



St Ronan's Presbyterian Church  
Eastbourne

# Record

## March 2022

6 March	Informal worship service.....	9.30am
13 March	Reg Weeks ( <i>Communion</i> ).....	9.30am
20 March	Informal worship service.....	9.30am
27 March	Ross Scott.....	9.30am
3 April	Informal worship service.....	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**

## Ash Wednesday...

On Wednesday, our three local churches, San Antonio, St Alban's and St Ronan's continued our tradition of celebrating significant Christian festivals together. It was the occasion of the Ash Wednesday service which begins the season of Lent. Various members of all three churches took part in the service. I delivered the homily (see later this issue).

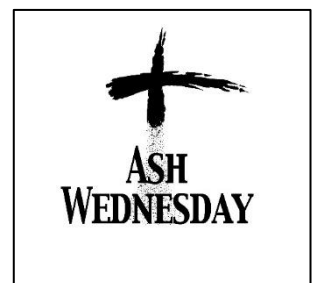


Although an Ash Wednesday service has been part of the Catholic and Anglican traditions for generations, it's only in recent years other churches have included it as an important event in their calendars.

A few years ago, the United Methodist Church in USA brought out a new worship book and, for the first time, included in it a service for Ash Wednesday. A news commentator remarked: *The use of ashes, is a practice Christianity inherited from Judaism as a symbol of mourning and repentance. By the Middle Ages, Western believers began putting ashes on their heads to remind them that their bodies would eventually turn to dust... ..Later, many Protestant churches abandoned the rite, emphasising Bible reading, preaching and simpler, more spontaneous, worship.*

While the 1996 worship book of the Church of Scotland (which we often use as a source book in St Ronan's) has prayers for every Sunday in Lent, it does not mention Ash Wednesday.

Actually, the ancient Jewish custom was much more dramatic. It involved lying on sackcloth and covering oneself with ashes. However, these days on Ash Wednesday, the ashes ritual is simply to draw the sign of the cross on each forehead with a finger dipped in ash. It forms part of a service of meditation and reflection. It's usually done with the words: *Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.* It is a good way for Christians to remind themselves they are mortal and need to reflect on how often they fall short of their own best standards, let alone of the desire of a loving and holy God.



The season of Lent is a time of fasting and reflection, as we remember the 40 days Jesus spent in the desert without food, resisting the temptations of Satan and reflecting on what God through the Holy Spirit was calling Him to do.

So, Lent is the 40 days (excluding Sundays) leading up to Easter day, when we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. Often the focus is on giving up of something for Lent, as a way of identifying with Jesus' experience. Some churches run a series of Lent Studies over the period to help participants understand more deeply what Jesus was on about, and to review their own response to these issues.

However, if your preference is for private reflection, there are many options available on the web. Just check in with Mr Google - but take care to use discernment regarding the source of the material you may find there.

**Reg Weeks**

### **Clerk's corner...**

**Services:** We've had the first month of our new pattern of services: two 'formal services' in the Church (2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sundays) and two 'informal services' in the Fellowship Room (1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays). We'll share a pot-luck meal together on the 5<sup>th</sup> Sundays - the first of these will be 29 May.

