

CANDOUR

News and Views for Ministers

Number 7, August 2005
Published by Presbyterian Publishing Company Ltd
PO Box 9049, Wellington

Finance and resourcing

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Candour is a monthly magazine about ministry and leadership. It is published by the Presbyterian Publishing Company Ltd. For more information, contact:

Communications Unit
Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand
PO Box 9049
Wellington.

Selected articles also appear on the Church's website at www.presbyterian.org.nz/candour

Disclaimer

The articles in *Candour* reflect the views of individual ministers or contributors writing in a personal capacity. They are not representative of the Church's official position.

Please approach the author for permission if you wish to copy an article.

Grants for postgraduate funding

The School of Ministry has trust funds at its disposal that are available for making grants to ministers for postgraduate study. The School has a regular schedule of grants, and is seeking expressions of interest and applications for its present round.

The decision as to whether or not a grant will be made to an applicant will be made on the following basis -

- the proposed course of study will aid the applicant's professional development
- there will be potential for benefit to the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand
- there will be probable significant service to the church
- parish and presbytery approval will have been given where appropriate

Decisions will be made by Senatus along with a representative from the wider Church.

Applications will be called for, normally, twice a year.

No retrospective grants will be made.

The closing date for the present round of applications is 31 September 2005. Applications should be sent to:

The Registrar
School of Ministry
Knox College
Arden St
Dunedin

or e-mailed to registrar@knoxcollege.ac.nz

Candour delivery

Thanks to everyone who has returned their form or emailed me their preference. I've enjoyed getting a sense of the number of interested *Candour* readers out there. So what was the result?

One-third of those who replied wanted to receive a paper copy, with many giving donations towards this. The remaining two-thirds said they wanted *Candour* by email. This means we have been able to substantially reduce the print run.

The subscription exercise also means that we will no longer be sending *Candour* to people who are not actively interested in receiving it. However, if you know someone who hasn't returned their form or contacted me but who would still like a copy of the magazine, please encourage them to get in touch.

Subscribers: please contact me if you change your postal or email address (whichever is relevant).

Amanda Wells
Email: candour@presbyterian.org.nz
Telephone: 04 3818285

Contributions

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

Articles on upcoming themes are also appreciated:

September: Life of clergy

Deadline: 30 August

October: Cross-cultural mission

Deadline: 30 September

November: New congregations

Deadline: 1 November

Advertising

One-quarter page: \$80 plus gst (8 x 12.5cm)

One-third page: \$95 plus gst (8 x 16.5cm)

Half page: \$130 plus gst (12 x 16.5cm)

Any artwork must be supplied electronically and in a high-resolution format.

Glen Innis Vacancies

August 29 - September 5	Homestead/Cottage
September 5 - 12	Homestead/Cottage
September 12 - 19	Homestead/Cottage
September 19 - 26	Cottage

To enquire about vacancies, please email glen.innis@xtra.co.nz or telephone 06 855-4889

Mission possible: Money matters

John Daniel, national mission enabler

A Baptist colleague recently commented that Jesus talked about money more than he talked about heaven or hell. Now I haven't been counting — nor do I wish to make any connection between money and heaven/hell — but there is enough about finances in the Bible to encourage us to consider seriously what we do in this area. This issue of *Candour* seeks to do that.

Financial management in the church has to do with why we exist — to better enable us to love one another as Christ loved us and for mission

The writers remind us of:

- the importance of prayer
- resources, including property, being mission-focussed and mission-driven
- mission action planning/budgeting
- diagnosing and treating ailing parishes
- restructuring for more effective financing, prioritising and not under-investing in crucial areas
- the Assembly budget, status and analysis
- statistics on attendance and giving

The articles that follow are rich in perspectives, possibilities and practical suggestions. They are provocative and passionate. Most of all, they remind us that financial management in the church has to do with why we exist — to better enable us to love one another as Christ loved us and for mission.

It continues to impress me that missional congregations are compassionate. They live on the edge of their resources, yet somehow pull through. They usually have a vision of where they are going, and why and for whom they exist. They attract resources and are effective stewards. They live out the Gospel and in the process become legends in their communities.

It is said that one can know what a person values by looking at two books — their cheque book and diary. How we spend our time and money often indicates where our priorities lie. I sometimes wonder how our financial management and our budgets — individually and collectively — stack up against this yardstick...

May you find in these pages something to help you and your congregation both make mission possible in your homes and communities, and be more effective in bringing our needy communities closer to the heart of God.

God bless you

Bush Telegraph

Are you on the list?

Bush Telegraph is sent out by email on the 1st of every month. It contains updates from the Moderator and Assembly service team, information about new resources, a noticeboard, the latest job vacancies and news about events around the country.

To register for *Bush Telegraph*, visit www.presbyterian.org.nz/btsubscribe, where you can enter your name and email address.

If you can't receive information by email, contact Amanda Wells to discuss alternative arrangements (04 381-8285).

Make sure you're receiving the Church's monthly news update.

Finance follows mission priorities

Fergus Sime, Mornington Presbyterian Church, Dunedin

Clarify the mission, then arrange the finances and other resources to facilitate that mission. Please remember to pray and seek God's will first so that it is God's mission not yours.

A suburban church

In the early 1990s, Mornington Presbyterian Church, Dunedin, prayerfully considered its mission and how this related to its three worship centres and what the future direction might be. These buildings were originally built in eras where quite different assumptions existed about such things as church attendance, public transport and the place of the motor car.

After considering the current and future needs of the congregation and community, plans were drawn up for extending one of the existing worship centres. These have gained wide acceptance from church and community, and solve many of the problems that existed with the three worship centres. Our prayer is that the extensions, combined with what exists, will serve both the church and community very well for many years to come. We anticipate being able to provide far better opportunities for mission and ministry, such as alternative services.

To some extent, the previous three worship centres inhibited mission and ministry opportunities, which we hope will be able to be expanded in the extended facilities. The planned spaces are multi-purpose, with a variety of sizes to accommodate everything from small group meetings up to large gatherings of 250-plus people. Now it is up to our congregation to demonstrate the outreach this will make possible.

Two worship centres have been sold. Due to location and age, one centre was more saleable than the other. However, both have finally been sold, with a "rent back" arrangement with the new owners of one property so that church and community activities can continue being housed until the extensions are completed. At present we are raising the remaining money and hope to begin building the extensions early next year.

This is a "work in progress" story. Perhaps once the extensions are completed and the building is in use, I can tell you about the next part of the journey.

School of Ministry, Dunedin, houses

Also in the early 1990s three members of the Education for Ministry Committee (EMC) (as it was then called) were asked to look at the housing needs of students and staff at what we now know as the School of Ministry. The primary purpose of these houses is to house students with families who are studying at the School of Ministry to become nationally ordained Ministers of Word and Sacrament, and teaching staff at the School of Ministry who choose to rent a Church-owned house. If there are surplus houses available after meeting these needs, other students studying at the School of Ministry are considered for a house.

