

# CANDOUR

News and Views for Ministers

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## Being Called

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## Noticeboard

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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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To enquire about vacancies, please email [glen.innis@xtra.co.nz](mailto:glen.innis@xtra.co.nz) or telephone 06 855-4889. Ministers are welcome to inquire regarding vacancies due to cancellations.

## General Assembly 2006

Registration packs have been sent to commissioners who have been approved by their presbytery.

After receiving their registration pack, those attending GA06 need to register online.



For queries about registration, contact [juliette@presbyterian.org.nz](mailto:juliette@presbyterian.org.nz)

For the latest news about GA06, visit:  
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## 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](http://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.**

# Who wants to be called?

Amanda Wells

“Being called” is an evocative phrase. It carries the implication of a caller (perhaps even an audible voice); of listening in on the right frequency; and of acting on this message once it's received. This can conjure up a picture of God with a megaphone: “go here, do this, act now!” Perhaps some people have this Jonah-like experience. But more of us muddle along, trying to hold on to those elusive moments of clarity.

Discerning your vocation isn't necessarily a concept that post-modern workers, with their portfolio careers and experiences of redundancy, can even relate to. But calling implies context, as Michelle Shin argues in her article in this issue. You're called to step outside your immediate concerns; to fulfil the needs to others rather than concentrate on feathering your own nest. This presupposes both being part of a community you can serve and that it is possible for you to make this mental leap.

An article last week in British newspaper *The Independent* was headlined “Society in 2025 ‘will be based on selfishness’”. The article cites a study that suggests consumerism and individualism will be a more dominant force in 20 years' time than any concern about poverty at home or overseas: “For the first time since 1994, Britons regard looking after themselves as more important to quality of life than looking after their communities.” Will any sense of calling to a greater cause therefore be lost? It's a bleak vision. The study suggests four possible types of society in 2025 and only one of these contains substantial altruistic elements.

Growing up in the 80s, my generation saw both the excess of the boom and the pain of the post-crash years. At school we studied *Z for Zachariah*, *The Chrysalids*, *Nineteen Eighty-four*, and *Brave New World*. A grim, dystopian, post-apocalyptic world seemed all too likely. It's hardly surprising that many children nurtured in this environment have embraced individualism and cynicism; why not, when the world's doomed anyway?

Despite this, many remain quietly desperate to feel some sense of call on their lives, although this is not quite the way they would phrase it. A calling provides a foundation for your identity, and the quest for self-realisation remains perennially attractive. Some of the most interesting conversations I've had recently are about what people perceive to be their identity and how they define

this. Does listing the details of your occupation, hobbies and relationships constitute identity? Gen X seems to be becoming less sure, in a tentative kind of way.

But called to what? It's easy for churches to couch calling in terms of overseas mission and ordained ministry. “Ordinary” people can be left feeling their day-to-day work doesn't quite measure up. How do we encourage people to live out their calling to the business world, for example, or to a particular trade? Is this less worthy than working in a ministry role? Are there different role models we can celebrate?

In this July issue of *Candour*, Martin Baker asks where tomorrow's leaders will come from and how we might recruit them differently, while Graham Redding talks about the factors necessary to successfully sustain a call. Kevin Ward relates his recent marathon experience to ministry. His description of the mixture of suffering, hard slog and elation will resonate with any endurance sport devotee, as well as providing an apt analogy for the race that is ministry. I enjoyed this article because I'm a crazy tramper but also because the church that I went to as a student emphasised Hebrews 12:1 (“let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us”) as a guiding principle for development. Last week's *Listener* magazine had a cover story on burn out, that modern malaise that seems to be all about rushing through life at an unsustainable pace without any thought for ultimate consequences. Perhaps our society nurtures sprinters at the expense of endurance. When people realise this isn't sustainable, are we there offering an alternative approach?

Howard Carter talks about the journeys on which his call has taken him and his family, while Jill Kayser relates her reluctant entry into children's ministry and the fruit that has resulted. This issue concludes with Mary-Jane Konings discussing Gen Xers and the challenges they face. In the Mission Possible section, John Daniel writes about the steps you can take when you doubt your call, including highlighting the times at which you can expect your call to be questioned.

The next issue of *Candour* will have the theme “Theology and doctrine” and its deadline will be 1 August. Contributions are welcome, particularly in relation to any study leave or research you have done. Please email me at [candour@presbyterian.org.nz](mailto:candour@presbyterian.org.nz)

# New leaders: Sign up here

Martin Baker\*

We want gifted, highly competent, passionate, theologically trained, smart, discerning, creative, loving, visionary, Spirit-filled leaders for the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. But where are these people going to come from? Some of them are in our midst now, seeking to respond to God's call and claim on their lives and generously serving the church in a myriad of ways.