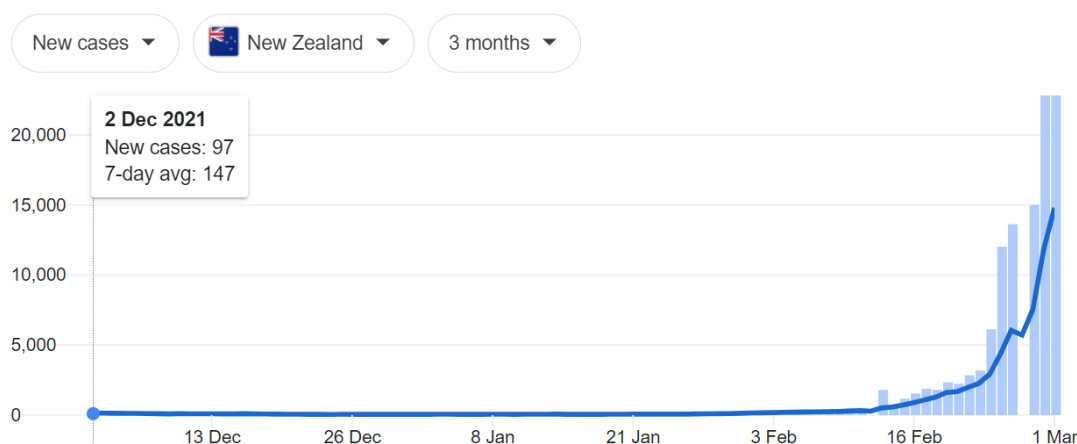


The new service pattern has eased the pressure somewhat, or at least placed it on different shoulders. It's a bit early to judge the new service attendances based on just one month's numbers, in a COVID outbreak and with a major southerly storm the other Sunday. Nevertheless, the two informal services each attracted about 13 people (a comfy number for the fellowship room) and the two formal ones about 22 people (about the long-term average for St R's these days).

**COVID:** An update...

**During February:** Since the last Record issue at the end of January, things have tracked along the expected lines. An 'exponential' rise in the new daily COVID cases – the numbers doubling every few days... As I write (2/3/22) the number is 22,000 and still heading skyward...

Here's a three-month bar graph showing the recent upsurge in daily COVID cases in New Zealand. Just look at the shape - don't try to read the fine print. Also,

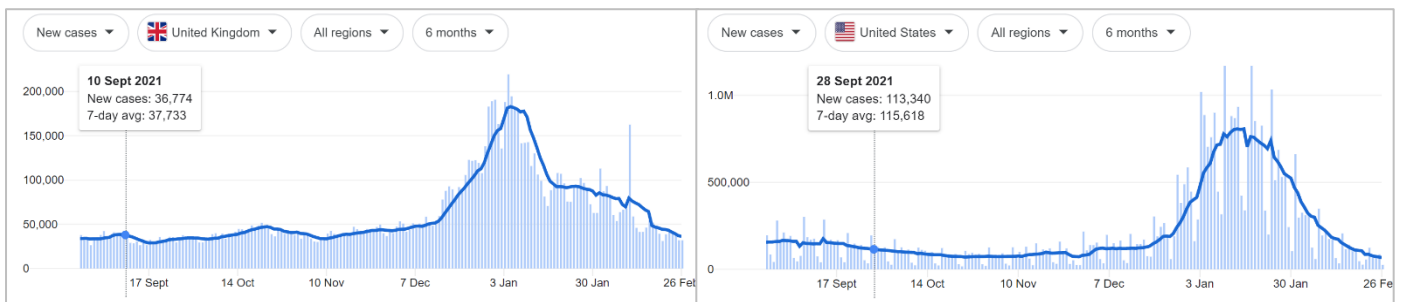


the bars are a bit messy as over the last few days as our COVID testing got into a spot of trouble. As a result, reporting has been erratic. The solid darker blue line (the 7-day running average) is a more reliable indicator.

**What to expect during March:** The steep rise in case numbers will continue for a bit longer, then '*peak*', then '*decline*'. So (you ask) how high the peak and when will it occur? Different sources give different estimates. A recent accredited source suggests a '*mid-March peak*' of 15,000 to 20,000 new cases a day. More recently it looks like the peak will be higher than 20,000 – maybe a '*35,000 peak*'. Then the decline...



**Predicting:** The best way of predicting what will happen for us here in NZ is to look at what has already happened overseas - the virus and the people in UK and USA are much the same as for us, so the pattern will be much the same. Below are the three-month bar graphs for the UK (left) and the USA (right). Again, just look at the shapes. You will see both countries are now '*post peak*'.



You'll also see the declines (right of peak) are similar to the rises (left of peak), but maybe a bit less steep. In both countries the daily case numbers are now manageable by the medical providers. This has allowed restrictions to be safely eased and their economies are now reopening...

New Zealand is currently a bit '*pre-peak*'. In the next (April) *Record* I'd expect to be able to show you a graph in which NZ is '*post-peak*' with daily infection numbers steadily reducing...

Today's news tells us NZ is opening up – a bit early maybe...? But NZ generally has a very good vaccination status (by world standards) and our region, the lower North Island, has a very good vaccination status (compared with some other regions in NZ)...