We prayed, visited all the existing properties, spoke with students, staff, EMC members, the Director of Financial Services and the Church Property Trustees. A larger committee was formed to

increase the skill base of the committee and a building report was commissioned from a building consultant. Out of that

came a picture of what sorts of properties we should buy, which existing properties might be kept and upgraded and which existing properties were likely to become surplus to requirements. Once the necessary approvals had been obtained, we set about buying, selling and upgrading the properties to meet the needs of the students with families and staff.

The current stock of properties meets most of the needs of the students with families and staff who live in them. The committee visits the properties twice a year to see what work needs to be done and contact people are available to provide help on an ongoing basis.

With the current financial constraints on the national church we are unable to complete all the maintenance and upgrading work our advisors recommend we should do, but we ensure all the necessary work is completed. Dunedin has a shortage of people in the trades at present

In a time in the life of the church where financial and other resources appear to be scarce, are we doing things in the best order?

and so our contractors over recent years have been unable to attend to our work as promptly as we would like. It does get done eventually!

We receive many appreciative comments from satisfied students and staff about the properties. Having suitable houses readily available to live in while training removes or significantly reduces one of the stresses students would otherwise experience. Part of our work includes pastoral care of the students. If we see needs that can be met by other related groups through this ministry of providing accommodation for students and staff, we refer the matter to the APW Support people or other appropriate people.

I wish to thank all the members of the committee who have devoted many hundreds of voluntary hours over about fifteen years to this ongoing ministry. Their work has contributed very significantly to having the properties in their current good condition.

The houses are a ministry of our national church. They are far more than numbers in the annual financial report

of the national church. They house real people; students, mostly with families, whom the church has chosen to train to become nationally ordained Ministers of Word and Sacrament. These students are mostly not well off financially and the help we can give them by providing suitable housing while training is of immeasurable value.

Summary

For both of the above projects, the mission needs were prayerfully determined first, then finances and other resources were obtained. In a time in the life of the church where financial and other resources appear to be scarce, are we doing things in the best order?

Do we pray and seek God's will first? Is it God's mission we seek to do rather than our own? Do we seek to clarify the mission needs first? Do we obtain and win the confidence and support of those who might contribute to the ministries first before we seek the financial and other

Do we pray and seek God's will first?

Not the sort of job you choose...

East Taieri - Saddle Hill Presbyterian Church is seeking a gifted communicator; someone who is called to evangelism and discipleship, to be their

Assistant Pastor – Local Mission

Working in the midst of community mission, you will actively seek opportunities to get alongside people. This position is a catalyst and links ministry areas and, as such, is open to growth as well as support of established areas of ministry. Your established theological base will sustain you in this role and your love of people will energise you.

We are a flourishing congregation on the growing edge of Dunedin. As a people we are evangelical, value highly the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and already strongly connected with our community. We are a growing regional church with multiple ministries and you'll join a team of four other pastors.

This isn't a job you choose – it's a call. Is it yours?

Application packs available from:

Jackie Dickison (Operations Manager)
East Taieri – Saddle Hill Presbyterian Church,
12 Cemetery Road, East Taieri, MOSGIEL.

Tel: 03 489 6308

Email: jackie@etchurch.co.nz

Church financial management

Ray Coster, St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Mount Maunganui

An old song has the phrase, "Money makes the world go round". In Christian churches, many of us would want to debate that statement. But there is too much truth to ignore it. Listen carefully to the current electioneering speeches and note how many have money or fiscal management at the heart of them. Or think about how much time and effort our church has spent on national finances and Assembly Assessment in recent years. Good money management is important in church life, even if we believe that the hand of God has a bit more to do with the world going round than money.

We always aim higher than we think we can possibly achieve

Over the past few years at St Andrews, we have made a number of major changes in the way we organise and monitor finances at the local level. Much of this was forced upon us by having seven paid staff members (6.5 full-time equivalents) and the associated employment and financial responsibilities.

New Structure

A few years back, we ceased to have a board of managers. This model of management no longer worked for us in our context. Management became more specialised, with people bringing their expertise to specific tasks.

The main frustration came from the board members themselves. We had a group of about 12 very well-intentioned people, each with a heart of gold and well worthy of honour. But they were being asked to make decisions that they were not equipped or skilled to make. For large parts of the meeting, they were listening to discussions in which they had very little interest or involvement. At the same time, the treasurer was quietly pleading to have a specialist group of people she could work with who knew how to read and analyse financial statements and who could make constructive comment, thus increasing our level of accountability.

We replaced the board with six specialist task groups, each with four to six members.¹ The members are appointed for their abilities, expertise and passion for the specific task. The administrative pastor ensures that all task groups are aligned, working towards a common goal, and aware of what the other task groups are doing.

Finance Task Group

Our finance team is made up of skilled business leaders, accountants and professionals. Monthly meetings are over an early breakfast so that the people can be in their work place by 8.30am.

The finance task group is more concerned about governance issues concerning our finances than about day-to-day management and spending. They prefer to focus on "blue sky" dreaming to resource the ministry, rather than approving each item of expenditure. Once the

budget is approved, the finance task group simply monitors the trends of income and expenditure. They do not expect the budget holder to seek their approval for spending. We believe that adults should be treated as adults and be responsible for their budget and not have to come cap-in-hand to those who have power or know better. Only if a budget holder wanted to spend above their annual budget allocation would they be expected to consult the finance task group. Over the years, we have found that the budget holders are very responsible. Most under-spend their budget. Day-to-day management of spending is monitored by the administrative pastor and, if needed, by the senior minister.

We invested in some very good computer software: Celeme for tracking the tithes and offerings; Quickbooks for the general Church finances; and MYOB for staff wages.

Resourcing Finances

To resource our ministry, we do not have Stewardship Sundays. In setting a budget we firmly believe in taking faith steps and holding up a faith statement to God. In other words, we always aim higher than we think we can possibly achieve, and then make that a matter of prayer for the staff and leaders. So far as I can remember, we have never put the "heavy" on the people of the church to give more – but the staff and leaders have certainly fasted and prayed when times have been tough!

In planning our budget, we do not begin by thinking how much we will receive and then allocate that to the various ministries. Rather, we begin by thinking about what

God would have us do, and then planning how we will resource that. Our budget is ministry and mission driven. We seek to resource the dream, so that our vision for ministry is not held back by money. For us, the finances for ministry are very much a spiritual exercise. To that end we have consciously tried to break what we would see as a poverty spirit that hangs over so many churches – trying to do things on the cheap. We seek to do the best we can locally and be as generous as we can to others.

We never hesitate to speak about financial

Whether we like it or not, ministry costs money, and it's not cheap

freedom or Kingdom finances. At least once a year, we ensure that the main focus of a Sunday message is money. Why? Because it is so important in virtually everybody's lives. But the focus is never on appealing for more funds or even on the specifics of the church's finances. Rather it is on explaining Biblical teaching on financial management to help people in their day-to-day lives. That includes the Biblical principle of tithing. Interestingly, we probably have more requests for copies of tapes of this service than any other in a year! In our adult education programme, we have run a very popular four-week course on financial freedom. The feedback we receive is that we do not talk enough about money in Church.