But some of these people are not known to us. They may be attending classes on theology at the Bible College or at Otago University, they may be helping to run Parachute or attending with their Youth Group. Perhaps they are on the edge of a student-orientated church. Maybe they are older – perhaps they have been a successful entrepreneur or leader of Plunket or the local Kohanga Reo.

Among the many good things that come from being part of a church with a national structure is that when it comes to fulfilling the Gospel mission, we can do more things together than we could achieve alone.

Could one of these things be the development of a recruitment programme? Part of the challenge is that it could never be entirely clear what we were recruiting people to do, exactly. While the School of Ministry and others provide some excellent training programmes, there is no career path as such, no guarantee of a job and, realistically, the main possibility for service, at least as far as the Ordained Ministry is concerned, is initially as a sole charge Minister in a rural or provincial parish. Of course, these parishes can be wonderful, supportive places to be – places too that have blessed the lives of many ministry training graduates. It is just that it's a very big jump to make for, say, a young Aucklander who may have a spark of awareness that God was calling him or her to some form of Christian leadership, and ministry, to see him or herself standing in a pulpit in a town whose location he or she may never have heard of before.

Let us imagine setting up a tent at the next Parachute Concert in which passers by will meet people enthusias-

tic and informed about ministry and service opportunities in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. Imagine too a structure that allows us to provide some managed process that provides the resources and oversees recruitment, training and appropriate placement of newly trained and qualified leaders.

When we think about the things that stop us taking these initiatives as a national organisation, we find ourselves addressing some of the issues that lie at the core of our future together - things like trusting the use of some of

our own precious resources into the hands of those who we may not know, and believing that there is still a church called the Presbyterian Church of Aote-

aroa New Zealand whose mission we actually want to see flourish and grow.

Our identity as a Church and our reason for being is centred on the person of Jesus Christ. Our Church's particular culture is defined in part by the qualities and character of those with whom we entrust positions of authority and leadership. It is in this way that the work of the various reviews and workgroups find cohesiveness. How we train and support our leaders and pastors, and the rules and structures of our Church dovetail into one another and, in the end, find their integrity in the support and direction they provide for a Church committed to fulfilling Christ's mission to the world.

Knowing that we are part of something bigger, trusting that God can work through our diversity and struggles to do a new thing, finding a sense of unity in a shared, mission and outreach-focused vision. These things strengthen our morale and will make our church an attractive and even perhaps a fun place in which to serve, work and belong.

*\*Martin Baker is a minister of First Church Otago and the Convenor of the Leadership Sub-committee of the Council of Assembly. Please send any responses or comments on this article to him at: martin@ihug.co.nz*

# 'Still crazy after all these years'

Graham Redding, *St John's in the City, Wellington*

I'm not sure that Paul Simon was thinking about parish ministry when he wrote those words, but the longer I'm in parish ministry, the more they seem to fit. Crazy is a good word to describe that aspect of the call to ministry that, when it is first heard, appears only a little short of absurd. Crazy is also a good word to describe one of those things that stops ministry from becoming bland and predictable. "Still crazy after all these years" is something of a declaration and a prayer.

Over the years, when I've talked to some of my retired or soon-to-be-retired colleagues in ministry about how they've not only lasted the distance but also remained fresh and even a little crazy in and for ministry, these are some of the things that I've heard repeatedly mentioned and ring true to my own experience:

1. The importance of collegiality: Ministry can be an isolating experience, especially in a time of institutional decline when the minister easily becomes something of a lightning rod for people's discontent. Having a few colleagues that you can turn to for a few laughs and a bit of encouragement can make all the difference – a good safety valve.
2. The importance of good supervision: Distorted perspectives undermine effective ministry. A good supervisor should help us keep things in perspective and facilitate healthy reflection and self-examination.
3. The importance of boundaries: Ministry is like a sponge – it will soak up every available moment that we have and indulge our need to be needed. The setting of boundaries is essential to maintaining personal wellbeing and avoiding a messianic complex. Spouse and family will appreciate it too.
4. The importance of pursuing interests outside of ministry: Regular exercise, hobbies, etc. – all those things that help us maintain a balance in our lives.
5. The importance of study leave: Study leave that is well planned, properly supervised and appropriately challenging is invigorating. Too often, though, it appears as little more than a means of taking an extended holiday. While we all need a good break from time to time, if we don't continually extend ourselves in our reading and thinking, we will find our ministry loses its edge.
6. The importance of an occasional stock take: Someone who's been in parish ministry much longer than me, and served in one parish for almost 20 years, once said that about every five years his ministry seemed to enter a different phase as the congregation in which he served continued to evolve. He talked of the need to almost "renegotiate" his ministry, and to check the alignment of his gifts and passions with the ministry needs of the congregation. An occasional stock take of this sort allows us to identify potential avenues for ministry and potential areas for personal and professional development. It's about repositioning ourselves for the next phase of ministry.
7. Finally, and perhaps undergirding all the above, is the importance of remembering our ordination and the vows we made to God then. As one of the elder statesmen of our Church, Denzil Brown, advises: "re-affirm the vows from time to time. But remember, too, the promise God made to you then and rely on it. As Paul wrote to Timothy: 'I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through laying on of my hands.' Stir the gift up. Blow the coals into flame. Allow the fire to burn - not to burn out! And remember: 'God is faithful, and (God) will do it.'"