**Who will get COVID?** Some estimates say 'about half of us'. By the end of March, we will all know people who've either got it or have had it. Your behaviour will help determine if you get it, or not. Wear a proper clinical mask, ensure it fits close to your face, avoid crowds, avoid poorly-ventilated places, keep vaccinated/boosted. If unvaccinated, you are much more likely to get it and you are four-times more likely to need medical or hospital care for it.

**COVID infection, treatment, symptoms:** People are affected differently. Most will develop mild to moderate symptoms about a week after the initial infection. Most will recover at home without medical assistance. By about a week after your symptoms first appeared, you will be feeling a bit better.



Treat with standard painkillers, cough medicines, rest and drink plenty of fluids. These all help relieve the symptoms while your body deals with the virus.

**Common symptoms:** Fever, cough, tiredness, loss of taste/smell.

**Less common symptoms:** Sore throat, headache, aches, diarrhoea, rash, discolouration of fingers/toes, red eyes.

**Rare symptoms:** Difficulty breathing, shortness of breath, loss of speech or mobility, confusion, chest pain. **Ring 111, seek immediate medical attention.**

**The fear factor:** The risk of death is very low (much less than 0.08%)<sup>1</sup>. That's about one person in Eastbourne. That person will most likely be unvaccinated and medically frail. To put this into perspective, Eastbourne sometimes suffers more drownings each year and nearly as many road deaths.

**St Ronan's?** We will carry on as before: •Don't come if you've a cold, •Do wear a close-fitting mask (preferably a clinical one), •Do 'social distance' by 1+ metres, •Don't touch one another. We keep: •Written attendance records, •Good ventilation, •Require a vaccine pass, •We do contactless communion.

**You:** •Lay in extra supplies – you never know if some local shops may have to close for a few days if their staff are unwell. •Call one of us if you need something from the shops or pharmacy. •If you are aware of someone, alone, elderly, no car, no local family, call or visit them...

Unite  
against  
COVID-19

**And:**

- If you think you may have COVID, isolate and freecall the 24x7 COVID Healthline 0800 358 5453
- If you become iller call your doctor. If out of hours freecall the COVID Healthline 0800 358 5453
- If you become seriously ill, don't delay, call 111

We're in this together, don't feel alone, call one of us... 😊

**e:** slang@xtra.co.nz    **t:** 562 8752    **m:** 021 222 0383

**Sandy Lang**

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<sup>1</sup> In NZ we've had 71,000 COVID cases and 56 deaths :  $56/71000 \times 100 = 0.08\%$ . This is probably an over high estimate of the risk as it's based substantially on the more dangerous form of COVID prevalent early on, with a cluster of resthome deaths.

## ***St Ronan's church flowers – And the Ukraine...***

The church flowers are a key part of our services. They bring into our aging, 1960s style church building (the work of an architect) an element of nature's beauty (the work of Nature's great architect). *Consider the lilies...* Matt 6:28).