I believe there are at least four key points in resourcing a church financially:

1. **Vision.** People support a vision, not an appeal. When people can see a goal and a purpose that they believe in, they will give generously.
2. **Sound strategy.** People need to be able to see a step-by-step process of how the vision will be achieved. Strategy must be well-reasoned and watertight.
3. **Credibility.** The person or people casting the vision must have credibility. They must walk the walk and talk the talk. People must be able to trust and have confidence in that which they give to and in the people who administer the finances.
4. **Meeting a felt need.** People catch or support a vision when they feel the goal is necessary or is fulfilling a need.

On a practical level, we would see three key avenues for resourcing ministry. The tithes and offerings of the people, community funding and business-generated income, such as an op shop. Paramount are the tithes and offerings of the people.

And all the above needs to be covered in prayer. Resourcing a church financially is a spiritual activity, not a busi-

ness plan. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that our tithes and offerings are possibly the best measure of our maturity and commitment. The reactions to measuring money matters vary greatly from hyper-interested to avoidance and denial. Neither is healthy or wise. Whether we like it or not, ministry costs money, and it's not cheap. Churches with strong general fund per-capita giving (based on average attendance per Sunday) have stronger ministries because they are able to do more and hire quality staff.

At a deeper level, however, our church income gives us

insight into the level of spiritual maturity in our congregation. Although we don't like to talk about it because it doesn't feel spiritual, mature Christians give more money than immature Christians. That's just a fact. So while it might feel like business, it's more about the growth and commitment of our people to God and His work.

References

¹ Administration, Finance, Buildings, Grounds, Décor, daughter church. Three more are planned: Equipment, IT and Fundraising.

ST ANDREW'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
TAKAKA, GOLDEN BAY

Part-time Ordained Minister's Position

A ¾ time (three-year) position is available to an ordained person with energy and enthusiasm who can encourage the congregation to fulfil their mission. We are looking for a person who is passionate about sharing God's Word, and is able to discuss biblical principles with a diverse group. Priorities in ministry include: leading worship; pastoral care; equipping members to share the good news; and helping them plan for the future.

Golden Bay is nestled between Kahurangi and Abel Tasman national parks, with a stunning coastline and lush farmland. It features places of unspoilt natural beauty such as Waikoropupu Springs and arewell Spit.

If you are interested in learning more about this position write to: Rev. John Malcolm, 42 Muritai St, Nelson or email minister@tahunanuipresbyterian.org.nz by Sunday 28 August 2005.

How to find and fund your mission

Lisa Wells, CFRE, FFINZ

In order to fund your parish's mission, it is important to first be clear about what you are doing and for whom. This gives us a case for funding support and it is only when that is accomplished that we can address the question "who should we ask to support us?" and "how?". This article is a brief introduction to mission planning, which is a process that helps a congregation identify its mission, acting as a budgeting tool and becoming a means to involve members of the congregation in mission – locally, nationally and internationally.

I will briefly touch on funding sources to help put this preliminary work in context, but that area is an article all on its own!

When we talk about mission in the church, it means different things to different people. So for the purposes of this article, let's define it as the "purpose" of your parish. Your parish exists for mission. Church, as an institution does not exist for those who are "in" it, but for those who have not yet found God. It may be that you have not thought much as a parish about what your mission is – in that case it is likely the parish is focussed on serving the people "in" it. Prayerful discovery of what mission God is really calling the parish to undertake will free resources and people for God's work in mission.

Mission Planning

Through mission planning, the congregation moves from being a group of individuals, each with their own opinion about what they should be doing and how it should be done, to a community of people who agree on the directions in which they believe God is calling them and who agree on who it is they have been called to serve.

Mission plans are more likely to be helpful if they are:

- Developed among the grassroots of the congregation
- Long range and focussed on the future
- Built on congregational strengths

There are a number of ways that parishes can discern God's plan for their mission – all involve prayer, communication, leadership and commitment. There are many helpful tools available in church and secular settings. The facilitator for your parish's Mission Appraisal will be able to make some helpful suggestions as to which model might be most helpful for your parish.

God calls each person and each congregation to contribute to His mission. Each congregation is made up of a unique group of people who have different talents and abilities – they respond uniquely to God's call on them: some thoughtfully and prayerfully, some enthusiastically, and others reluctantly.

People belong to congregations because they want to be part of a group and they want to feel useful. Discerning God's mission for your parish will help set the focus where it should be.

Some of the questions, which your parish might want to ask, are:

- What does Christ want us to do?
- Who are we called to serve?
- What strengths do we have which can be built on?
- What opportunities are in our community?
- What have I been given to show Christ's love to my community? (Not what do I want to do, what does Christ want me to do?)

Praying congregations rarely get it wrong; when planning is hatched in prayer, you are working in partnership with the Holy Spirit.

Time for Action

Once the parish has discovered its mission (and the people or groups of people it is called to serve in mission), you can begin to develop a Mission Action Budget.

There are three types of budgets used in parishes:

1. Line item – recording income and expenditure
2. Programme – allocation of line items across activity areas
3. Mission Action Budget – how you will invest in your mission priorities

The Mission Action Budget will:

- Show what mission action is planned
- Wrap the functional in the mission
- Involve everyone in decision-making (and thus feel ownership of means and ends)
- Be oriented towards the future
- Be easier to talk about than a list of numbers and cost centres
- Help with understanding parish priorities

- Focus outward rather than inward
- Have potential to grow

Money follows mission - once you know where you are going others will follow (though not everyone). The stronger and more compelling the mission, the stronger the money. We are talking about meeting real needs in a real world.

The Mission Action Budget

Example using a parish with mission focus: “Our mission is with children and their families”.

1. Provide a service of worship each week in the community where children and their families feel welcome	15,000
2. Provide pastoral care through personal visitation with young families in the congregation and at the local child care centre, and offering emergency relief in times of need	8,000
3. Offer the following to grow mission with children and their families in the community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A course on growing self-esteem for parents of young children, led by the minister • Begin an after school club in the local primary school • Provide the resources to send three Sunday School teachers to a leadership-training course • Teach Religious Education in the local primary school with the minister and two parish volunteers 	6,000
4. Support two projects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious Education in local school • Counselling for children (local Presbyterian Support programme) 	2,000 1,500
Total investment in Mission	\$32,500

People give to a winning cause, and when you express the work of the parish in mission terms, it becomes a compelling and exciting thing to give to.

Our appeal to give should centre on compassion and community. Few are motivated by challenge and commitment. People want to know that when they give, it will make a difference.

Ways of giving

Traditionally, we have focussed on only two ways of giving – passing the plate and the envelope (or stewardship) gift.

There are many more ways to ask and many ways to give. God calls us to generous giving, cheerful giving, giving that flows abundantly and richly out of one’s heart and soul. It is an art to help yourself and others to grow forward the spirit of generosity. However, let’s start first with the giving of your own congregation – because if they won’t support the mission of the parish there is little reason why others should!

