

# Candour



Presbyterian Church  
of Aotearoa New Zealand

NEWS AND VIEWS FOR MINISTERS

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## The public face of Christianity



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## Contributions

We welcome responses to published articles. If you would like to write a piece replying to any of this month's featured articles, please contact:

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*Amanda Wells*

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# Good news and bad news

Amanda Wells

**I thought I knew what I would write in this editorial, but my words have been stolen by p16. Yes, please do get in touch when you face media difficulties (as many of you have already done). The media is scary and stressful when you are underprepared, but we can help.**

I could write instead about that recent, significant event called GA10. General Assemblies tend to dominate our work for a period of time beforehand and to produce a jet-lag like exhaustion afterwards. I am thankful to all the people in Christchurch who made my job run smoothly this time: Cecile, Ian and Stephen, to name just a few. And especially to Jose who, much to my surprise and delight, agreed to re-immers herself in the Presbyterian world for four days.

I sometimes wonder what an alien would make of a General Assembly. They are definitely easier to comprehend second or third time round but can still seem somewhat arcane even to those intimately involved with their workings. I always think that a GA doesn't represent the essence of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand particularly well (unless you consider that essence to partake of long business sessions easily snared in discussion of detail). The Church's public face should not be a meeting at which it talks about itself.

Our public face needs to reflect the values that are most important to us; the Gospel that we seek to live out. This was underscored by GA10's keynote speaker, Mick Duncan, who told stories about making space for strangers, and sitting and walking alongside them. Making disciples, in the words of the Moderator's theme. That's the face we need to present to the public.

Unfortunately the public is not so interested in this concept. It lacks oddness and controversy; the two news values most often associated with church-related stories. But we are readers/viewers too, and we need to take some of the blame for consuming this type of news. Do you feel a more intense (if slightly distasteful) interest in a colleague's fall from grace than in their successes? Not many choose to fight against their baser human natures.

Just look at the news of late. This week's *Listener* has no less than three columnists analysing the racism of now-departed TV presenter Paul Henry. Intense interest in Henry's somewhat pathetic comments also serves to disseminate their unappealing message. I was flicking past Radio Live last week and was appalled (if unsurprised) by the rednecks ringing up to add fuel to the racist flames. Henry's fall from grace gives the saga an appropriately conflict-based conclusion.

Likewise the Commonwealth Games have earned more column centimetres for their toilet facilities than their sporting feats, and again this week we are being fed sorry details of the deaths of the Kahui twins. News is not exactly a cheering business.

But doesn't this make Jesus' message all the more relevant? People are searching for something countercultural and the Church doesn't need to look far to find it. Mick Duncan's stories of Manila's slums fascinate because they are so at variance with our accepted norms. Who would give up their running water and flat screen TV for crowded poverty? Someone with a motivation so strong - but so countercultural. And Mick asks us to see him not as a freak but as a Christian doing what Christians are called to do.

This message isn't ever going to get a lot of traction in our mainstream media. It's too complex and too unresolved; neat and tidy endings are preferred. But those small stories of churches running a foodbank, or organising community events, or running parenting courses, or going out into their communities after the Christchurch earthquake; each of these forms part of a jigsaw that reveals a countercultural Gospel. Why would people serve others for no reward, or try to help those many view as deserving of their situation? These stories point our communities towards these questions. It's not a conclusive triumph but it may be the best we can hope to achieve in a secular world.

If you want to listen to Mick's stories again, they are available as audio on our website, along with a lot of other material from GA10. Any feedback you might want to give on our GA10 communications work is also very welcome, as we strive to do something better or different each time.

The November issue of *Candour* will have the theme "Different approaches to our changing context" and look at new ways of being church. Your contribution would be very welcome! The deadline will be 5 November. I am also opening to running some reflections on GA10 in the November issue - just drop me an email if you are interested.

# What does the 'comeback' of religion mean for us?

Andrew Bradstock\*

**G***od is Back* is the title of a new book by John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge: its subtitle is "How the global revival of faith is changing the world". These authors are not being ironic: religion is back on our radar today in a way we could never have imagined a generation ago. In the 1960s, commentators were confidently predicting the end of religion: now, to quote one of them, distinguished United States sociologist Peter Berger, the world is as "furiously religious" as it ever was!

It's not so much that there are more believers now than before, but that religion is again a force to reckon with. Statistics show that coverage of "religious" stories in the Western media has increased enormously in the last decade. Leaders of governments now need to know about the major faith traditions in order to understand the dynamic behind world events and the nature of their own societies. Some of these leaders even have a religious faith themselves and speak publicly about its influence on them. Perhaps it is no surprise that religion is now under greater attack than it has been for years: why would Dawkins and Hitchens devote so much time to rubbishing belief in God if God were not making a comeback?

Partly this "comeback" has been triggered by developments casting religion in a negative light, like 9/11 and the bombings in Madrid, London, Bali and elsewhere. Although virtually all religious people, like everybody else, would not hesitate to condemn these atrocities, casual usage in the media of terms like "Muslim fundamentalism" and "militant Islam" has served to confirm suspicions that religion is often dangerous and destructive. Religion is not well understood by commentators and opinion formers – its re-emergence has caught many by surprise and they are struggling for the grammar to explain it – but there's a widespread perception that it has little to contribute to the public good and is best kept to the "private sphere".

