1,400km, 16 hours, three churches and two clergy

Sixteen hours and 1,400km in a car over two days to participate in three church services. Apparently, there is some interest in what conversations occur between a priest and a bishop who might undertake such a journey.

In October, Bishop Cam and I undertook a road trip in our Western Region. Cam had promised to be present in Charleville for a baptism that Sunday. I, on the other hand, wanted to meet members of The Parish of Charleville. There is a covenantal relationship with my church, The Parish of Mt Gravatt, and The Parish of Charleville that was established many years before I arrived on the scene. Our commitment is to prayer, shared ministry and hospitality. I also bring a curiosity about how such partnership relationships can be mutually beneficial and enhanced by newfound digital technology.

Our first stop in Roma was to bless a window in honour of The Rev’d Canon Arthur Fellows and his wife, Beverley. This aspect of our journey was somewhat serendipitous as I renewed a family connection between the Fellows and Stalley families. A connection that harks back some decades to North Queensland, where Canon Fellows would have known my grandfather, The Rev’d Canon Edward Stalley, through his role with ABM. I still often wear a white stole that belonged to my grandfather, presented to me by Canon Fellows soon after my ordination.

Sharing the driving, Bishop Cam and I arrived in Charleville in time to freshen up so we could join some local Anglicans for dinner at the RSL.

On Sunday, we first joined the people (and pet dogs) of All Saints’, Charleville for a Holy Communion service. There was no baptism as was initially planned, but Bishop Cam kept his commitment to be there.

We then travelled the 100km to Augathella to again celebrate Holy Communion with another small group of faithful people who warmly welcomed us and expressed their deep gratitude for our participation among them.

As I reflect on this whirlwind trip, many things stand out as worthy of mention.

Bishop Cameron serves in a very unique episcopal ministry shaped by the vast Western Region and its communities. As we travelled, it was clear that Bishop Cameron knows each community, its people and clergy deeply. He ministers alongside them with empathy and understanding. Many in his region know him as “our priest” because he spends much of his time working with the parishes who do not have their own local clergy.

The ministry of the local Anglicans to keep a church presence and offer pastoral care to the community is inspiring – the people who provide lay ministry in their parishes thirst for connections that will support and enhance their ministry. They, too, need people who can be there for them.

The locals want those in urban centres to know how much they want doctors, teachers and other essential workers to take the opportunity to work in their rural communities.

Ministry in the Western Region involves an ability to be lovingly present to people with diverse socioeconomic, educational and cultural and linguistic backgrounds. I observed Bishop Cameron engage with each person with the same sense of interest and understanding.
It is clear that genuine participation between urban and regional parishes can provide unexpected opportunities to support one another in our shared mission. During a recent parish workshop at Mt Gravatt, three congregation members of The Parish of Charleville joined us via Zoom.

In the end, 16 hours in a car together was filled with conversation that was only interrupted to listen to music we wanted to share with each other. We chatted about ministry, vocation, family, books, music and podcasts. I heard about each western community we passed through, their people and clergy. We talked about God and faith.

For my part I came away from our trip in the west encouraged by the kind of encounter with others, be they bishop or lay, in which God surprises and blesses.

Editor’s note: Please pray for all rural and remote communities in our Western Region, particularly those who are supported in some way by the BMF. The new Bush Ministry Fund money boxes are a fun and easy way for churches, ministries, schools, families and individuals to donate to bush ministry in our Diocese. Please call Helen Briffa at the Western Region Office on (07) 4639 1875 or email her via hbriffa@anglicanchurchsq.org.au to order your money boxes.

Sunday Devotions • Monday 13 December 2021 • By Lalania Tusa Fa‘aaefili

Sunday Devotion: 19 December 2021, Fourth Sunday of Advent

Welcoming all expectant mums

“When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.'” (Luke 1.41-42)

Main Readings: Micah 5.2-5a; For the Psalm: ‘Song of Mary’ (APBA p.31 or p.425) or Psalm 80.1-7; Hebrews 10.5-10; Luke 1.39-45 (46-55)

Supplementary: Psalm 113; Matthew 1.18-25; Isaiah 66.18-23; Psalm 18.27-38; Revelation 20.11-21.5

Like Mary, I had a son at a young age. Even though I had just left school, I knew I was responsible for carrying this son, raising him and my future three sons to be strong, dependable men so they would care for their families and Elders. Also, like Mary, I had cousins who were pregnant at the same time as me in my Kuku Yalanji community in Mossman. We raised our children together and were always welcomed by our family and community members, who looked out for us and our bubbas. We were cared for by the Elders, who cooked us fresh Milku (mullet) soup, which is very high in omegas and thus nourishing for babies.

I heard this scripture being read recently in church. It's been a long time since I've heard it. What stood out to me when listening to the minister preach was how precious it is to God that women bear children. God nourished and guided me in my own pregnancies, especially through my family and community who welcomed and cared for me.

I think that stigma remains in the wider community when young women become pregnant – they are still sometimes shunned. We all need to do our bit to support any woman who is pregnant, especially given all she is going through with hormone changes, morning sickness, an identity shift and the new pressure of responsibility. How we view women impacts how we treat them.

Being a welcoming people means caring for all expectant mums, just as Elizabeth and Mary cared for each other.