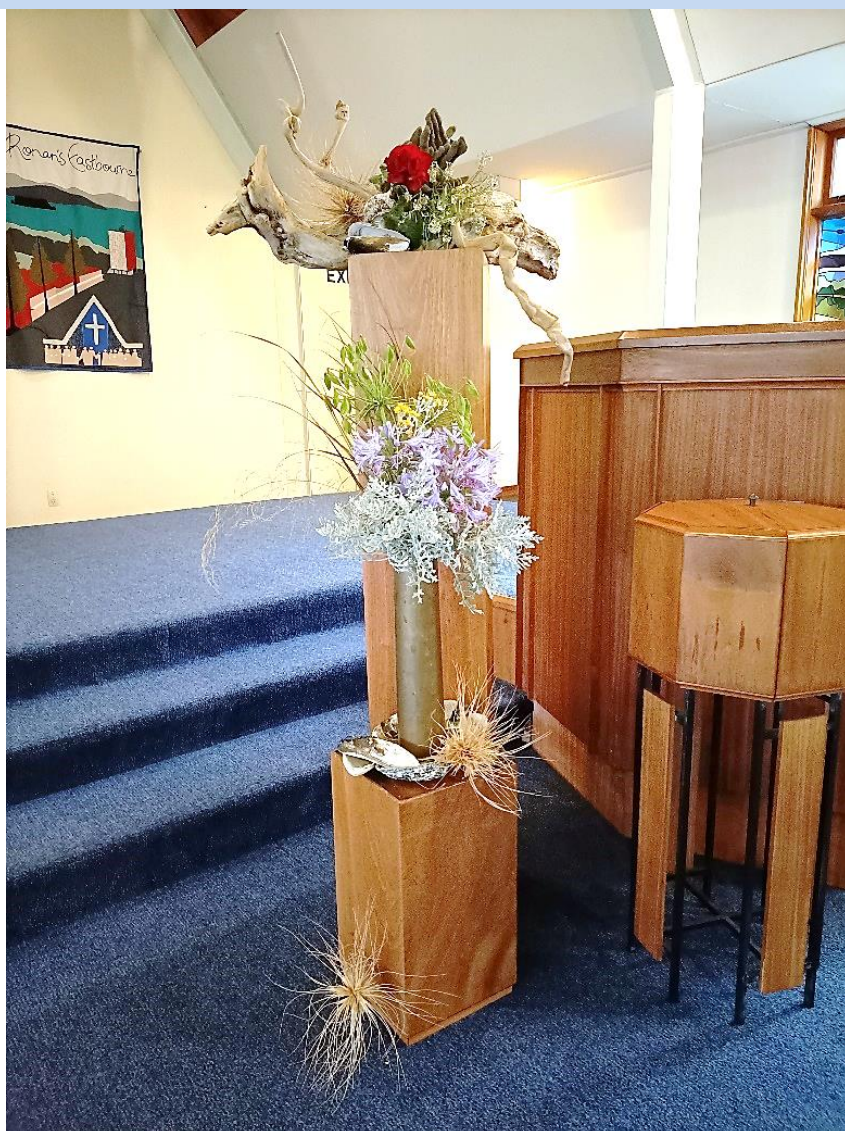
The flowers also reflect the artistic creativity of the arrangers. They're more than just a bunch of shop flowers dumped in a vase. Some of this creativity you will see in the artificial/dried arrangements by Shirley Burdan, Nola Rough and Susan Connell. I put out one of these arrangements on the Sundays when I'm on 'flowers duty'.

But we also have a small number of floral artists whose names appear on the roster.

These people come into the church quietly, a day or so before the service, and work their special magic there, alone...

We enjoy these people's creativity. How they sometimes take fairly-ordinary items, and craft a thing of special beauty in how they put these together – combining items, and textures, and colours, and forms to create something beautiful out of things you or I might trample on the beach or throw away on the compost heap.

But there's another thread sometimes behind the arrangements. This week the creator (Elspeth) had been thinking about the Ukraine. She'd earlier seen seashells thrown up on the beach in the recent storm. There they lay broken open and in shards, their fragile inhabitants gone. It made her think of how seashells are built to protect a sea creature. This led her to think of how in Kiev, buildings and peoples' homes now lie broken open and empty. So, she was expressing these thoughts as she put together the flowers for us...





- There are a lot of broken seashells in the arrangement. This week, shells fell in eastern Europe. The lower arrangement uses an old brass artillery shell-case as the vase.
- The colours of the flowers are blue and yellow. The colours of the Ukrainian flag.

• And the leaves are white. A prayer for peace. The upper arrangement also has white in the alyssum. Even though fragile, this flower will flourish in a harsh environment.

• The sea sponge (top) looks like fingers, raised in supplication.

• And agapanthus and spinifex (bottom) are good at spreading their seeds.

All these components make the whole arrangement a prayer for peace in the Ukraine, where the environment is now so hostile. It is a prayer also for that peace to spread...

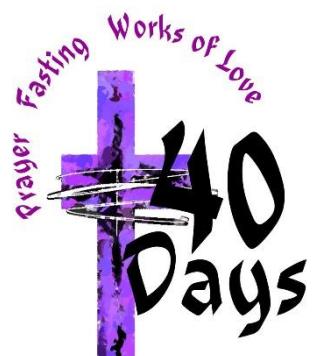
Last, the red rose (top) is chosen for the people who have already died. It is a bit wind burnt and battered, because this is apt...