**I**t's not so much that there are more believers now than before, but that religion is again a force to reckon with

This is a huge challenge to us in the Christian Church. How do people see us and our faith today? What sort of "public face" does Christianity have at present? How well are our beliefs and practices understood? What would the average New Zealander say if asked what purpose they thought the churches in their town were serving? Because, let's face it, it's not just Islam that it is let down by a small number of people on its extremes, that gets a bad name because of the actions of the few.

Christianity has also had a pretty dreadful press of late, which has seriously affected how people see all of us who embrace that label. We don't need to dwell on all the gory details, but even if we limit ourselves to events of the past few weeks – the uncovering of horrendous levels of child abuse in the Roman Catholic church, and the virulent attacks on Islam in the form of opposition to the building of a mosque and cultural centre near Ground Zero and threats to burn the Qur'an – we see much of which to be ashamed. How do we react?

It's a truism, of course, that "bad news" stories are generally the only stories that get reported. A church can get on with serving its community faithfully for generations and never get a mention in the local paper, but if one of its leaders starts fiddling the books or gets caught driving over the limit, that will be headline news! So it is on the larger stage: serious journalists will say that the two kinds of people they generally find in the most deprived and abandoned areas of the world are evangelical Christians and Catholic nuns, yet it's the members of these traditions who cause

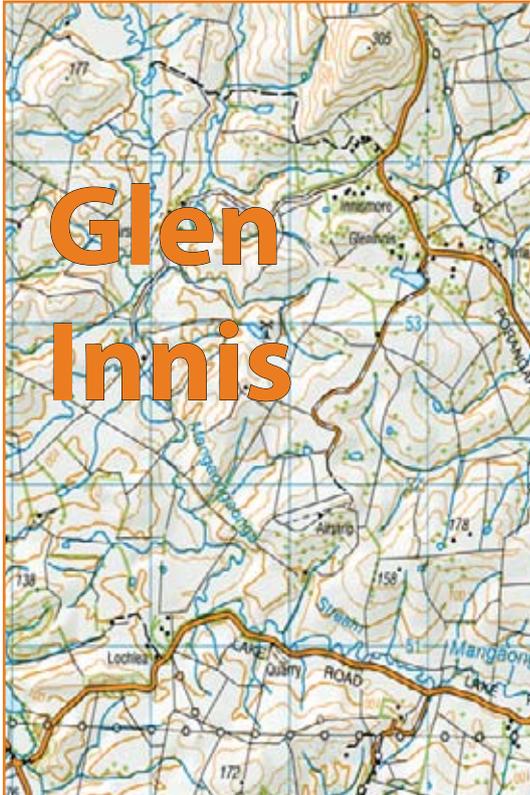
scandal who make the news, not those quietly getting on with being the hands and feet of Christ to the poor.

While, in the days leading up to the anniversary of 9/11, the world's media chose to focus on the obscure pastor of an obscure church and his threat to burn copies of the holy book of Islam, many other Christians in the US were getting on with just being good neighbours to Muslims in their town and discovering how church and mosque could work together to serve the local community. Even in that pastor's town, some 2000 Christians came together, on the eve of 9/11, for a "gathering for peace, understanding and hope" – but that didn't cause quite the same international stir!

On his visit to New Zealand last month, US church leader Jim Wallis suggested it is largely those on the "extremes" who set the news agenda today, whether in the caves of Afghanistan or in tiny fundamentalist churches in Florida. He mentioned how this can lead to distorted perceptions of reality – for example, that Christian antipathy to Islam is increasing – but also how pressure on the media to report stories that would give a more *balanced* perspective can reap results. On one level, we can hardly blame the media for devouring wacky religious stories when religious people feed them to them, but we also have a responsibility to promote the truth and ensure that people do not mistake distorted or false representations of the Gospel for the "real thing".

The unreported truth is that followers of Jesus are a massive force for good in the world. In towns, villages and neighbourhoods around the country, churches faithfully serve the spiritual and material needs of those around them, often largely unsung. At the national and global level, Christians, along with people of all faiths and none, are making a massive difference to the big issues of our day – including poverty, unfair trade, climate change and sex trafficking – through their committed, selfless action. At the end of the day we do it because it is what God calls us to do and because it is right, not in the hope of approbation from the world; and we accept that there will always be those offended by the Gospel, just as people were by Jesus himself. But we are called to be wise as serpents (Matt 10.16), and in our media-driven culture I think that means not passively allowing others to determine how people perceive us, but showing as best we can the difference our message can make to individuals, communities and the world at large.

*\*Andrew Bradstock is Howard Paterson Professor of Theology and Public Issues at the University of Otago, Dunedin*



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# What is our public face?