## Interfaith relations

The Doctrine Core Group has developed a paper on interfaith relations, which includes an introductory paper on Muslim-Christian relations by the Rev Peter Marshall.

You can read the paper at:  
[www.presbyterian.org.nz/4087.0.html](http://www.presbyterian.org.nz/4087.0.html)

# Marathons: Learning on the run

Kevin Ward, School of Ministry, Dunedin

When I did my first stint as a parish minister, I sometimes commented that I learned as much about how to do that in my role as 1st XV rugby coach as I did in theological college. Hindsight has moderated that belief somewhat, despite still valuing what I learned on that sporting field a great deal. As I moved from rugby as my sport of participation to that of distance running, and especially marathons, I have found it a field in which I have learned a great deal about being a ministry leader.

The insights lost some immediacy as, through injury and old age, my running intensity lessened and I gave up thoughts of competing in any more marathons than the 19 I had already done. However, the arrangement to be in Hartford, Connecticut, for the first part of 2006, and therefore the possibility of fulfilling an almost forgotten dream of running the Boston Marathon, reignited my passions. I found I first had to qualify in order to compete. Part of the mystique of Boston is that, apart from particular championship events such as the Olympics, it is the only marathon you have to qualify for. I managed to do that in the City of Christchurch Marathon last year and then, having endured the rigours of training in a New England winter reaching minus 18 at times with the ground covered in over two feet of snow, lined up for the great event with 23,000 other competitors before over half a million spectators on Easter Monday, or more importantly in Massachusetts, Patriots Day, 17 April. I found in these two events that running a marathon as a 56 year old was a vastly more difficult experience than my last experience as a 45 year old. While the last 10 km of a marathon is always very challenging, I had never really hit the famous wall before. On both of these occasions I did, so some of the lessons I am about to draw from the event for ministry have even more painful meaning for me now than they did when I last spoke on this over a decade ago.

The New Testament more than once uses the metaphor of running a race for our lives as followers of Jesus. The major passages are Hebrews 12:1-12, Philippians 3:12-14 and 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. In the last passage, the apostle Paul applies the image specifically to his own calling as

a minister to preach to others. In reading the dynamics of these passages, it is clear that the image being called upon is that of a marathon race, not a sprint race. To “run with perseverance”, to “not grow weary and lose heart”, “strengthening your weak knees”, “pressing on”, “straining toward the goal”, going into “strict training” and “disciplining (‘beating’) my body” is language that marathon runners can identify with only too readily. It is all language we also need to understand in Christian discipleship and ministry. One final general point is that in all of these passages, the focus is on finishing. In marathon running that is what it is all about. An old saying among runners is that “to win you first have to finish”. Of the 21 marathons I have begun there is only one I did not finish, my 4th, and I was so disgusted with myself for giving up that I resolved never to pull out again. This was a resolve I needed every bit of mental bargaining with myself to keep as I struggled over the last 10km at Boston. But when I crossed the line and received my medal,

along with the other 20,000 who finished, I knew I had won, however slowly I had been moving at times.

Like ministry, a marathon race goes through a series of stages. By

the way, for those who are not sure, a marathon race is 42.2 kilometres (or in the US 26.2 miles). First of all there is the buzz of the start. There is often a crowd along the side of the streets cheering you on and as well as that there are plenty of other runners close by (sometimes too close for comfort) and the friendly adrenaline stoked banter that began as you lined up for the start continues as the first easy kilometres zip by. The danger here is of going too fast, pushed along by your own adrenaline and dragged along by other runners. Doing this is disastrous as burn out will soon hit. You need to start out at a pace you can maintain till the end otherwise your reserves will be burned up in a very short time. Pacing yourself and not allowing others to push you too hard will pay off further down the course.

The next phase usually kicks in somewhere before 10 km and if you are reasonably fit lasts till about 30 km. The easy running is over and you are aware you are having to work. There are a few minor discomforts as your muscles

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**You need to start out at a pace you can maintain till the end, otherwise your reserves will be burned up in a very short time**

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have been working hard and the field has thinned out, the banter stopped, and you may well be running on your own, especially in New Zealand with relatively small fields. There is a sense of monotony about it, it is just sheer repetitive work, the same routine over and over again, and the finish seems a long way off. "Surely I should have reached the 20 km marker by now? Where is it?" A sense of drudgery begins to set in. While at Boston the streets were lined two, three, four or more deep from start to finish, in most marathons there is hardly a spectator in sight by this point, and the nearest competitor may be 10 or more metres ahead. This is the loneliness of the long distance runner.