The purpose of stewardship giving is to help people grow in the generosity of their giving, not to raise a detailed, line-item budget.

As I’ve stated earlier, people give to achieve the mission and they give in ways that relate to their own values base. In a Christian setting (rather than a humanist philanthropic one), they give as an expression of their spiritual life. It is part of who they are – living is giving.

A cost budget is far less compelling of support than one that is based on the mission objectives of the parish. You will recognise a cost budget when you hear it explained. It goes:

We want you to know that it costs x dollars per day just to keep the doors open, the lights on and pay the rates

Sometimes it will go on to say:

If you only realised how much this all cost, you would be more committed in your giving

These statements only serve to remind people how much it costs to keep their own lights on and meet their own rates demands. These are not compelling pictures to help people grow forward in their giving. They focus on cost. We live our lives through giving, not conserving. We live through service, not survival.

The best question to ask when we prepare a budget is therefore:

“What will we invest on behalf of God’s mission to help people with their lives and destinies?” This is why a mission plan is an absolutely vital understanding to have, before we ask for (more) money.

None of this means that we are called to be spenders, but to consider the nature of stewardship – not a protective mechanism for safeguarding assets, but as a guide to generous and wise investment in fulfilling the mission to which God calls us.

To determine the best strategy, we need to first ask: “What do we want to accomplish that will grow the giving of the congregation?”

Four distinct strategies are possible:

1. Increase the number of new giving and pledging households
2. Advance the number of workers and leaders who participate
3. Increase the giving of specific current giving and pledging households
4. Advance the congregation’s giving a quantum leap

Each strategy has very different means of achieving the result. I’ll talk more about these strategies in a later article, but I’d like to end with a grid of potential giving sources (shown below). This is not definitive, but is offered as a thinking point – something to be going along with. I’ll expand on this in my next article.

Where this brings us to is to the point of some real action. Sadly, many fine fundraising efforts I have seen over the years have foundered because the groundwork hasn’t been done and the organisation – be it church, club, school or whatever - has jumped straight from acknowledging that they have a need to asking someone else to pay for it! Doing things in a sequential and proper order is good fundraising practice, is respectful of other people and, best of all, it works.

Finally, I need to acknowledge that this article is partly based on work I did whilst employed by Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand in 2000/01 to research the concept of Mission Project Funding. As such it draws on published workbooks by the Uniting Church of Australia and material by Kennon Callahan, amongst others. I am grateful to these sources, as their work has helped to shape my synthesis and own thoughts.

As they say - none of this is rocket science. It’s by hard work, by being prepared to try new things and take a few risks that we can find our mission and then the beauty of this is that God has already placed all the resources we will need – just a reach away.

Sources of funding for the mission of your congregation

Who gives? Ways of Giving	Regular worshippers	Participants in Church Activities	People served in Mission	Supporters of the Church	Local Community Individuals	Local Community Groups	Other Churches and groups	Trusts	Government
Spontaneous giving									
Short-term goal									
Community worship									
Long-term goals									
Planned giving									
Bequests									
Fundraising									
Endowment									
Self-help Grants									
Commercial activity									
Fee for service									

Parishes at the triage station

John Roxborough, School of Ministry, Dunedin

The idea of sorting parishes into those who need urgent treatment, those whose treatment can wait, and those who may be offered palliative care, like medicine at the scene of a terrorist attack, may be brutal but it is not at all far-fetched.

What would a triage nurse say to some of our parishes and other church bodies today?

Some questions would address our identity, attitudes and relationships: what is your name? Who is your family? Do you want to live? Are you willing to deal with your injuries? Can you change your lifestyle?

When parishes reach a point of crisis, including one in which the financial model they are familiar with is no longer sustainable, it is easy to make mistakes. The economic facts of life may point towards reduction in paid ministry, amalgamation, or closure. These certainly need to be considered but they are not necessarily the only alternatives.

In particular, Local Ministry Teams, in which ministerial leadership is shared among a core group of leaders while the whole congregation shares in worship and ministry, is a dynamic model that grows people's faith, confidence and their capacity for mission. With a resource minister providing support to the team and the congregation one day a week, the costs are about 20 percent of a traditional minister.

Why are we doing this and why does it matter?

Churches as buildings, and congregations as gatherings of the people of God, are places and fellowships that help make it possible to live the Christian life and make it easier rather than more difficult for others to believe. In our ordinariness and frailty, we seek to be signs of the Kingdom of God but we also seek to glorify God through our strengths and by growing our capacity to do things together to make a difference.

Urgent treatment

Those needing urgent attention may feel in greater pain, and they may wish that they were in the category of those whose treatment can wait until later. However, it may be they are in the best situation of all: they know they need to change. They accept that it is going to happen. They share the sense of urgency that the time has come.

They are prepared to act. They may even be prepared to get and take advice. Their temptations are: to make the wrong decision under pressure; to take a route that is not based on reality; or to make leadership appointments that are unworkable.

Those whose treatment can wait

Serious decisions are always better for taking the time to consult, discern, pray, listen, involve stakeholders and manage change. Those whose treatment can be delayed still need treatment.

Among congregations in this situation are those that are vulnerable because they know they were successful in the past. That legacy is still sustaining them but their pattern of ministry is not adjusting to changing times. They also face the temptation of believing that what worked yesterday will work tomorrow. "In the 1950s, we knew how to be church, and if the 50s ever come again we will be ready!" I have seen congregations pray for revival, because that is the form of spiritual renewal they remember, but have great difficulty recognising what is going on when their prayers are answered in ways they did not expect.

Palliative care

Recently I heard of a parish which recognised that a Local Ministry Team model of ministry could have worked for them, except that it was now too late and orderly closure was their only option. For some parishes, it is not a sign of failure to face closure. "A seed must die" is a Gospel principle. It is possible to come to that point out of faithful commitment to doing the right thing. But it can also come because of a failure to embrace change at the right time.

At a consultation in Rome of Catholic orders seeking their future in changing times, Andrea Riccardi, founder of the St Egidio Community, said "people die, movements die, and religious orders die . . . God never said everyone will live to the end. What we need to cultivate is the art of a good death." The key for an order facing threats to its existence is not to cling desperately to institutional structures but to live its mission "fully and completely," above all by bringing the Gospel to the world. His comments about orders that failed to live their mission could apply also to churches: "You have a prayer life that's closed off to others... The people of the city don't enter your lives."

(See <http://nationalcatholicreporter.org/word/word1206.htm> for more on this topic.)

It is possible to be in denial and to be overtaken by events but congregations and Christian organisations that recognise the time has come to close the doors on a place and an era can, if they act at the right time, ensure that the witness they stood for continues in other ways. It is a matter of faith and leadership; a holding on to the vision with a letting go of the means by which it was realised in a particular era.

I was recently a patient in Mercy Hospital in Dunedin. The Sisters no longer run things but the presence of their faith and vision is very evident. At a number of critical times in the history of their order in New Zealand and in Dunedin they have made radical changes in their ministry to adjust to changing needs in society and to their changing capacity to respond to those needs.