*Susan Jones, Timaru Presbyterian Parish, South Canterbury*

**C**hurch members often believe the public face of Christianity is church buildings. A friend recently was asked by a Teachers' College student if churches were "those buildings with funny towers". The entire class of prospective teachers found it difficult to name local churches at all. Yet an advocate for preservation of heritage churches during that same month named the spire high above the city buildings as a Christian witness. Who to?

We know the Exodus. It is preached and told in children's talks through the church. Leaving the old bondage and moving voluntarily towards the Promised Land is in our Christian psyche, but usually spiritually not geographically. We might be better to learn the hard lessons of the exile - a less popular message. The Israelites' shock at losing the Temple was palpable. They felt there was no way they could sing the Lord's song in a foreign land. Yet, scholars believe the synagogue movement was born in the exile. God, they discovered, was far from being contained within the temple.

Our churches, so dear to us, carrying so many sacred memories for us, can mean little to the very ones we want to introduce to the God who is the mainstay of our life. The same churches that are dear to us may, in fact, hold back others from discovering that God. Yet also, in this age when ancient-future is a resonating mix of aesthetic for postmoderns, older churches may come into their own. Wandering around an historic, darkened but candle-lit sanctuary, reflecting on themed stations in one's own time, is very a different experience from singing corporately to organ music on Sunday morning.

**T**he same churches that are dear to us may, in fact, hold back others from discovering that God

Huge tensions arise when buildings are the topic.

Timaru Presbyterian parish amalgamated in November 2009 – joining four former parishes, each with their own site and complex of buildings. For half a year we have been working together and finding the joys and the tensions in that. Different congregations and different buildings have led to different customs and procedures and it is exciting work to achieve clear communication!

Another public face in the Timaru Presbyterian parish is the employment of a ministry team. For centuries, ministers have been trained to be sole-charge clergy. That has had varying effects. Sometimes the charismatic personality turns arrogant or the introverted minister slides into burnout. For every successful sole charge ministry, there can be another where the focus on only one minister is problematic, due to the minister, the parish, the parish leadership or all three!

I notice today's world doesn't expect superhuman ministers anymore. People who will work with others are valued. Outsiders expect cooperation rather than division. Churches cooperating and ministers working in teams make sense to regular people who look on from outside. A major plus in the Timaru Presbyterian parish is the team ministry. Having other colleagues to run issues past, having varied points of view on a problem, having back-up, and the enrichment of thought through the input of other ministers is really valuable – both for the ministers and the people. Looking for a fourth minister to join that team, we are wondering if others view team ministry differently from how we have found it.

Do ministers feel they will lose their individuality in a team? Do they feel they would always have to be the leader of the team not "just" a member? Do they feel their particular flavour or style would not come through? I would be disappointed if that was preventing more ministers embracing team ministry when given the opportunity. In a collegially run team like Timaru, it is a good thing that

we blend and mix our styles and personalities. We need the “go with the flow” types along with those who can get it down on paper or through a process. We need the dreamers and the practical people, the visionaries and the administrators, and the range of ages and experience.

The public face of Christianity has often been the charismatic, tele-evangelist type of preacher, and society is wary of the fragility of such pedestal-occupying ministry. I don't know if at Timaru we manage to role-model the Trinity all the time! Cooperating in love and service, however, seems to express the role model of relationship that the divine Three offer us for our own communities of faith. How great it would be if the ultimate team ministry (Trinity) was modelled in all the ministries that lead our Presbyterian faith communities! Team ministry is exciting stuff. It stretches and grows ministers and people. It contributes a different public face to Christianity than we have known for millennia.



奧克蘭華人長老會

Auckland Chinese Presbyterian Church

*To know Christ and to make Him known amongst  
all generations of Chinese in New Zealand*

## Senior Minister

The Auckland Chinese Presbyterian Church (ACPC) is one of the congregations of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. Situated in the heart of Auckland's CBD, it has been a telling witness to the grace of God among the Cantonese immigrants to New Zealand for over a hundred years. Its present congregation includes long-time local Chinese, recent immigrants from South East Asia as well as English-speaking New Zealand-born Chinese.

It is this feature of the ACPC which makes this a unique call to serve a vibrant bi-lingual, cross-cultural congregation, on the one hand, to empower it to continue its strong tradition of Chinese culture and, on the other, to answer the needs of a modern, forward-looking group of young professionals.

The ACPC has followed the Presbyterian tradition of eldership. In both the Cantonese and the English Ministries elders and youth leaders assist and support the minister in both spiritual and administrative matters.

We are looking for a Senior Minister with oversight of the ACPC but with particular responsibility for our Cantonese ministry. S/he will be fluent in Cantonese and be competent in English. Standard Terms of Call apply with housing included and some assistance with removal expenses is negotiable.

In due course, the Senior Minister will assist in the call of a full time assistant/associate minister with particular responsibility for the English-speaking ministry.

