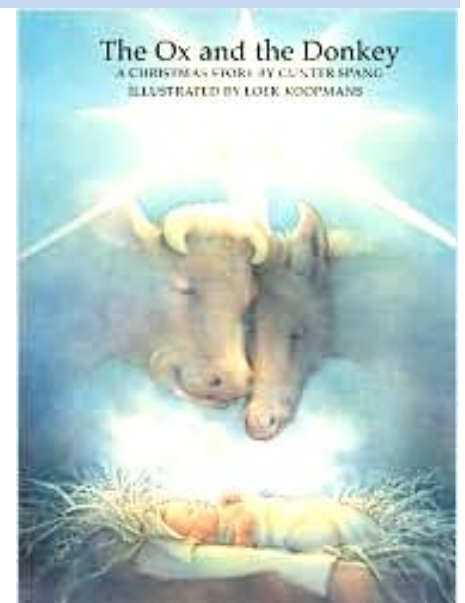
Anne Manchester

Children's Power Hour: In celebration of the Nativity

All this November, on Sunday afternoons, the Power Hour children have been producing a film for our St Ronan's traditional Family Nativity Service which will be held on 12 December at 9:30am. The film tells the beautiful Nativity story of "*The Ox and the Donkey*" by Gunter Spang (do you remember when St Ronan's did it in 2012). This is in lieu of our usual dramatised productions with congregation participation. We felt that with the presence of COVID lurking and social distancing regulations, it would be preferable to change the nature of the children's sharing of the Nativity.

The production has been a total family immersion, with children, parents and a grandparent. What a team of good hearts it has been! I am so impressed! I wish you could have seen how much the children have put into it with their smooth, paced reading, and timed acting with table puppets (like in Godly Play), listening and interacting with one another. They have been fabulous!

Elsbeth Costilinis wrote a new script based on the story and assisted with directing. Matt, Colleen and Mills McCorkindale and Leah Hoffman have done



the filming and editing, and Nana Marilyn has been our supportive audience. A huge thanks to them!

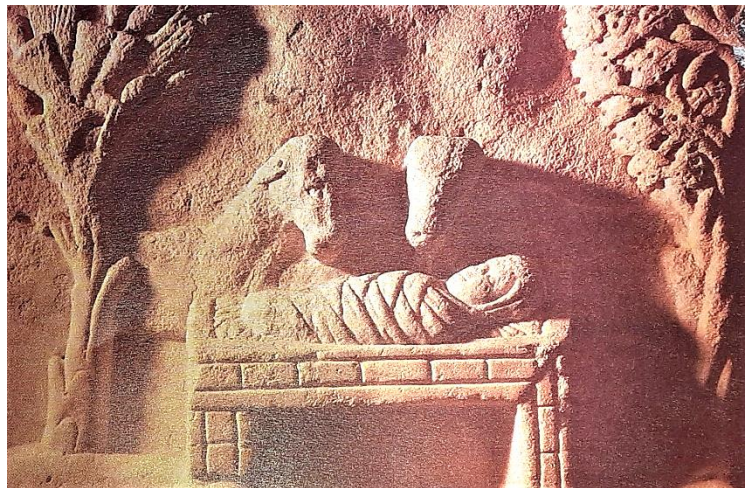
"*The Ox and the Donkey*" was chosen as it fits well with the children's developmental stage of identifying strongly with animals, their strengths and behaviors, e.g., Aesops Fables. Also, the children are maturing and are now becoming able to stand on their own.

Interestingly, throughout the Bible, a donkey is mentioned 142 times and can be symbolic in its use. Spiritually, a donkey can mean: service; suffering; peace; and humility. Thus, a donkey is particularly involved in the Nativity story and during Jesus' life. In the Old Testament, a donkey carries the theme of wisdom and "on the authority of God's word".

In the New Testament, Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey, as a humble king of peace following the tradition of arrival in peace rather than as a war-waging king, arriving on a horse. In Judges 5:10, a prophecy mentions that the Messiah will enter Jerusalem on a donkey.

Reading between the lines, we can see parallels between the donkey and Jesus. The donkey is known to be a guide for others, loving, wise and walks in personal truth (holds its ground/stubborn). It is a helpmate and seeks out gentleness in people and has a soft spot for anyone who is frail. It is intuitive, perceiving danger and keeping others out of danger.

While the manger, stable and donkey were noted at Jesus' birth, the ox was not noted. However, it stands to reason that the ox was a common farming animal in Jesus' time and was probably housed in a stable with other farm animals. Lastly, the ox and donkey have been depicted together at Nativity time as far back as the 14th century – see the attached stone relief depicting the infant Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger as reported in Luke. The stable animals, the donkey and the oxen, watch gently over the baby.



May your Christmas give special honour to Jesus and may your holidays go well for you...!

POWER HOUR TERM 4 2021 FINISHES 12 DECEMBER

POWER HOUR TERM 1 2022 STARTS 13 FEBRUARY (the Sunday after Waitangi Day)

Susan Connell

A team divided... 😞

My previous rant found an unexpectedly appreciative response and since then a multitude of topical intertwined issues swirled in my head. Ultimately, they distilled into one item: our response to the COVID pandemic.

The pandemic has vividly demonstrated the structure and weaknesses of our society. I do not say “of our culture” because we are a *mélange* of many cultures and subcultures which exist side by side, sometimes in uneasy tolerance. We have been shown that we are essentially governed by an upper middle class anglophone coterie, which decides its policies based on narrow self-interest, a tightly limited cultural understanding, and the minimum it can get away with.