There are principles in palliative care that apply to congregations and organisations: respect for an ability to control their own destiny; a faith that every stage of life, including death, has validity in the purposes of God; a hope for living that does not cease; the importance of meaning and relationships; the preservation of memory. Perhaps we need to believe not only in the resurrection of the body, but also in the resurrection of the body of Christ.

Change is difficult, but it is also possible

As we worry about teenage fatalities on the roads and lifestyle threats to our physical health at any age, there is disturbing evidence that information about danger is ineffective at sustaining necessary change. Telling a congregation that if they carry on as they are, then they will die out is as ineffective as predicting the demise of a whole denomination and expecting this will not only get people's attention but will somehow make it clear what they need to do.

What helps people change is a compelling narrative, a story, a vision that people want to be part of. It is no accident that Jesus taught with parables that invited people into a story. If we want ourselves and others to participate in what we are together, and commit to a future, then one of the most important things is that we tell the story of what we are about: a story about Jesus, a story about faith, a story about justice, a story that is both human and born of the Holy Spirit.

There are many changes that we need to work through nationally and regionally, and of course the option of Local Ministry Teams is only one possibility among others to be considered, but it is a possibility whose time for consideration has come. We may be at the triage station but we are still part of a story of hope.

Statistical trends in attendance and giving

Joan Ross*

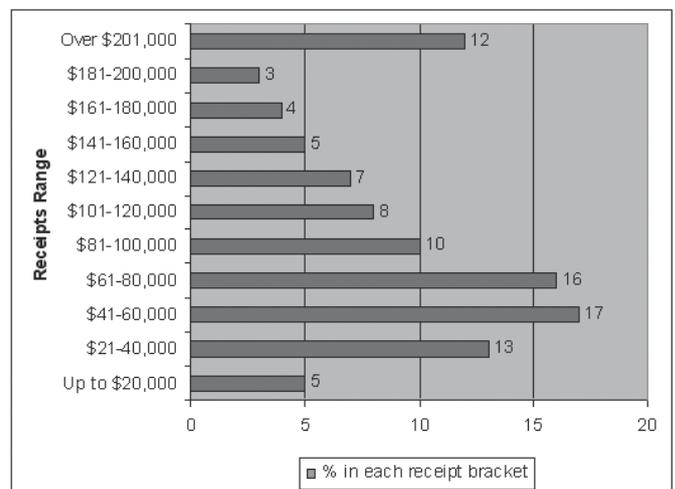
The big picture and the small dot. Imagine if you will an Impressionist painting; whether it's Monet or Cezanne is over to you. As you stand back and your eye scans, the big picture comes into view. Focus on a few square centimetres of canvas, and your perspective changes. Suddenly this painting comprises myriad dots or strokes, each distinctively placed and coloured; the large and the small of it.

I keep this image in my mind when looking at church statistics: the big picture of national trends is constructed from multiple and diverse local church communities, each of which bears a distinctive relationship to the whole.

It's hardly apples with apples ...

In commissioned research for the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand¹ I derived the following spread of parishes by their total annual receipts in 2003 from the statistical returns of that year.²

Figure 1: 2003 Percentages of Parishes by Total Receipts
Sources: PCANZ Statistics



This figure shows that in 2003 over half of PCANZ churches (51%) had total receipts from all sources of less

than \$81,000, and would be operating with considerable restraints on budget goals and possibilities. Where is the “small dot” of your church in this bigger picture?

Focus on income through giving ...

In 2003, giving by envelope and cash offerings in PCANZ churches totalled almost \$25 million. The average adult attendee of a June worship service³ could be expected to make an annual offering of \$786. This varied across regional presbyteries and union district councils; for example, from \$624 in Christchurch, to \$781 in Wanganui, to \$973 in South Auckland.

Now the interesting thing about envelope and cash offerings by the average adult June attendee is that the amount given has continued to increase over the last five years, although the actual numbers of people attending worship has continued to decrease. This suggests to me that the Church has many generous givers across the country who are digging faithfully and deeply into their pockets in support of their local church.

Table 1: PCANZ Attendance by Offerings

Sources: PCANZ Statistics

Year	PCANZ June Attendance		PCANZ Offerings	Adult Annual Offering
	All ages	Adults over 25yrs	Envelopes and Cash	
2004	37,988	29,694	\$25,523,226	\$860
2002	39,168	30,686	\$23,787,000	\$775
2000	43,765	32,157	\$23,499,000	\$731

Diversifying sources of giving ...

We have traditionally thought of “givers” as those who attend the primary worship services. However, an increasing number of these faithful givers are reaching an age where they live – and give - out of fixed incomes. Patterns of attending and giving in younger generations appear to be more mobile, and less consistent.

Presbyterian churches need to diversify the ways that users of church activities can be expected to make a contribution to their cost. Alternative worship services, community educational and support programmes can also include an invitation to make a contribution, be it financial, in time or in kind. Does this stand in tension with an ethos of community service? If so, are there ways that income from one local church activity can be used to

subsidise another, keeping costs at a level affordable by participants? Now and in the future we will need to find ways to “give smarter”.

References

¹ *Tracking the Changes: Select Statistical Analysis for the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand*. October 2004: 62.

² Presbyterian Churches and Uniting Churches with Presbyterian partnership.

³ PCANZ worship attendance statistics are derived from attendance figures averaged over four Sundays in June of each year.

* *Joan Ross is currently Stated Supply Minister at St Mark’s Congregation, Hutt City Uniting Congregations. Joan recently completed an M.A. in Social Science Research from Victoria University.*

Summer School 15 – 20 January 2006

FUNDAMENTALISM: ITS MANY FACES



The Third Summer School organised by Upper Clutha’s Aspiring Faith Community will take place in Wanaka. Seminars and workshops will run in the mornings with afternoons free to enjoy Wanaka and its surrounds. Evening sessions are public forums.

Speakers include: Associate Professor Peter Lineham, Massey University Albany Campus on Christian fundamentalism in New Zealand, Dr Najibullah Lafraie from Political Studies at Otago University on Islamic extremism, and Margaret Harvey, artist and tutor from Christchurch on Creativity in art and life’s journey. Peter Callachor, biblical scholar and psychotherapist of Dunedin will offer a theological understanding of speakers’ topics.

For further information, contact Neal & Alison Brown: email brown.hawea@actrix.co.nz

Drawing up Assembly budgets

John Trainor, co-convenor, Administration and Finance policy group

A budget is a useful tool for any organisation in helping to achieve financial discipline and set priorities over the year ahead.

The Assembly Budget process was extremely difficult this year as it was necessary to cut over \$1m in expenditure to achieve a balanced budget, and yet at the same time ensure that the budget reflects the priorities as indicated by the wider church through Focus on the Future.

In a newsletter on 29 June this year (available under www.presbyterian.org.nz/finance), Council set out the major changes in direction that are occurring, with sufficient detailed information to allow a comparison of the 2005/06 budget with expected outcomes for the year just ended on 30 June 2005.

The balanced budget for the year ahead comes after a number of years in which Council agreed to run planned budget deficits but that have ended (or will end in 2004/05) with actual deficits considerably above the level that had been proposed through the budgeting process.