I am not the author of these thoughts. I've merely taken the words of a private email (with permission) and edited them for the *Record*. Such thoughts are worth sharing - and they are certainly worthy of our fuller understanding.

**Sandy Lang**

## ***True fasting...***

It's been asked: *Why would God feel more inclined to listen to us if we become skinnier, or if our stomachs growled in hunger?* And *"What would the creator of the universe gain through our discomfort?"* These are the questions of a Christian writer I found when exploring the purpose and meaning of fasting. I have to admit that, as a member of a tradition that has little to say about fasting, these were my questions too.





Andrew Mandonio writes - *Fasting is clearly an important topic in the bible, but the essence of fasting is not found in giving up food, as most are taught today...*

You may know that Hebrew is written only in capitals, only in consonants and from right to left. But you may not know that the Hebrew letters themselves each have a meaning. So, a word takes its meaning from the letters.

Thus, the Hebrew word for fast is *tsum*, formed with the three Hebrew letters צום. The first letter (reading from the right) is צ [tzadi] which indicates a man lying on his side, meaning righteousness, or prostrate, which indicates transformation. Then ו [vav] is regarded as a nail or tent peg, meaning to fasten, hook, or join together. And, the last מ [mem] conveys the image of water; massive, power, sustaining life.

These three letters and their ancient meanings may then lead to a definition of fasting such as, *A transforming righteousness that firmly secures us to the one with the power to give and sustain life.*



Andrew suggests a deeper analysis of this word-picture might lead to: *The man lying on his side gives the idea of one who is prostrate before the Lord humbly seeking his intervention in some important event. The tent peg tells of the sureness of his attachment to his God – he is not moving until something is changed. The idea of water in Hebrew thought speaks not only of power but also of turbulence. The man is upset in his spirit (in his bowels as the ancients used to say) over some event or injustice.*

At this point, the word-picture for *fasting* seems to describe what we would call *prayer*. After all, there is nothing directly connected to the giving up of food in this description of *tsum*; and the bible often connects the idea of fasting with prayer. Both are important ways in which we rely on God to intervene when we are powerless.

And, it's not hard to see now how fasting and prayer are so interconnected. Both are states of humility and acknowledged weakness, seeking one who can intervene and promote justice. Justice is a key theme of both fasting and prayer.

But how often do we make fasting about depriving ourselves of some minor part of our diet, acting as though this external behaviour is the way to please God. In fact, the idea of abstaining from food for the sake of trying to be righteous became confusing even for the Jews of Isaiah's day. They were frustrated with God when they fasted by abstaining from food and He didn't respond accordingly. Isaiah 58 tells us the people were angry with God for not noticing their fasting.

*Why have we fasted, they say, and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?*

And God replies, *Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?*



Fasting and prayer intertwine with righteousness and justice. We are told by the prophet to seek justice for others; to free people from bondage, any bondage, physical, mental, emotional, spiritual. And to share food, clothe the naked, assist the needy. God tells us through the prophet that these acts of righteousness are a part of what He calls fasting.

Jesus told his disciples something very similar when he told the parable of the nations gathered before the king, clearly indicating the connection between righteous faith and the way we live

*Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'*

True fasting, then, is not about denying ourselves to gain God's attention, nor trying to impress others by our demonstrations of piety, but rather seems to indicate that if we are to empty ourselves it is in order to come to the aid of those in need.

It is not an individual thing, though our acts and choices are surely our own, but the mark of the ashes we receive is a small outward sign that we, together, are part of that great fellowship of those committed to live by the teaching of the one who came to show God's love and concern for all people.

We, together, are to repair the broken world around us, one person at a time. That's what we are called to do – not only to cleanse our hearts as we begin this period of reflection leading us to Easter, but to think again on how best to live this life.



In the words attributed to St Francis:

*May God bless us with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths and superficial relationships, that we may live deeply from within our hearts.*

*May God bless us with anger at injustice, oppression and exploitation of people, so that we may work for justice, freedom and peace.*

*May God bless us with tears to shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger and war, so that we may reach out our hands to comfort them and turn their pain to joy.*

*And may God bless us with enough foolishness to believe that we can make a difference in the world, so that we do what others claim cannot be done and help to bring justice and kindness to all who need it.*

**Reg Weeks**

## ***Did God create atheists...?***

There is a famous story told in Hasidic literature that addresses this very question.