Our PM took the stage early on to say we are a team of 5 million battling an insidious invader. The opposition immediately began criticising the government policies. At the time, I wrote to our local MP, Chris Bishop, saying that, in a time such as this, a team must work together and show itself united. No team which is divided will succeed. To show yourselves to be worthy of leadership you must show first you are a worthy loyal supporter of the leader. Speaking to him a few weeks later at the Riverside market, when the National Party was wondering why it was in such disarray, I told him: “Your big mistake was to politicise the pandemic.”

For months we have been participants in the ‘Jacinda-Ashley show’, as two ‘Anglo’ middle class actors set out for us the things which are happening and the things we should or must do. It has all been expressed in terms, language, formats, and structures familiar only to limited segments of our population. It was barely, if at all, intelligible to Polynesians (Māori, Sāmoan, Tongan, et al). It is significant that the one segment recognised as the most vulnerable was the elderly and rest homes.

We were urged to make use of the ‘app’, as if everybody knew (a) what an ‘app’ is, (b) understood how to use it and (c) had the necessary equipment to use it. My off-the-cuff guesstimate is that this command/request was intelligible to <20% of the population who had the necessary smartphone. It excluded me because my cell phone was too old. Many months later, when I had graduated to a superior model, I have found the ‘app’ confusing and exasperating. Even now, I am guessing only 50% of the population is using it. While the measures and methods adopted were accepted by those who understood them and could implement them, it was soon highlighted that there were significant sectors of society who did not relate to them. These were: the ‘essential workers’, the marginalised, the Polynesian communities, in particular the Māori communities and the gangs. The gang involvement is, I think, one of the most significant positives to come out of this episode. It has shown:

- a) The gangs are an integral part of our society;
- b) They are comprised not of just Māori, but include Sāmoans and Tongans

among others, and have an abiding sense of disorientation and alienation from the dominant culture;

c) They have a high degree of organisation, loyalty and connection to their home communities;

d) They have tremendous individual abilities and talents which have, over many generations, repeatedly been ignored, abused and downplayed.

e) They are a major community asset which can and should be harnessed and channelled for the benefit of all;

f) They do not enjoy being marginalised and seek to be accepted members of their surrounding communities.

The whole COVID event has demonstrated how very different the various Polynesian communities are from the dominant 'Euro' culture, and how poorly some of our communities understand and appreciate each other's structures. Each community has its own supporting structures, be it a marae, church or place of employment. These structures should have been key conduits of communication to the vulnerable communities. But, initially at least, they were not.

Many people, individuals, families and businesses, have been adversely affected by the pandemic, and our government has worked generously to alleviate the dislocations. But I have been appalled by the singular arrogance and selfishness shown by certain elements of the hospitality and tourist industries who have noisily bewailed their loss of profit. The fact that 'we are all in this together' seems to be lost on them, as they focus on their own myopias.

We are not out of the COVID woods yet. We do not know where its mutations will lead us. But as a society we can triumph over them, if we act on the lessons we have learned in the past two years:

a) Recognise all our individual communities for what they are: fiercely individual, independent and often foreign to one another;

b) Recognise, accept, and value the various cultural structures for what they are: sources of great strength and immense talent.

c) Transform the Jacinda-Ashley presentations into something to which all our communities can relate.

d) Have our 'Opposition' recognise that it will achieve much more for itself and the country by showing and supporting common leadership, rather than by sniping and sowing confusion.

There are people who for various reasons genuinely feel the approaches taken by the Government are invalid. So be it. They and their viewpoints should be respected. In my experience there is rarely an absolute right or wrong, especially when we are dealing with something we do not fully understand. In the final analysis, both may be right, and both may be wrong. United we will achieve great things; divided we collapse in a heap of mutual recrimination.

Geoff Mann

Phil's photo – Together and alone...

Two ideas struck me during last Sunday's service at St Ronan's.

- The first from Sandy (leading the service) who in his opening words said...

We draw comfort from one another.

- The second from Rev Dr Jenny Dawson (visiting preacher) who in her reflection said...

...many people .. think so much about the future, or the past, that they completely miss the present.



Jan Heine is a fabulous woman who's been part of the life of St Ronan's for very many years. Throughout her life she's had a passion for the New Zealand outdoors, and for caring for it.

In recent months she's not been able to walk in the bush. She's missed it a lot. Recently, Jan was delighted when Les and Allison took her into the bush at the northern end of Cheviot Road in Lowry Bay. I tagged along with my camera and to help get Jan's wheelchair over, round and through a few bushy obstacles. That was a lot of fun in itself...!

Along the track, in the light breeze, an awesome Kahikatea tree waved its welcoming branches to Jan in gentle greeting. We could see the delight on Jan's face. *[We draw comfort from one another]*



On Saturday, wanting some time to myself, I wandered off to the cricket at the 'Rec'. Watching cricket is such a delightful pastime: sitting in a deck chair - maybe with a drink - the only game that can last five days (not just 40 minutes of frenzy each way) - the muted applause when a wicket falls - the muted applause when a six is scored...



My special time: immersed in the present - with my camera - by myself - enjoying the solitude that cricket presents - but the while being part of the cricketing community...
[not missing the present]



A thing I've known all my life is we can adapt - no matter what. One wonders what wonderful challenges will come our way in 2022 – some good and some not so good. But how privileged we are to have that ability to adapt built into our DNA. We'll get through it together. We'll get through it if we seek the present. We'll be okay...!

Phil Bengie



Our God calls us to worship and grow together and to show the love of Christ through serving our community.

Directory

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Local Ministry Team

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Hall Bookings	Sandy Lang

Contributions for the 'Record' are most welcome
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The views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors
They do not necessarily represent those of St Ronan's Church

**And the closing date for our next *Record* for February 2022
is Sunday 30 January 2022**