Auckland Chinese Presbyterian Church

105 Vincent Street, Auckland 1010, New Zealand | [www.acpc.org.nz](http://www.acpc.org.nz)

enquiries and expressions of interest to: Dr Albert Ko [settlementboard@acpc.org.nz](mailto:settlementboard@acpc.org.nz)

# Public perception of faith and Church in our www.world

*Howard Carter, Student Soul, Auckland*

**“It’s regrettable that a pastor of a church down in Florida of less than 50 can make this outrageous, distressful and disgraceful plan and get the world’s attention but that is the world we live in today.” - Hillary Clinton (on Dr Terry Jones’ plan to burn Qur’ans on 9/11)**

It’s interesting to see what makes the news and how the Christian faith and Church are perceived and portrayed in the media. I’m going to touch on several items and incidents that have appeared in media recently that for me reflect what people think.

In the lead up 9/11 this year, I received an email from a friend in Hamilton asking me (as part of a news group she has of her friends) to respond to the plan of Pastor Dr Terry Jones to burn the Qu’ran as a way of commemorating the terrorist attack on New York’s twin towers in 2001. At first I thought that this must be the action of a mega church to attract such a response worldwide. However, it was a church that size-wise would sit comfortably within our denomination. Jones’ plans had prompted effigy burnings and public demonstrations in Afghanistan and elsewhere in the Muslim world.

Quite rightly they received condemnation by presidents and government officials in the US and floods of responses from round the world. You could join a Facebook group asking Jones and his church to reconsider their proposed course of action. The interactive media I read on the subject had hundreds of responses, many calling for tolerance and respect between faiths and others that were vociferously poignant in reflecting the intolerance that they were supposedly against. I myself wrote an email to Jones suggesting that a better (not bitter) Christ-like response might be to raise funds for flood relief in Pakistan, a Muslim country.

**S**adly the incident served to reinforce a stereotype of Christians as intolerant and capable of hate crime

Sadly the incident served to reinforce a stereotype of Christians as intolerant and capable of what in many people’s minds would have been classed as hate crime. Fortunately the furore over the event and the intervention of Muslim and Christian people in Gainesville, Florida, averted the incident. As I reflected on where Christ was in this, I was surprised where my reflections lead me. In the midst of the media hype, a head-scarf wearing Angela Jolie (St Angela perhaps ☺) appeared on camera touring flood-devastated Pakistan, where she had gone to heighten public awareness of the plight of 12 million Pakistani people, in what was being described as a “devastating crawling tsunami”. The other glimpse of Christ at work came in the warmth with which other moderate and reconciliatory voices were heard, like Jim Wallis and Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf. Rauf is behind the New York Islamic Cultural Center at the centre of controversy in New York City. Wallis describes him as a good friend and says Rauf and his wife, Daisy Khan, “are genuine peacemakers”.

The few movies I have had a chance to view recently also have been a window into how the Church and Christianity are viewed in the wider world. Sadly, they have portrayed the Church as distant and disconnected.

*Harry Brown* (2009) is an English thriller that I went to see because of the reviews of Michael Caine’s portrayal of a vigilante, ex-marine pensioner living on an estate in an advanced stage of urban decay. The aesthetics of the film reminded me of a couple of post apocalyptic movies I had seen on DVD earlier in the year (*The Road* and *The Book of Eli*). Sadly the only time the Church appears in this movie is after Brown kills a major criminal and deposits the money he has taken as a result

in a church's poor box. The church seems to be an oasis of peace, but it is not connected with real life and it stands empty. The glance that Brown gives to the cross at the front of the church seems to look for help and hope, but these are missing from the world to which he returns. Likewise, in the Australian crime drama *Animal Kingdom* (2010), there is a world of crime, family and societal decay in which the main character "J" finds himself trapped. Again I was surprised that a church appeared in this film, be it only for the funeral of J's betrayed and murdered uncle. Again the church was portrayed as cold and empty; even in the midst of this sad family event it didn't seem to be a place of solace and help. J's other uncles simply stood outside and plotted their revenge. I would hope that there is more hope that what is portrayed in such movies.

Fortunately the same week that I saw *Animal Kingdom* I also found the DVD *The End of the Spear* in a bargain bin. Although it was written off by critics as Christian propaganda, its real life story of the Christian Gospel's ability to bring new life, reconciliation, purpose and the love of enemies was a much-needed counter narrative to these other dark stories.

**W**e need to go public but also need to realise that everything we do today can echo and reverb round the world

In New Zealand this year we have had both positive and negative spins on church stories. It was good to hear the voices of Sir Paul Reeves and our own Lloyd Geering recently speaking out on the youth drinking culture in New Zealand. While these people are officially seen as "living treasures" in our nation, it was interesting to see how little impact their bold comments and show of unity had (it was good to see GA10 add its collective voice on this issue). "Billboard" disputes also captured the media's attention with both negative (think tolerance) and quite positive outcomes.

Sadly it was almost with a sense of glee that the *New Zealand Herald* and other news services reported that the man whom Bishop Brian Tamaki calls his "spiritual father" had been accused of sexual impropriety. In any other case Brian might be seen as a victim of a betrayal of trust and I couldn't help but hear the echo of the sarcastic "aha aha" that the first book of Psalms puts in the mouth of those who oppose the psalmist. With the earthquake in Christchurch, it was interesting to see the public concern that was shown for church buildings in the region and the positive spin put on churches persevering with worship in the face of such setbacks. It was even reported as a positive thing to see the church step out of its buildings into the public domain and offer solace, normality and a chance to give thanks to God in the face of this disaster.

