

## New Zealand conference report and feedback

Thank you everyone who came to the conference and completed the feedback form. This was overwhelmingly positive but there are also useful lessons and pointers for future events.



**Overall, delegates were very positive:** "It has been incredibly valuable" "I am inspired to encourage other rural churches" "A wonderful experience - meeting those who work in rural across the globe and in different denominations".



The keynote speakers were especially well received: "Fabulous - touched my heart" and the learning community process overall was "Extremely valuable". Delegates "Loved the cultural experience" of the different times of worship and said it was "Fantastic to learn songs in new languages and hear God's word from other culture's perspective".

The local team did an amazing job on the wide choice of outings. Delegates "Loved the variety and enthusiastic people" and said the "Story telling was very powerful".

In the evenings we changed gear somewhat. Activities were "Culturally and richly diverse" and it was "Great to be able to laugh together."

Sharing resources – formally, informally and on the memory stick was "Very very important" and one delegate added that they were "Looking

forward to getting home to explore these".

There was much praise for the administration and organisation: "Outstanding job, very well done" "Great communication with updates, activities and information" and "Arrival assistance was fantastic" with a "Lovely warm attitude". The venue and amazing food was also warmly praised.

Looking to the future, there are things we did right: finding a brilliant local organiser who gathered a top notch team; automating booking and bio collection; and providing a pack including presentations on a USB stick. The basic elements also seem to be right: welcome reception, icebreaker, morning worship from different countries, keynotes, outing(s), lighter evening activities, case studies, and resource sharing. To this we could add more praying for each other and more story telling.

We have noted some areas for improvement including: Chose a country where we can easily get visas; get bursary applications in very early; and make IRCA officer nomination process clear in advance.

There are also **issues for reflection.**

- There were mixed views on the learning community groups: some wanted more diversity for cross cultural learning but some thought the country groups were too diverse. If we use this structure again it might be helpful to have both diverse and homogeneous groups for different activities.
- The case studies were much appreciated and we should have more of this and include stories; it was agreed we should restrict the time for each but perhaps five minutes rather than three.
- More resource sharing and line some up in advance. Meanwhile make clear that the website is used for resource sharing.
- IRCA meeting: some thought the IRCA review should be a smaller group or optional; alternatively, work to ensure everyone feels part of IRCA and retain a short Quadrennial General Meeting.



- We chose try to choose a venue 8 years in advance though lining up a Chair for this would not be easy. Possibly choose a Vice Chair who become the next Chair.
- We need to increase cultural diversity, though this is difficult because of communications issues and limited funds to support those from developing nations.
- How do we strengthen links with regional groups?
- How do we encourage more young people to come?
- Some who were more local wanted a shorter event but overall length was thought to be about right for those coming a long way and to develop relationships.
- The mix of activity and space seems about right: too much input for some, too much space for others!
- How do we get musicians / instruments for worship and maintain the multi-cultural dimension?



Finally, **topics suggested for future conferences** included:

- Mental healthcare
- Self-care in isolated service
- Bridging the gaps - between urban and rural, church and society and denominations
- Structures others have found helpful for servicing small rural churches
- Lay leader development
- Being ecumenical - what does it mean and how do we do it, models of mergers and collaboration
- How to speak to all generations
- Environment
- Theology of rural ministry.



We look forward to 2022!

Jerry Marshall, June 2018