I would like to take you through, in general terms, how this came about and why you can have a high degree of confidence that the balanced budget outcome that Council is looking to achieve in 05/06 will occur.

Planned deficits

A significant element of the total deficit that Council of Assembly has run over the past four years was planned. Council had adopted a strategy, widely accepted within the church, to develop and sustain healthy congregations for mission. There was a mission resource team in place pursuing these objectives in circumstances in which the Presbyterian Church, overall, was in steady long-term decline.

While income was insufficient to maintain the momentum needed, Assembly did have substantial reserves that could be, and were, drawn upon to fund the mission resource team and other activities.

Reserves were adequate to meet these planned deficits through to the end of 2003/04. If the reserves were there for a rainy day, it was felt that we were now in a down-pour.

\$2.4m deficit of 2003/04

The planned deficit for the year was \$0.3m. This was prepared in the traditional manner of Assembly budgets that ignored seniority allowance and beneficiary fund levies and expenditure, and also left out depreciation, provision for any doubtful debts, and CWM income and expenditure, among others. It was a budget designed to match certain "controlled" expenditures with certain levies and income. It was not designed to be compared with the annual financial operating results of Assembly.

The actual deficit for this year was the culmination of ongoing problems in the finance department that go back many years, but manifested in an inability to get audit clearance for end of year accounts, a falling level of service to parishes and, finally, in this mammoth deficit.

While the deficit outcome for that year was very serious, it is not quite as bad as the bare number indicates:

- \$1.4m of the total was composed of a series of special adjustments that included moving Trusts to more appropriate areas, increased provision for doubtful debts, etc.
- The actual \$1.0m shortfall in normal operating results does not represent monies lost, in the sense of being misappropriated, or spent in inappropriate or frivolous ways. Expenditure was almost exactly in line with the amount budgeted. However, there was a shortfall of income from levies and other sources that should have been recognised earlier.

I will return to the cause of the deficit later.

\$1.2m projected operating deficit for 2004/05

There was a planned deficit for the year of \$660,000 that is now forecast to end up at \$1.2m. The anticipated cash component of the deficit (around \$0.5m) has had to be funded through borrowing.

The reason for the planned deficit was to achieve a transition to a balanced budget in 2005/06. Sometimes major cutbacks take time to implement, particularly when staff changes are involved, and it may not be possible to cut back to the intended position without doing a great deal of damage to an organisation. The mission resource team was being substantially disbanded and this took time to implement.

Unplanned deficits

I would like to turn to the reasons why the planned deficits in 2003/04 and in 2004/05 were greatly exceeded.

The proximate cause of the budget deficit overrun in 2003/04 is that there was not a good level of understanding of Assembly's financial position either in that year or in prior years. Problems go back to decisions related to a new computer system installed in the late 90s and to subsequent actions (or lack thereof) of the finance team, A&F and Council. When things go wrong in a major way, I have found there are usually multiple causes.

The underlying cause to which I would attribute this failure — if not initially, then at least in the time taken to respond — is the governance structure of the national church. The governance structure of the church at the national level had not been designed to ensure that clear responsibility was given to committees or individual appointees or even staff to achieve outcomes. Unambiguous authority had not always been given to those who appeared to have the responsibility. When everything seems to be going well, deficiencies are hidden. In a crisis, the system of governance is put to the test.

The over-spend in 2004/05 was largely due to the budget being prepared, by necessity, before the results for

2003/04 were known, and with a quite inadequate information base overall. The decision was taken, quite rightly, early in the new financial year to make every effort to finalise the 2003/04 accounts at a cost that exceeded any budget provision. However, without an adequate management information system at that time (no monthly accounts), A&F and others were not alerted

to any problem until much later.

There appears to be a new readiness for change

Conclusion

Fortunately, perhaps partly as a result of this financial crisis, there appears to be a new readiness in the church for change — at least at the national level. Focus on the Future consultations have highlighted, among other things, dissatisfaction with aspects of the operation of Council of Assembly and its numerous policy and task groups. Action is now being taken to implement Focus on the Future recommendations and to obtain a more responsive and effective national structure.

I have a high degree of confidence, despite our experience in recent years, that Assembly will stay within the expenditure constraints set by this year's budget. We have had a much improved basis on which to construct the budget and now have the capacity month-by-month to monitor actual income and expenditure to budget.

Budget 2005/2006: A commentary

Rob Ripley, executive elder, St Aidan's, Northcote

I've been asked to provide intelligent commentary on the 2005/06 budget — from the point of view of "one who has been critical of the Church's handling of financial matters". I smiled when I saw that and wondered if I would see commentary from those who are uncritical of our accumulated and unplanned operating cash deficit, which by now must be approaching or exceeding \$4 million.

A number of categories were suggested for comment but the list did not include the most important category of all; the one without which budgets are simply useless pieces of paper written in vain hope rather than sound reality: trust and confidence.

Budget analysis

I'm in the budget business. I regularly create, assess and amend budgets for farmers who are seeking debt finance. The golden rule is simple. What do you realistically expect to happen, given an "average" season, if there is such a thing? Do not be over-optimistic and do not be over-pessimistic. The proposed Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand budget appears to me to pass the test. I think it is a very good budget and those who worked to produce it should be congratulated. I should point out that when the two anomalies of depreciation on buildings and CWM overlapping are removed, we appear to have an operating deficit of around \$500k for 2004/05. A pretty creditable result, all things considered.

I am delighted to see at last some common sense applied to the hitherto completely confusing intrusion of CWM funding into Presbyterian operating accounts. For the first time in decades, we might be able to look at a set of accounts and actually see how we are performing, without relying on explanations from “those who know about these things”.

A minor point of criticism might be that the budget shows an expectation of “assessment underpayment”. This delivers a subliminal message that it’s alright to underpay and I doubt that was intended.

Assessment underpayment

My parish is an under-payer this year, not a non-payer. The reason is simple. We ain’t got the dough. I see our assessment for next year represents an apparent increase of over 10 percent while our income has gone up by 8.5 percent and our membership by 3.7 percent. This trend does not bode well for the future and is unsustainable. I’d say the budgeted \$0.5 million provision for assessment underpayment should be sufficient for our needs.

Churches that can’t afford full-time ministry

I believe parishes that can’t afford full-time ministry should be converted to PDUs and relieved of National and Presbytery assessments. The money should instead be invested in growth so that these parishes can be brought quickly up to strength – say within three years. Full-time, well-educated, professional ordained ministry, for me, is a cornerstone of being Presbyterian.

Treasurers’ role

In my experience, parish treasurers sometimes cause more trouble than they are worth, usually by taking for themselves some divine mantle of financial authority that is used to veto the legitimate plans of sessions or managers. The treasurer’s role is to count the beans, tell the session or board how many beans there are and pay monies on instruction from the session or board. It is NOT to tell the Session there is no money for local mission projects and therefore they cannot proceed. With electronic banking, it should not be long before the National Office is able to provide parishes with monthly financial reports in a standardised format, in just the same way as the current excellent central payroll system operates. Thus parish treasurers could become redundant and find more useful things to do.