With the power of technology, media and the Internet, what we do and say in public, even in our isolated communities, can have far-reaching consequences and effects. Comments can be catalysts for positive change or flash points for division and derision. They can point people to Christ or reinforce people's negative stereotypes of our faith. I blog ([howard-carter.blogspot.com](http://howard-carter.blogspot.com)) and one of the things that amazes me is seeing the statistics for page views: what I write is read around the world in places as varied as Germany, Canada, Denmark, China and Latvia. Admittedly Google's image search accounts for some of those but it is interesting to think that the musings and reflections of a small time Presbyterian minister at the bottom of the world can have an effect around the world (even if in a small way). However, with that possibility of global impact comes responsibility. We need to go public but also need to realise that everything we do today can echo and reverb round the world, particularly on a slow news day.

It is the irony of our www.world that the following quote remains true.

*"Don't think that small groups of people can't change the world, they're the only ones who have."*

- Anthropologist Margaret Mead (quoted in Jim Wallis' *Faithworks* (2000))

## Do you hear a call to serve God in Vanuatu?

### Can you teach English to theological students?

A position is available at Talua Ministry Training Centre, beginning in 2011. It is supported by the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and the Council for World Mission (See the article in *Spanz*, June 2010, page 23).

We need someone who has a theological background, can teach English and also:

- Has respect for those of other cultures and has skill in working cross culturally
- Is flexible, resilient and adventurous
- Will enjoy participating in the community life of the theological campus

For more information, contact:

Kevin Heath, kevsue@eol.co.nz  
or c/- St Andrews Presbyterian Church, PO Box 4255, Mt Maunganui, 3149

### Vacancy - St Andrew's Symonds Street (Senior Minister)

St Andrew's is a lively and multicultural parish with two vibrant congregations meeting on a Sunday morning.

We are a diverse, welcoming, friendly and inclusive community. There already exists a very strong platform for future growth and development. The parish has been blessed with incremental growth in recent years.

The parish has a unique "inner city" mission and ministry opportunity, with a great location and strong ties with the University of Auckland and adjacent CBD.

We are looking for a Senior Minister with particular responsibility for the needs of our international congregation who brings the following strengths and emphases in ministry:

- a commitment to biblical scholarly preaching and teaching, with a reformed and evangelical commitment that has academic rigour.
- an effective leader of worship that is formal and dignified but allowing for flexibility to cater for the youth of the parish through other worship styles.
- highly developed interpersonal skills that will allow you to lead in outreach and hospitality.
- attributes of understanding, empathy and ability to work with our Indonesian congregation, and their minister.
- skill in delegation and consultation together with an approachable and hospital nature.
- standard terms of Call (housing allowance not manse).

Contact person: Rev David Williams (Convenor of Settlement Board williams.dn@gmail.com or mobile 021798002) – Parish Profile available via email.

# Songs and poems for peace/ justice/creation

John Thornley\*

**The Amnesty Freedom Week, 1-7 August 2010, was associated this year in Palmerston North with a programme of songs and poems offered at Wesley Broadway Church.**

The event was co-organised by the "Off the Street" Arts and Theology Centre and Amnesty Palmerston North. It took place on the Saturday afternoon of 23 July, and included refreshments following the programme, which lasted about one hour and a quarter.

We were fortunate to have Roy Tankersley, Palmerston North church musician, leading on keyboard. For the majority of those attending, around 45 total, the nine songs sung would have been met for the first time. But by his skilful use of the treble line, highlighting the melody, Roy was able to give a strong lead to the singing. A small group of eight persons meeting for one hour the evening earlier also helped with the collective singing.

All songs were taken from the four collections of the New Zealand Hymnbook Trust: "Let justice roll down", "Is there no other way", "God of the galaxies", from *Alleluia Aotearoa*; "May the anger of Christ be mine" and "These hills", from *Faith Forever Singing*, and "Love is your way", "Peace to the world", "Look in wonder", and "Leftover people", from *Hope is our Song*. Two songs were sung by a solo singer: "God weeps", from *Faith Forever Singing*, and "My heart is leaping", from *Hope is our Song*.

Most of the poems read were by international writers, reflecting the focal Amnesty themes of unjust imprisonment, torture, racial and ethnic violence; written by an inmate of the Guantanamo Bay detention centre, a Palestinian exile, and a former prisoner on Robben Island under the apartheid regime. Dorothy Alexander, a member of Wesley Broadway, read two of her own poems, dealing with issues of poverty and alienation among youth in Aotearoa New Zealand.

**The event was an illustration of a Church expressing a public theology**

I served as storyteller, providing a linking commentary. Two Biblical passages, inspiration for the song texts, were read: Amos 5:21-24, for "Let justice roll down", and Mark 11:15-17, Jesus driving the money changers out of the temple, for "May the anger of Christ be mine".