The third stage starts anywhere after 30 km (earlier if you are not in good condition or have gone out too fast). However fit you are, it becomes a painful experience at this point. New Zealand's most popular marathon in Rotorua has a hill just at this distance, and Boston has the well-labelled "heartbreak hill", which I discovered while running it is actually a series of three hills. Sometimes you work through the pain and get a second wind and the last few kilometres can be another high as you know you are going to maintain things till the end. The high doesn't mean the pain ends, it just covers it up. But on other occasions, the pain just carries on till the end. This is the famed wall, and the race from this point on is as much mental as physical. The words of the writer to the Hebrews about "growing weary and not losing heart" are profoundly applicable. Losing heart is so easy as the body grows weary, the "feeble arms" drop and the "knees" become "weak". Just lifting up your leg to put it down again becomes a mental battle almost every time as the legs scream out "just give me a rest". At this stage you are often starting to have doubts as to whether you can actually finish, constantly questioning why you ever decided to do this, and telling yourself you will never put yourself through this again. For me I have nearly always got through this and into a second wind over the last few kilometres, but in Boston it just never went away, except perhaps once we made the final turn and I saw the finish about 500 metres away. Towards the end of course, the crowds begin to appear again, although at Boston they just went from two or three deep, to five or six deep and then to packed grandstands. The "great cloud of witnesses".

However, even on such a day as this, as soon as you have crossed the finish line, caught your breath again, received the medal, consoled yourself through battle tales with other victorious warriors (even at about place 10,000 out of 20,000) and been told by countless spectators "well done", the adrenaline takes over again and you begin to dream of the next course to conquer.

I think the metaphor makes its own connection with the "race" of Christian ministry and leadership. Ministry and leadership is not about a short burst of glory; a spectacular star that shone brightly for a brief moment and then burned up and disappeared. It is about a sustained commitment to finish the course, to faithfully carry out the tasks we have been called to, sometimes when it seems just plain monotonous drudgery, sometimes when every step seems painful, sometimes when the end seems such a long way off. If we just live for the high of the adrenaline moments and the cheers of the crowd, then we will never sustain longevity in ministry and reach the goal we dreamed of when we set off to the cheers of onlookers and well wishers. It is interesting that in all the three passages mentioned, the focus is on the goal of finishing. For our forebears in the faith, the emphasis was put on being faithful to the end, whereas in contemporary Christianity we have put much more emphasis on the start; being saved, born again, receiving the spirit or whatever. We focus on what is happening in the present rather than looking to finishing well in the future. The Hebrews passage is set in the context of chapter 11, the heroes of the faith, those who have run the race and finished before us. Today the heroes we read about are those who we perceive to be doing great stuff in the present rather than those who stayed the course to the end. For me when I was a reasonably competitive marathon runner in my younger years, I gained inspiration from reading the stories of some of the great runners of the past.

So what are some other lessons we can draw from this metaphor?

- Obviously one is the need for disciplined training. Paul talks about strict training and disciplining the body so he will be able to finish the course. Training takes discipline, hard work and is often painful. A comment I hear often is "why do we need to do all this training, I just want to get out there and do it". In running if you don't build a solid foundation through training, then at some point down the road you will be found out. The same is true in ministry.
- A second thing is about staying focussed. Paul writes in Philippians about "this one thing I do". Preparing for a marathon takes a strong sense of focus, being willing to give up some other things in order to give time to this. It involves giving up late nights so you can get up early and put in the long runs, and giving up certain "pleasurable" foods so your body can be in the best shape. And during the race one needs supreme concentration on the task at hand. Staying the course and being faithful in ministry mean at times a single-minded focus on "this one thing" I am called to and a willingness to give up other things

I might find attractive. For some in ministry, rather than being able to say this with Paul, they would have to say “these many things I dabble in”.

- To have a plan for the whole race. If we don't, we will just run how we feel at the start and end up running the whole race in the first few kilometres. To do a good marathon you have to hold yourself back at the start, otherwise you will burn out. At Boston with its hill, the leader at half way is hardly ever the winner. An observation I would make about ministry is that I have noticed some who start out in spectacular style, feel they have to do everything they think they will ever do in ministry in their first place in the first few years, but very often do not last the journey, burn out and drop out. On the other hand, many of those who start off much more slowly, doing the basics well, often at a measured pace, have ended up having long lasting and effective ministries.