Trust and confidence

The national financial crisis has produced a serious decline in confidence on the part of ordinary parish members. These people are the “shareholders” of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and it is from their pockets that Assembly Assessment payments are made. A further blow was delivered late last year by the extraordinary revelation of a further half mil expenditure hitherto unknown even after six months of heavy investment in “expert” financial consultancy. There has been good information provided thus far about the symptoms of the problem but when it comes to the nitty gritty of why the problem occurred in the first place and what measures have been put in place to assure us that the haemorrhaging of cash will not continue, there is a black hole. (It seems everyone wants to be forgiven but no-one wants to repent.) Parish members need to be assured that from now on an iron-fisted control of all spending is being exercised by Council of Assembly and A & F. Thus far there is no such assurance.

Until this deficiency is rectified we will continue budgeting for “assessment underpayment.”

Believe and Belong

Want to help your young people journey towards **baptism, confirmation** or other forms of commitment?

The Presbyterian Youth Ministry team has created a guide to six sessions and a celebratory service that you can work through with your youth group.

The booklet is straightforward, attractively designed and written for a contemporary audience. Each session has ideas on getting started, scripture references, activities and how to dig deeper. Copies cost \$5.

To be sent **Creating a Pathway to Believe and Belong**, contact the PYM office:

mo.mansill@presbyterian.org.nz

04 381-8299

PO Box 9049, Wellington

God in cross-cultural situations

Beryl Anderson, *Smoothing the Rough Edges* (Daystar Publications Trust, 2003)

By John Gullick

This is an amazing book. It is an insightful look into the lives of Christians in a cross-cultural setting without frills or the rose-coloured glasses of describing a ministry to a sending church.

Beryl Anderson shows us what happens to Christians from widely differing backgrounds in an Istanbul church. What she shares is at times surprising, always challenging and incredibly helpful for the Christian who has their eyes set on a cross-cultural setting.

The book is unique, in my experience at least, in that Beryl has gathered together a number of personal stories from international Christians. These stories are extremely helpful for those with notions of ministering internationally. But they are also helpful for those of us here in New Zealand.

Smoothing the Rough Edges is more than a mission book. I would regard it as an extremely helpful ministry resource. Each chapter finishes with a set of penetrating questions that the reader can apply to their own life.

This book is more than a mission book... it is an extremely helpful ministry resource

These questions can relate to cross-cultural situations but also to the lives of those who have similar issues to face.

As New Zealand becomes increasingly diverse in culture, this book will grow in relevance in our own nation. Because this book is written in the context of the Middle East, a region in the focus of the world in our generation, it has other lessons for us to learn.

Packed in its 110 pages are profound insights into a ministry that has clearly served God well in a region that provides unique challenges to the Christian.

Finally, her paraphrase of 1 Corinthians chapter 13 exposes the engine room of her ministry: love.

Her parting quote:-

When I was a (New Zealander), I spoke as a (New Zealander), I understood as a (New Zealander). But when I left (New Zealand), I put away (New Zealand) things.

Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. Now we adopt to this culture awkwardly, but God will live in it intimately. Now I speak with a strange accent, but he will speak to the heart.

Now these three remain; faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Helping young people to commit

Mo Mansill and Jo Ryan, *Creating a Pathway to Believe and Belong* (Presbyterian Youth Ministry, 2005, \$5)

By Reuben Hardie

I remember sitting in my office in my second year of ministry and waiting nervously for a group of young people to come for a course on confirmation and belonging. To be honest, I felt like hiding or locking them out because the material I had in my hands came from the Middle Ages (or at least the 1960s) and I had this overwhelming sense that unless I winged it, the next six weeks were going to be a total flop.

It is for this reason that I recommend to you the resource *Creating a Pathway to Believe and Belong*. Mo Mansill and Jo Ryan have done a great job of putting this together, and have clearly drawn from their experience working

with young people and their extensive research into the current involvement of youth in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. The purpose of *Creating a Pathway to Believe and Belong* is to help guide young people to make some form of commitment to Christ, whether baptism or confirmation, and to help them develop a stronger sense of belonging to your Church.

Creating a Pathway to Believe and Belong maps out six sessions, and a celebratory service to mark the end. The six sessions are based upon the underlying framework of the Presbyterian Youth Ministry: "IN", "AROUND" and "OUT". "IN" - we belong to God; "AROUND" we belong to one another; "OUT" we belong to God's world and are called to serve those at the margins of it. The sessions are clearly set out and include ice breakers and activities to help bring the studies to life.

This is a resource that will help ministers and youth leaders who are struggling with out-of-date youth resources and who find themselves, consequently, winging it.

**The Bad, Sad Case of Graham Capill:
A response to Chris Nichol's article
(Candour July 2005)**

From the start, I wish to make it clear that I agree with much of what Chris wrote: that there can be no justification for Capill's actions and that the fall is part of us all. I believe Chris is right when he says there is a tendency for many elements within the Christian community to minimise offending of this nature but I am also of the opinion that Chris' assertion that our primary identification should be with the victim and not the perpetrator needs to be examined further.

In any consideration of offending such as Capill's, there are actually three parties who need to be taken into account: victims, offenders and the community of interest affected by the harm or injury that has taken place. All three participants (whether wittingly or unwittingly) must have their needs (not wants) addressed. The Biblical perspective holds out a vision for us as to how people should live together in a state of right relationship (Shalom). Restoration of this ideal should never be lost in any consideration of situations such as the Capill case.

Yes, victims' needs are important, but in addressing them we must always ask, "who are the victims?" There are primary victims; those directly affected by Capill's offending, but there are also secondary victims who are knowingly or unknowingly affected by the consequences of his actions. These are people such as family (they may not always be aware of this), ourselves as Christian people who feel betrayed by what he did, or family and friends of the primary victims whose lives are subsequently disrupted or affected. There is a whole continuum of many people affected by his actions and the consequences of these actions spread like ripples on a pond into the wider community.

Then there are the offenders. Ironically, they may themselves be victims of other offenders. There is ample evidence to indicate that many offenders such as Capill were victims themselves who later imposed their learned behaviour on others when they were in positions of power sufficient to do so. Their own ability to relate meaningfully may well have been severely stunted or distorted by their experiences. However, the consequences of their behaviour should not be trivialised or minimised in any way; quite the opposite, in fact. Nevertheless, in spite of this, restoration must be a possibility for them if the ideals of Shalom are to be taken seriously.

This is not to be seen as a cop out or a fudging of the enormity of this proposition. As Howard Zehr and Chris-

topher Marshall remind us, forgiveness and restoration are not easy options. They require honest, painful and often lengthy facing of realities before any regaining of wholeness can take place. It is worth noting that at least one therapist has commented publicly on the need for Capill to face the reality of his offending and the enormity of its consequences before therapy for him can have any chance of successful outcome.