A photograph of Earth, moving in the darkness of the universe, stood on an easel at front, and provided visual support to the songs dealing with the Creation songs, with these words of introduction: "The image of Earth spinning in the vastness of space is one of the iconic pictures for our times, evoking our awe at the immensity of space in our universe, and just one universe among many, many more, and the fragility of this spaceship earth, only home for bird, fish and animal including humankind. In the following two songs, Shirley Murray conveys our feelings of both awe and anxiousness." "God of the galaxies" and "Look in wonder" were then sung.

Special guest poet was Ahmed Zaoui, a former university lecturer and politician in his country of birth, Algeria. Ahmed spent time in Paremoro Prison, following accusations of terrorism. He now lives in Palmerston North, and with family involvement has set up a caravan in the Square, selling kebabs and other traditional Middle Eastern foods. The poems, read in Arabic and translated in to English, were written during his 10-month solitary confinement in Paremoro.

The event was an illustration of a Church expressing a public theology. New Zealanders are fortunate to have a significant body of songs, words and music by New Zealanders, giving expression to a public theology. With singable texts of integrity and relevance to the current issues of our day, these

songs can be sung not only at Sunday worship but in civic/public ceremonies for peace (Anzac Day, Hiroshima Day), nationhood (Waitangi Day), school prize-givings, environment and creation-centred activities, and multicultural and citizenship events.

Can our society find and use songs we can all sing?

Or will our spiritual rituals become platforms for only individual performers and celebrities?

Can we hold on to Sly and the Family Stone's vision: "Everybody is a star"?

The Amnesty fundraiser event began with this quotation from Bernice Johnson Reagon, leader of the African-American women's *a cappella* group, Sweet Honey in the Rock, who was interviewed by Brian Edwards when the group toured New Zealand. His question: does music have the power to bring about social change?

*I always tell people that you cannot get freedom by singing a song, so you have to do more. Song is an accompaniment. Song is a way of maintaining a balance. It's a way of having a glue. It can hold you together. It can help you to maintain sanity and your humanity if you're in a fight. If you find a song, the extent to which you become embittered is handled a bit better. The arts do that in general, but if you want to be free you're gonna have to do a bit more than sing. You have to be an organiser, and you have to be willing to come together with people, some of them you may not like a lot, but you might have enough in common to work together and to strategise on a goal. If you sing while you do it, you'll stay together longer.*

*\*John Thornley is the Co-Manager of the NZ Hymnbook Trust. This article was first published in the Spring 2010 issue of Word and Worship.*

## Forming a church planting and church growth support network

### Do you have a passion for church planting?

- Whether they be new congregations in existing parishes
- New and innovative ideas for connecting with your community
- Door to door evangelism strategies
- New churches in new subdivisions

...in fact any ideas that you have found to have worked in your context and would like to be linked to others so you can share ideas and resources.

I invite you to send me your email address so we can form a network of support and encouragement

Send it to the Rev Jim Wallace, [wallacej@wave.co.nz](mailto:wallacej@wave.co.nz)

## Ministry Exchange/Overseas Ministry Opportunities

### **Presbyterian Church (USA) – Michigan**

A minister of the Presbyterian Church (USA) seeks a three-month exchange in 2013. The minister comes from a mid-to-large-sized ecumenical church that was planted in the mid-1980s in an area that attracts a lot of tourists. The church is active in the community, providing an afterschool youth programme, monthly community meals and a discussion group at a local brewery. The minister would be on sabbatical here as part of his doctoral studies, which are focusing on Reformed theology in a postmodern setting.

### **Presbyterian Church of Canada – Owen Sound, Ontario**

A minister from a large urban parish seeks an exchange with a minister in the South Island for approximately three months. The minister's parish has a ministry team and staff and has a strong focus on homelessness and poverty. The parish offers both contemporary and traditional services.

### **United Church of Canada – Ontario**

A minister from a mid-sized rural parish seeks a three-month exchange between May and October 2011.

### **Presbyterian Church in Canada**

A Presbyterian minister from a multicultural parish near Vancouver seeks an exchange.

### **United Church of Canada – Nova Scotia**

A minister of a historic church in Halifax seeks a six-month exchange from September 2010.

### **Presbyterian Church (USA) – North Carolina**

A minister in team ministry in Charlotte is seeking an exchange with a New Zealand minister.

Please contact Juliette Bowater on [juliette@presbyterian.org.nz](mailto:juliette@presbyterian.org.nz) for more information.

## YOUTH WORKER Mosgiel Presbyterian Church

*Just out of Dunedin  
Christ Centred – Community Facing*

Employment and training offered.

Start Feb 2011

Job description and terms available:  
Rev Helen Martin  
[hmartin@xtra.co.nz](mailto:hmartin@xtra.co.nz), or 03-489 6156

# Until Kingdom come!

*John Murray, Minister Emeritus, Wellington*

**J**esus was not a social worker. Jesus was a prophet. His life was to bring the Gospel into sharp engagement with the world - his message was the coming of the Kingdom.

Jesus was not a recluse, a mystic calling us to the desert of self abnegation. His three temptations were to do with the bread of life, the temptation of power and the delusion of the introspective super-ego.