The Master teaches the student that God created everything in the world to be appreciated, since everything is here to teach us a lesson. One clever student asked... *What lesson can we learn from atheists? Why did God create them?*



The Master responded... *God created atheists to teach us the most important lesson of them all — the lesson of true compassion. You see, when an atheist performs an act of charity, visits someone who is sick, helps someone in need, and cares for the world, he is not doing so because of some religious teaching. He does not believe that God commanded him to perform this act. In fact, he does not believe in God at all, so his acts are based on an inner sense of morality. He bestows the kindness upon others simply because he feels it to be right.*

*This means, the Master continued, that when someone reaches out to you for help, you should never say 'I pray that God will help you.' Instead for the moment, you should become an atheist, imagine that there is no God who can help, and say 'I will help you.'*

***John Harris***

## ***Children's Power Hour – Jan's hats***

What a beautiful and unexpected kindness has been shown to our Power Hour children recently! As part of Jan Heine's estate, a number of colourful hats, collected on her Asian travels, have been left to our children to enjoy.

Jan was a longstanding member of St Ronan's, had a love of children and made worthwhile connections with them. For several years Jan joined in the 'Ronan's Readers' group each week to support Randwick School children with their reading. As if that was not enough, Jan was back at the school, again weekly, to also help with their breakfast programme.

I have a lasting vision of Jan with her sparkling eyes and smile, when she came over at a Sunday morning tea to especially praise Blake and Emma for their fine job of helping everyone stir our traditional St Ronan's Christmas cake. Jan's efforts were more remarkable because she needed to get someone to steer her in her wheelchair over to the children and the cake-stirring trolley to share her feelings.

Thank you Jan for your blessings on our Power Hour children. They will enjoy playing with these rare hats for a long time in different ways.

**Power Hour Term 1:** 13 February to 10 April (Palm Sunday). Children aged 8 years and over (plus adults) must wear masks indoors.

**Susan Connell**



Jan Heine's hat collection gathered from her travels. Many are from the Uyghur people of Xinjiang. Others are from Kazakhstan, Turkey, Greece and Tibet.



L-R: Mills, Blake and Emma showing their chosen hats gifted by Jan.

### ***Weeds, glorious weeds...***

I try to grow the familiar crops in my garden, such as tomatoes, beans, onions, cabbages, silver beet etc. But Nature has a different perspective. She lavishly supplies me with goods with which I am unfamiliar.



This thin spindly green/yellow item rampantly imposing itself over everything else is chickweed, an edible green.



So also are these small mauve-flowered seedlings which pop up all over the place: red dead nettle and galinsoga.





This week I discovered a new mauve flowered weed. Investigation revealed this was chicory (cum endive-cum-witloof). I yanked out a large vigorous green interloper with a solid taproot and took it to California Garden Centre. But they didn't recognise it, labelled it a "weed" and suggested I take it to the council. "Ah, amaranth!" said the council officer.

Depending on which variety you have, it is either a pricey cereal or a poisonous noxious weed, or perhaps a flower love-lies-a'bleeding. I subsequently found that amaranth is being commercially grown in Upper Hutt.



My hillside is gold with the blossom of fennel, the type that does not produce an edible bulb but whose seeds are a staple of Indian cuisine.

I'm unimpressed and rip them out ruthlessly, even though the leaves are a great supplement in soups, salads and fish.

Among the fennel is another tall climber, with feathery seeds which are prolifically spread widely. This, I now recognise as fleabane, which does not banish fleas but is used as a vegetable in America and Europe.



Then, there is the nasturtium, all of whose parts are edible. Docks of various kinds which have medicinal properties. Yarrow, dandelions of several types, cape gooseberry and many more which I don't recognise...



I made the mistake a few years ago of planting an elderberry (on sale at Common Sense Organics) and sunchoke (Jerusalem artichoke) and from somewhere a mugwort appeared. These are all classified as noxious weeds and I'm now told *Once you've got them in your garden, you'll never get rid of them.*

**An axiom:** *What you need is right close by. All you need do is look for it.*

I developed this axiom many years ago when I mislaid my pen or my glasses. I then found it had more general applicability.