- To expect suffering. If one sets out to run a marathon thinking it is going to be fun the whole way, then at some stage I can guarantee you will be sadly disillusioned. At some point you are going to suffer pain. The analogy to ministry is clear. On almost every page of the New Testament, what rings through is that those who follow Jesus should expect to suffer. It also suggests that leaders can expect a double dose. Certainly the writings of Paul make this clear. Most of the second half of the Hebrews passage is about enduring through suffering. Martin Luther King once said that it is when we suffer that we discover what we are really like. We find our character. It is a very Biblical point. I have learned a tremendous amount about myself, and gained tremendously in my ability to keep enduring in difficult circumstances, when almost every part of my being calls out to give up, from learning to do that while completing a marathon with similar feelings. If we can not endure in the midst of hardship and suffering, then it is most unlikely we will see the course of Christian ministry we set out on completed. Yes, the good times are great, the affirmation of others enjoyable, but we need to know how to keep putting one foot faithfully in front of the other when the hard patches come and we are all alone, as they surely will.

- Finally, learn to accept, and even seek, the support of others. In the Christchurch marathon I hit a really bad patch at about 37 kms and starting walking. A young guy on a bike came alongside and started talking to me telling me how well I was doing and how I could do it. I just had to start running again. He stayed with me, including during another brief walk, for a couple of kilometres. At Boston I was having another walk at about the same point, and a group of about a dozen young people start-

ed chanting out “9927 (my number) you can do it. 9927 looking great.” The boost it gave was tremendous. With such a packed field, others close by were struggling and we gained support from encouraging each other. Comrades in the battle. I have always found it helpful to tell others what I was seeking to do. It creates a sense of accountability. They are going to ask me how I did. At Boston by means of the wonders of modern technology, we could submit three email addresses of friends who would be sent from the microchip on our shoe and the global satellite system instant details of how we were going every 10 km. The sense of not wanting to let down their expectations was another factor that kept me going. So in ministry we need to be not too ashamed to seek support and to make ourselves accountable to others for what we are doing.

There are numerous other minor analogies that could be drawn, but these are some of the major ones it is helpful for us to keep in mind, at whatever point we are on the marathon journey that our call to ministry involves.

## **“Resource” leadership seminar**

**Wed 27 September 2006, 9am-4pm  
St Columba, Botany Downs, Manukau City**

Lead by Andrew Norton, John Wren and Jamie Worn, this seminar will help you:

- plan a year's preaching in advance
- built memorable links between your preaching and your mission
- create messages that are remembered and result in action
- present reflective prayer and meditation that connects with people

The cost is \$60 and includes work book, lunch, and morning and afternoon tea.

To register, email [office@stcolumba.org.nz](mailto:office@stcolumba.org.nz)

For more information about the seminar, call Andrew Norton on 021 224-3554

# Journeying with your calling

Howard Carter, Ahuriri/Putorino Presbyterian Parish, Gisborne-Hawkes Bay

One of the metaphors I have found useful to describe our system of call comes from our Celtic heritage. It is the idea of green martyrdom or peregrinati; of being willing to leave ones home, county and island for the sake of the Gospel. Here is a fuller description from Elizabeth Culling: "The peregrinati set out with no particular destination in mind, but wherever they found themselves they preached Christ and sought to live out the gospel. The 'Lives' of the Saints frequently states that pilgrimage was undertaken for the love of God...for the name of Christ... for the salvation of souls to obtain heaven."- (Cited in Mitton 1995: 164).

I have found myself identifying with this old Celtic idea in my journey to and in ministry. Here is a story/reflection on that journey connecting it with the past.

For the family standing on the deck of the interisland ferry, there was a definite sense of adventure. It was a sea journey, the first for the children, even for the parents unusual enough to be exhilarating, although they had been driving for the whole day after cleaning and clearing house the day before. It was a journey into the unfamiliar; moving to a different island, heading for an unknown house and huge changes. Across a stretch of water that, because of the life style they had chosen, would be more than just a physical barrier to returning at least for the three years they would be impoverished students.

There had been a sense of calling that as sure as the birds, which whirled and twirled in the wind above the boat,

were being blown south, so the wind of the spirit was blowing them southwards. But in mid-strait both coasts were clearly in view and it was time to wonder.

Great is the speed of my coracle, its stern turned upon Derry. Great is the grief in my heart, my face set upon Alba.

My coracle sings on the waves, yet my eyes are filled with tears. I know God blows me east, yet my heart still pulls me west.

My eyes shall never again feast on the beauty of Eire's shore. My ears shall never again hear the cries of her tiny babes.

Though my body speeds to Alba, my mind is fixed on Eire: upon, Munster and Meath, on her beauty from Lenny to Linn.

In Alba their hearts are hard, their tempers jealous and harsh; their bodies plagued with disease, their clothes thin and scanty.