Or in short, Jesus' message and mission can be summed up in the phrase "public theology"; God in the world. Part of this is our personal faith, yours and mine, in helping to bring in the Kingdom - but this public theology comes first or else our personal faith ends up as unworldly spirituality.

The Church is therefore the primary but not the exclusive agent of the Kingdom, of "Godness" in the world.

So, in past years, our Presbyterian Church had a Public Questions Committee, not to forget an International Affairs Committee, to express, however inadequately, the Gospel engagement with our community and the politics of our country.

This engagement covered not only the revered questions of alcohol and Bible in schools - but the more controversial and difficult areas of war and peace, contraception and abortion, rugby and apartheid, Treaty issues and Maori and Pakeha relations - not to mention the ever-ongoing question of homosexuality and sin.

So what of today? Consider the pressing issues of oil and energy, water and privatisation, food and the hungry, women's rights, poverty and war expenditure, West v East, Christianity and Islam.

And so it continues. What does the Gospel say? How do the Churches - the Churches together - engage with these issues to make a Kingdom of difference?

It is not a matter of choice, or whether we can afford public theology or not. It is certainly not solved by disbanding the Public Questions and the International Relations committees as we have done. The Church that is not involved in public issues with "Kingdom come!" is nothing more than a pietistic institution.

*\*The Very Rev John Murray was convener of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand's Public Questions Committee from 1975 to 1982.*



## Opportunities to serve God in Timaru!

Want to minister in a church moving to meet the needs of its community in the Central South Island heartland? Join the Timaru Presbyterian Parish (TPP) Ministry Team.

TPP was incorporated in November 2009 from four parishes. We need a Nationally trained Minister to join our Ministry Team of 2.5 full time equivalent ministers serving four worship centres.

For our final team member we are looking at two possibilities. One is an ordained minister who is a youth specialist and can lead us in a youth programme to revitalise the parish. The other possibility is a minister who would specialise in pastoral care of the elderly. If either of these two styles of ministry interest you and you would like the collegiality of working in a team, contact us.

For job descriptions and a profile of the parish please email or write to Bill Penno, Convenor of the Ministry Settlement Board

[bill.penno@xtra.co.nz](mailto:bill.penno@xtra.co.nz)

"Greenacres", No 10 RD, Waimate

# New hymnbook wins praise

*Catherine Macdonald, Director of Music, St Andrew's, Gisborne Presbyterian Parish*

*Hope is our Song.* Published by the New Zealand Hymn Book Trust

**A**s long-term users of the three hymn books published by NZHBT, the musicians and clergy of Gisborne Presbyterian Parish were excited to hear of the publication of the new hymn book, and two of us were pleased to be able to attend the conference and launch at Labour Weekend 2009. We took with us Parish Council permission to buy a choir set of the new book, and since then we have been using it extensively.

It was a pleasure to meet some old friends published here; several Colin Gibson pieces: "Speaking up" (126); "How much am I worth?" (63); "In the name of Christ" (75); Bill Wallace's "Deep in the human heart" (19); Stan Stewart's "Christians are all kinds of people" (16). However, there is a world of new friends to be met. It is a shame to single out pieces, as I have barely scratched the surface of the resources available, and every look or even skim-through reveals new treasures. My book bristles with "post-its" and bookmarks from various surveys.

We have introduced 27 pieces in the 42 Sunday services since the book was launched, which is more than one a fortnight. Several have been sung by the choir as an anthem, such as "I cannot dance" (66), words by Jean Janzen after Mechtilde of Magdeburg, tune Colin Gibson, or "Companions, let us pray together" (21), words by David Clark and Witi Ihimaera, tune David Hamilton. Colin Gibson's "Take a grape" (127) was a lighthearted Harvest Festival offering, using appropriate props; and Shirley Murray's meaningful Pentecost words set to a Colin Gibson tune in "Make spaces for the spirit" (96) fitted our Pentecost service.

Often, the congregation will be introduced to a hymn or song as an anthem before learning it themselves. Some have been sung each week for a month as Introit (e.g. "Simply to be" (118) Gibson/Murray) or Blessing (e.g. two settings of Shirley Murray words, by Jillian Bray in "The blessing of water" (130) and Barry Brinson in "Peace be with you" (111)). Christmas saw us singing Jim Strathdee's tune to Shirley Murray's "Look in wonder" (93), and Colin Gibson's tune to more Murray words in "The light, the Christmas light" (132), and Easter introduced "Where the light of Easter Day" (153) Bray/Murray. Bill Bennett's rollicking "Rocking the Boat" (117), and "God of the northerlies" (45) have been enjoyed, at different times. Depths that I have not yet plumbed include a range of child-friendly songs, contemplative worship songs, including some of the gentle pieces introduced to us at the conference by composer Robyn Allen Goudge, and celebration of creation (including Colin Gibson's "Hymn of thanks for pets", discovered in great delight by a chorister, and to be used in the Sunday nearest St Francis' Day). The music in this book lends itself well to the worship style of our congregation, where we lack music leadership of the guitar-and-drums kind, and are usually accompanied by our grand pipe organ, or, for more upbeat songs, a grand piano.