I look at all the abundance of healthy food growing wild in my garden, uninvited, undervalued and unappreciated. I wonder to what extent it exemplifies our entire approach to life.

**Geoff Mann**

### ***Phil's photo – The joys of youth...***

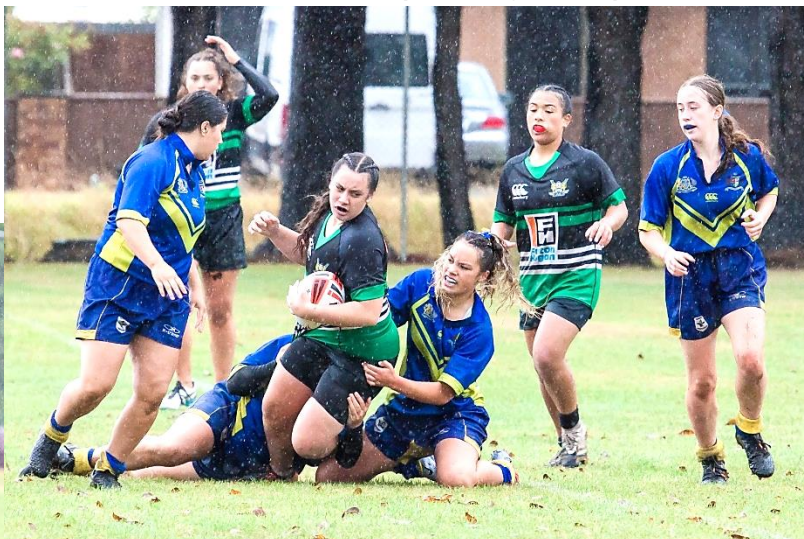
It was recently in the news that today's young people don't get enough exercise. They spend too much time hunched over an electronic device or watching TV - not getting out and doing stuff...

This is not entirely a new problem as, in all generations including my own, there've been sit-around teenagers listening to the endless harangue from their parents about getting out of bed, getting up, having a shower, and getting out.



Even in Patriarch Isaac's day (Genesis 25 ff) we read of the busy 'outdoors' young man Esau – a keen hunter with bow and arrow – and his twin brother Jacob who hung around the tent: safe with his mum, keener on cooking red-lentil soup (pottage), in a pot, on a campfire...

While the general news statement about inactivity may be true for today's 'average' teenager, it's absolutely not true for 'all' today's teenagers. There are some out there making the most of what's available in sporting competitions and physical challenges. During February I was invited to photograph three sporting activities involving local youth.



The first was a triangular rugby league nine-a-side tournament at the Wise Street Park, Wainuiomata. This tournament was for under-16s girls from three

local clubs: *Wainuiomata, Wellington Tongan and Randwick League.*

The protocols were strict. Numbers entering the field were limited. A check in for COVID passes, scanning and obligatory mask wearing for non-players. Well planned. Well managed.

These young women played their games with tremendous vigour in light but steady rain. Everyone got soaked, everyone got spattered in mud. The games were characterised by good humour and tremendous dedication. Wainuiomata were the victors that day.



The second was the Muritai Yacht Club's February Youth Regatta. Again, rainy and a light wind. More than 60 young sailors competed in four races. They all did so well. I was lucky to secure a (dry) spot on board Graham Webby's launch *Black Pearl*. I was indeed privileged to share in the excitement as I took a heap of photos from my comfy pizzie.



The final youth activity was at the Wellesley College's Year-5 school camp. The boys went to YMCA Kaitoke to enjoy whatever adventures might come their way. Impressive how they gained confidence in these activities and thought outside the square. Three went down a mud slide into the lake together creating a magnificent splash and mini tsunami.



Well done our young people. It's you who are our future. I'm sure these will make the best of the wonderful and weird activities that will come their way as they grow up.

**Phil Bengie**



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

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## Directory

St Ronan's Presbyterian Church,  
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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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Phone (04) 568 3377

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 March 2022  
is Sunday 27 March 2022**