But in Eire their hearts are soft, their tempers gentle and wise; their women fair and kind, their men stout and strong.

The orchards bend double with fruit, the bushes are blue with sloes; the plains are lush with grass, the cattle healthy and fat.

Tuneful are the songs of the monks, and tuneful the chants of the birds; courteous the words of young men, and wise the words of the old.

If all Alba were mine, from its centre out to its coast, I would gladly exchange it for a field in a valley of Durrow or Derry.

Carry westwards my blessing, to Eire carry my love. Yet carry also my blessing east to the shores of Alba.

—Columba

I was part of that family and at this stage I felt the pull Columba talked about in the prayer known as "Columba's Journey"<sup>1</sup>. "Carry my blessing north, to Rotorua and Titirangi my love, yet carry also my blessing south to the hilled shores of Dunedin." There was the sense of loss, of grief; friendships and family left behind. My almost 80-year-old mother was now too frail to travel to Rotorua let alone the length of the country and we would be unable to cover the cost of going back north. Kris's family had been just over the hill in Tauranga, comfortably close and distant at the same time, but always there. There were friends for us both and for the kids, some of them as close as a brother or sister. People for whom I could fully understand the sentiments Paul had articulated towards the church in Thessalonica (see pull quote). Young people struggling with issues that had the potential to crush the life out of them and others who had the potential to totally revolutionise their world; and we had left them. Yet there was the other coast and the promise of a future that would hold more ministry, new friends and community. There was a leaving of ministry and purpose, and if I was to be honest, position and mana to become a student again. To step into the unknown, the new.

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a leaving of ministry and purpose, and if I was to be honest, position and mana to become a student again. To step into the unknown, the new.

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So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also ourselves, because you have become very dear to us

1 *Thessalonians 2:8*

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The situation wasn't really new because over the twelve years Kris and I had been married, this was our fourth

major move and each time it had been following what we sensed the Spirit was calling us to. There had been adventure involved and the grief of leaving and missing. This time, however, it was harder because we'd stayed longer. There had been only three of us last time we had moved but now it was five, and this time we were aware of the fact that it was for a limited period of three years. Three years, then we would move again. "Next time," I promised Kris, "next time we're going to settle in for the long haul. Next place we go, it'll be for a long time, I promise. Maybe I'll end up even being a one-parish minister!"

Three years later and once again we stood as a family on a similar deck on the same stretch of water. The weather was different and you couldn't make out one shore let alone both. This time there were six of us. This time once again we felt the spirit wind blowing us north but it was too rough for seabirds to provide a visual metaphor this crossing. But once again I felt the sense of being called, once again it was to the unknown, a small parish in the north of Napier that stretched from the port way north to the Mohaka river. More people to get to know, to learn to love and to faithfully serve. Once again we left behind friends and relationships, studies (yahoo) but also effective ministry.

Once again we'd unsettled kids and uprooted them to move. The future you'd think was a bit more settled but it seemed as cloudy and mist-shrouded as the Wellington coastline. Long term this time? I hope and pray; yet if not, well, I've always been happy to use the words of Canadian folk singer Bruce Cockburn: 'I'm too old for the term but I'll use it anyway; I'll be a child of the wind till the end of my days'.

So here, O God, is my pilgrim's prayer:

*God who formed the sea and the land,  
Who spoke and the waves rolled and the wind blew,  
Who flung stars and galaxies into space,  
And breathed life into our clay forms  
We give you praise  
In Christ, You know what it is like to journey,  
You left your heavenly existence to live amongst us,  
You chose to give up the comforts of house and home  
To teach and heal freely as you roamed,  
You experienced the joys and sorrows  
Ebbs and flows of our life,  
Then out of love you gave your life for us,  
Nailed to a cross, buried but not ended.  
You rose from the dead and you are seated at God's right hand  
Yet in a real way you journey with us still  
Present to the end of the age.*

*God's Holy Spirit  
Wild goose, Spirit wind  
You blow and we do not know from where it comes  
Or where it will go or lead us,  
We ask you to fill our sails afresh  
Not to lead us to safe harbour  
But out upon the wide and wild ocean  
To where our master calls us to serve.  
God we have left family and home  
Prestige and position to follow you  
The land we are in is foreign and strange  
There are not the familiar landmarks, by which we can  
navigate,  
We miss the things and people we have left behind,  
Friendships that warmed our heart,  
A community that embraced and nurtured us,  
Homes that were full of memory and meaning  
It has caused sorrow in our hearts  
And often we are tempted to give up the journey and re-  
turn  
Or find an easier path to go by  
Yet you lead us and guide us  
You provide for us  
You go before us and watch our back on the way  
You walk along side us  
I often fear O lord for my family and their welfare  
I question what moving so often will do to them  
Yet I know you love them more than I do  
That you are loving and full of grace  
That your plans are for our best  
That you know our needs and provide  
I will put my trust in you and go where you call  
I will stay if you call me to stay  
I will wander if you call me to move on  
In all this I will continue to journey with you  
Through your strength, by your spirit  
As you continue to journey with me.  
A journey to maturity and mission  
Amen*