At the conference we were challenged by a delegate who looked at the gathering of grey heads and asked where the youth were, querying the relevance of this book to young people and their music. She did not feel able to recommend much of the music to her home worship team. She felt that, for her, the book would be a great resource of Christian poetry. However, many of the pieces in this collection are suitable for guitar accompaniment, and about a third of the pieces (50 out of about 150 tunes) do include the chords. (Of the 158 songs in the book, 14 comprise lyrics only, with a suggested tune for singing. Some have two tune options.)

The book certainly lives up to its predecessors, our pastor finding the tunes perhaps even more singable and teachable. The Theme and Church Year indices are, once again, invaluable. The additional indices are extremely welcome; particularly the Biblical Index, the Index of Tunes and Index of Titles and First Lines. The Glossary of Maori Words is also of interest, even to a many-generation European-Pakeha kiwi. There are four hymns with Maori lyrics, including a translation of "Honour the Dead— a hymn for ANZAC Day" (61) Gibson/Murray. I counted 52 contributors including multiple selections from Shirley Murray, to whom NZ and the world is grateful for relevant, beautiful and strong words to sing, and Colin Gibson, whose contribution to NZ hymnody cannot be overstated.

I am delighted to see the book was printed in New Zealand. And delighted to report that the first printing sold out within a month of the official launch, and that a second printing was required. Congratulations to the New Zealand Hymn Book Trust for a quality product.

# Like a possum in headlights?

*Martin Baker*

**I recall with some degree of horror the image of a blurry figure moving at an alarming speed back and forth across the television screen. Thankfully, this was not a public broadcast but an in-house attempt at media training at what was then the Theological Hall. Someone had got their hands on an early version of a home video camera. A cumbersome thing, which involved a VHS video recorder incorporated into the workings of a machine, almost military in its dimensions, with a lens in the front.**

The blurry image on the screen was me, rocking to and fro with the anxiety of being the subject of the camera's attentions. Was this going to be my moment of budding tele-evangelism fame, first recorded in the dim light of the Knox College chapel where our speech lessons were held? Our instructor, on seeing the image, suggested to me that if ever I found myself speaking in front of a camera I should try to imagine my feet nailed to the floor. I have never forgotten his advice, but I am not sure it has helped reduce my sense of anxiety.

Here at the Assembly Office we subscribe to a clippings service that sends us any news articles that mention the word "Presbyterian". Alongside our monitoring of the broadcast media, this has given me a strong impression that overall, congregations and ministers do a good job of presenting positive media stories. Some of our colleagues have real skills in writing op ed pieces for their local newspapers and others have done very creditable jobs of appearing on television.

The biggest challenge we have as far as the media is concerned is dealing with situations where things are not going well. Conflict sells stories. And church conflict or conflict involving ministers, especially if there is criminal activity, sexual scandal or something that seems bizarre, sells lots of stories. While there are some very interesting Biblical or theological reflections we could develop around the fascination humans have with the pain and downfall of others, we cannot blame the media for this focus. It is their job. But it is our job to do our very best to ensure that nothing we say or do brings our work or that of our Church's ministry into disrepute.

When the reporter rings you, or the cameras come to your door, no amount of indignation or a perceived sense of unfairness or righteousness is going to make the story go away. The story will almost always run, with or without you. Everything you say or do from the point at which you are contacted may be used in a story. You can be interviewed at length, and in the time of that interview make just one slightly off-the-wall comment or aside, and that one thing might be the only thing that you are reported as saying. No media have the time, let alone the budget to relate everyone's point of view in a fair and balanced way. A reporter may have a 400-word limit or a 30-second television screening time to tell the story. Just to make it more challenging, it is not just what you say, but how you say it, plus the background behind you in the photo, the angle of the camera lens and various other subtle devices, that reinforce a particular emphasis.

Ideally, you should be always looking to convey a sense of fairness, intelligence, integrity, transparency, good humour, openness, care and concern. Almost inevitably, a church story emerging out of a situation of conflict will convey the opposite qualities.

Even in difficult situations, it is very important that we seek to engage with the media in positive ways. There may be some times when saying "no comment" is all you can do, but usually it is much more positive to say, for instance: "Our Church has some good processes for dealing with these important issues. While we work through the process I am sorry but I can't say anything else about this matter at this time".

If there is a possibility that you are going to be interviewed, especially over some matter of conflict, give Amanda or Angela (our communications team) a call at Assembly office. They can give you advice and resources, as well as advise you whether or not you should agree to an interview at all. I have found it very useful to attend a media-training programme. Amanda and Angela can provide these opportunities from time-to-time around the country, and email Amanda for a copy of the very useful little card she has given me to stick by my phone. It reminds me to prepare for an interview and to think about the key messages I want to tell the reporter.

Back in 1968, at the dawn of our media era, Andy Warhol said: "In the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes". If it is going to be 15 minutes for us, let us work to make them ones that testify to our faith and hope.