I will not comment much on the third party, the community of interest, affected by Capill's actions, except to say that what has happened will challenge us all to the deepest levels of our very faith and belief and, if we have any sensitivity at all, it will cause us to re-examine closely how we deal with victim and offender alike.

Capill Bad? Certainly his behaviour was obnoxious. It is the outcome of someone who is diseased mentally and spiritually. There can be no condoning or justification of his actions.

Capill Sad? Yes, the public leader is viewed to be fundamentally flawed. Distrust of Christian leadership both by ourselves and members of the general public has been increased, at least by implication and transference, whether this is justified or not.

However, we must not forget that the Divine who threw in its lot with the unjustly crucified also uttered the words "Father, forgive them" at the moment of greatest torment. Somehow restoration and, dare I say it, resurrection has to remain a possibility for victim, offender and community of interest alike if any real justice is to come out of this tragic situation. Not taking these considerations into account is to run the risk of descending the retributive path adopted by groups such as Sensible Sentencing; a no win option.

Douglas Mansill

**More on Capill and Alan Goss' review of
Lloyd Geering (Candour July 2005)**

I agree with Chris Nichol that we do not need misplaced sympathy for the perpetrators of sex offences such as Graham Capill. My drill for sex offenders is "no mercy!" Be humane, but not merciful. Mercy is abused in these acts. Misplaced sympathy can be something victims often have to deal with as well.

Secondly, Alan Goss in his review of Lloyd Geering's lectures says "Lloyd's ability to see the whole picture and compress it into a readable form is legion" I have asked

the St Andrews's Trust to get someone other than Lloyd to address the questions of "How do these views affect our view of our human selves?" Lloyd assumes "faith, hope, and love" will fix it? He speaks of the modern explosion of knowledge without specifics. I would have thought that Feuerbach, Freud and Kohut deserve more mention in the modern revolution for theology. Has the psychological been so bowdlerised or subjugated "a la Foucault" that it has become unmentionable in academic theology?

The "secular" society as the object of our investment in life can make many humans bored, even suicidal. Lloyd's expositions could become another Feuerbachian, Freudian, projection of a potential transcendentalism called the secular. Our repetitive subconscious influences also influence our ability to project by choice. If we just go around again, we don't change much. I advocate a change in our view of Humanity to a new one with

1. EGO as the foundation of life,
2. Self and Others as the aim, and
3. A collective END for human beings in a life which goes on.

Yes, this means we abandon one Biblical view of humanity but not the Jesus view of his or our humanity. I advocate this with some humour as well as seriously.

Boyd Glassey

Thoughts about Alan Goss' review of Lloyd Geering

Editor's note: this letter was submitted to the nzpres email discussion list and is reprinted here by permission of the author. Much debate subsequently occurred on the list. To subscribe to nzpres and view the archives, visit <http://lists.presbyterian.org.nz/mailman/listinfo/nzpres>

Like the majority of ministers in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, I rarely share my opinions or thoughts via this forum. However, I feel that I need to write to share my thoughts about a book review in the latest *Candour*.

The review was of a book written by Lloyd Geering called *Is Christianity Going Anywhere*. The reviewer was Alan Goss. I have not met either of these men to the best of my knowledge.

What impacted me as I read this review was the obvious anti-Christian sentiment that Alan shared as a part of his review. I read the review with a sense of growing dis-ease, followed by anger and then followed by despair that

it is even possible that a Christian church could encompass and accept as part of our "diversity", such thinking as related in the review. How can it be possible that such clearly anti-Christian ideas and concepts can be accepted or put up with such that it even appears in a Christian publication? How is it that we have sunk so low in our understanding of faith in Christ that we can now tolerate such comments as "The claim that Jesus was divine, for example in the Nicene Creed, is challenged." How is it that we can all sit quietly by while the reviewing of such blatantly anti-Christian thinking is even given room in a Christian publication that is a part of our national Church?

I guess this is all such old hat to so many of us who have read and heard similar things over the years, but is it right that we have come to such a place where we just sit back and ignore the ramifications of even giving voice to such heresy? Is it right that our tiredness in opposing such comments made in the review is reason enough to pretend it isn't there?

I believe from what I have read from events around the world that God is looking for those who will stand up for His name and give Him all the glory. I believe that God is calling His Church back into that place of complete trust in His ways. I believe that He is looking for those who will humble themselves before Him and who will be obedient to Him. I believe that it is time that someone somewhere stood up and said that the emperor doesn't have any clothes. It cannot be that a Christian church can put up with those who are preaching and teaching contrary to the Word of God. It cannot be that everyone who believes that Jesus Christ alone is the Way, the Truth and the Life just puts up with this sort of anti-Christian teaching. I despair for the life of our Church. I despair that we are falling short of God's call on our corporate life; that He can be ridiculed and mocked in a church publication and everyone acts as if it is okay - it is not okay!

Folks, the time is now when the corporate church needs to live in the fear (awe) of the Lord again. Acts 9:31 says that the church was strengthened, and encouraged by the Holy Spirit it grew in numbers living in the fear of the Lord. We are at risk of playing games with God if we continue to put up with the sort of understandings that are espoused in the review in question. And for those who still believe in the judgment at the end of the age, I shudder to think that many of us may hear the words, "away from me you evildoers - I never knew you", simply because we never stood for the faith, contending for it as God calls us to.

Tom Phillips

The Jesus seminar's conclusions

If it is true that the scholars of the Jesus Seminar movement have concluded that Jesus was primarily a teacher of wisdom then what happened to him is of secondary interest.

Yet a reading of the Gospels suggests that this was a primary interest.

G R Grant

The Burning Bush in Samoa

In May 1988, I was called upon by the Prime Minister Hon. Tofilau Eti Alesana, and the government of Samoa, to be the chaplain and leader of the House of Prayers of the Nation, on Mount Vaea, in a very large Samoan House called Faavae i le Atua Samoa.

It was a real lasting, rich experience on my prayer life. We met at 6.30am every Friday morning. I prepared programmes and I was supported by the Prime Minister and ministers of the Cabinet, plus minister and lay preachers from many of the other denominations in the country.

I served this ministry for 17 years. I resigned because I was interested in writing books and translating books. The Ma-

hua Printing Press of the CCCS (Congregational Christian Church in Samoa) was of high standard. I have already written and published four prayer books. At this moment, I am writing a new book called Tusi Lauga, of mostly my own sermons. I am also doing a translation of two volumes by George Knight on the Book of the Psalms.

The Burning Bush is in my heart. The word of God is sweet in Jeremiah's mouth, and is burning in his heart. I love the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand! I recall now the message I prepared (1986-1987) for the Church: "Family of God! Come alive! Come alive in worship! Come alive in your mission! Come alive in the Faith of Abraham! Come alive in your giving!"

My dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ! Feed your Burning Bush with pieces of wood from the rugged Cross!

Kanape Faleto'ese

(Moderator PCANZ 1986-1987)

What do you think? Letters to the editor are very welcome. Please email candour@presbyterian.org.nz or post to Candour, PO Box 9049, Wellington, making it clear that your text is intended for publication.

Ordained minister - First Church Invercargill



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