## References

<sup>1</sup> Sourced from Van de Weyer, pp. 31-32

## Bibliography

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# Placing your call in context

*Michelle Shin, hospital chaplain, Auckland*

The call to the ministry is not something that can be talked about in a vacuum because there is not a satisfactory definition to explain clearly what it is we are talking about. The ministry here is an ordained ministry and this is not to take away from the importance of other ministries of the church. I say it cannot be talked about in a vacuum because I believe that it concerns the life of a person and it encompasses all aspects of one's life. It is more like a vocation, rather than a job, but even the word "vocation" does not fully encompass its nature.

Firstly, it is a process. It takes a life time. It happens as part of a process in which relationships with other individuals and the community play a very important part. It involves a process of discernment, which involves prayers and reflection, and it involves the prayer and encouragement of others such as friends, congregations, family, teachers and other church authorities. Then there is a process of authentication of the call, involving the discernment of the Church that recognises the individual's gifts as well as their natural and spiritual self, which are important for the ordained ministry. Then there is a formation process during which the person is tested and tried, as well as nurtured and encouraged to continue to pursue the call. Then there is ongoing re-examination, nurturing and sustaining of the call throughout your life in ministry.

Secondly, it has a purpose that is not one person's but is of God, who is transcendent and also imminent. It is to serve God and His purpose for the world. It happens in recognition of God's activity through the community of faith. Therefore, the call should be understood in the context of the gathered community of faith where all members are called to do what Jesus called the disciples to do as we read in the Gospels. What was the nature of the gathered community?

1) The community originated with Jesus and it started with Jesus calling them to follow. Mark 1:17 Jesus said to them (Simon and Andrew by the Sea of Galilee), "Come follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men."

Metaphorically "fishers of men" is not something we can understand and it may not tell us exactly what the disciples were called to do, but whatever it meant, it changed their lives. There was a caller, Jesus, and the disciples were those who responded. There was a complete turn around of lives. Their purpose in life became the pur-

pose of God in Jesus. This becomes clear to us when we come to the later part of the Gospel, just before Jesus was taken up to heaven. It tells us that the purpose of calling was about salvation through our going and preaching the Gospel everywhere possible.

2) In Mark 16:15-18, 20, Jesus said to them, "go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptised will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues, they will take up serpents and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick and they will recover." And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the Word through the accompanying signs.

They were called to go and preach the gospel.

Likewise, Matthew 28:19-20 says, "go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teach them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Their purpose here on earth was clearly to go and preach the gospel, baptising people in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit... The community has existed for this purpose and ultimately for the salvation of the world.

3) And, finally, with the coming of the Holy Spirit, the church was born but the purpose of call remained and therefore the purpose of the church.

So, Peter said in Acts 2:38, "repent, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." And the church continued to meet and grow in the teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers. They shared all things in common, met in the temple and broke bread from house to house and had grateful heart and thanksgiving.

4) Then, the number grew so much so that there was a growing need to appoint leaders. So the disciples said, “it is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables, therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom whom we may appoint over this business, but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.” (Acts 6:2-4) Therefore, there was a separation of the Ministry of the Word and Sacrament from other ministries. And it was all for one purpose, that is, the preaching of the Word and bringing people to God in repentance and prayer; therefore for the salvation of the world.

Since then, many have been chosen either through meeting the risen Christ on the way like Saul or through being nurtured and brought up by witnesses and teaching of the others like Timothy. Throughout history, the church shaped its offices and governances in relation to existing culture and way of life. The ordained ministry has been modelled after monastic, monarchic and feudal systems and then on professionals with qualifications and academic excellence. Today, we seem to recognize the need of all that has been and much more. Perhaps we are seeking to model business, with managerial and productivity driven strategies and so on.

Those preparing for the calling face challenges to the boundaries between themselves and the community. In preparation, people are encouraged to take time to make decisions while they are going through years of study, reflections, and ministry experiences as well as various other social and personal experiences. In all of the experiences of people with the sense of call, they are not only in touch with the contemporary world but also are being tested, nurtured and confirmed or re-examined and redirected in their ways to follow the Christian calling that all Christians have been given. This is a very challenging task and many are left to their own resources and devices to stay the course. This is all worthwhile if the fruit is that which you worked towards, but without proper support nurturing the gifts of the people and bringing them forth to be used in the work of salvation as an ordained minister resulted in the shortage of ministers and ministry interest. Rather, we focus on the financial deficits and the disgruntled few that diminish the work of the Spirit.

There should be a certain period of testing the call, which requires obedience and immediacy, and might not always be convenient. Behind the ordained ministry’s apostolic succession that links the church with Jesus Christ, there are the prompt responses of the disciples when Jesus Christ calls them, despite of all the reasonable circum-

stances. It should be the same for the ministers; it requires them to respond decisively, for the faithful proclamation of the Gospel and humble service in the name of Christ. Therefore, the true meaning of laying on hands during ordination as a symbolic act of the gift of the Spirit given in the ministry of the church by the Risen Christ will stay as a reminder of the Spirit of God at work through the individual for the community. Jesus Christ in His Holy Spirit is the source of everything that enables the ministry of the Church and the ordained.

Thirdly, ministry is not something that happens merely by what we do with what we know. It requires devotion and energy at all times, in a way that is not under our own control. It also needs to be nurtured and fed through meditation and continuous studies. However, it is the hardest thing for people to understand that the minister’s work is meditation and studies as much as visiting, leading meetings, and conducting services, weddings and funerals. For each word we speak and each act we perform as ministers should be thought through and prepared by study and prayer. This is also the only way the call can be sustained. It is not by love of the job but by the love of the Word and the power of the prayer. This becomes increasingly harder for the ministers and ministry students; the pressure of having to do so is overwhelming.

The productivity and profit margins are not comparable to meditation and studies, which have no recognisable value in a business sense. I do not think that the ministry will cease because of lack of money; however, it will become shallow and lose its meaning if there is no appreciation for Word and Prayer.

Given the fact that the ordained ministry had been shaped by the culture and its shifts, I believe the Spirit, who has shaped the Church in the past, is shaping our Church today. Perhaps we are being reshaped by the Holy Spirit in our ordained ministry even now. For example, there is the constant pressure of growing numbers, therefore producing the appropriate ministers with leadership skills and management knowledge to satisfy the business model of being Church. There are challenges of down-sizing and selling off assets and services to meet the need of now. Less and less, the church is reaching out at a social level, and through such challenges churches are increasingly becoming inward-looking, as if we are in defensive mode trying to hold on to what seems to be diminishing, such as numbers and resources or reserves. The call to ministry today might be quite different from that experienced by the previous generation and perhaps we ought to dig deep into how it might best be understood in our own setting. However, this has to happen with a great deal of study

and reflection, holding the Word and the culture in tension, if we must. Because after all, the purpose of the call remains, even if the shape in which it is to be interpreted and translated will be different. It needs creative thinking and even more devoted studies and prayers.

If we feel that we have become too eager to listen to voices that are not our own or are not something that we previously listened to, it is probably wrong for us to listen. I believe that we ought to listen to what the Spirit has been saying to the Churches all along and keep asking why Christ has called us to be His Church. And we ought to consider the call to ministry for building up one another for the Kingdom of God with the sense of spiritual growth and gathering, nurturing and growing people with heartfelt worship that is meaningful for us and will make us effective preachers and worshipers, here and now.

Fifthly, we should not overestimate what God can do.

“What shall we say the Kingdom of God is like?” asked Jesus. “What parable shall we use to explain it?” It is like a mustard seed, the smallest seed in the world; it grows up and becomes the biggest of all plants. It puts out such large branches that the birds come and make their nests in its shade.”

Christianity started with a small beginning and we have been declining for quite some time now, but it was never about numbers, rather about the heart. Likewise, the identifying and discernment of a person with a call should not be based on its small beginning, handicap, race, gender, or socio-economic background. However, there should be a recognition of one’s teachable spirit, humbleness and grateful heart, a willingness to risk it all for God, as well as commitment and appreciation for the way in which the process of discernment that the person, as well as the Church, should work through to listen to the Spirit with clarity.

Lastly, the Spirit is the key driver in the process of re-examining, nurturing and sustaining the call. We may not understand the direction that the Spirit takes us, just as we cannot understand the extent of God’s ways. Therefore, the individual is susceptible to the inconceivable way of the Spirit and should have a good understanding that the Spirit at work is the Spirit of God, renewing, life-giving and uplifting the church. And that same Spirit calls peo-

ple and they grow not only in how much they know, but in how much they grow in love and passion for the work of Jesus Christ for the world and for His people. Because the church ministry should not be about how well you put together a service, but should about how the service conveys the message of Christ and changes people’s lives. It is not how many people you have on Sunday but how many people are growing to know and love, so are ready to give their lives to God and His work of salvation.

The Spirit is the key to the new covenantal relationship the person has with God and with the Church. The Spirit is nurturer of the call and foundation of our commitment made before God and the church. God in Jesus Christ gives gifts of the Spirit to the Church and one way in which it initiates, nurtures and confirms for the church is the gift of Ministry of the Word and Sacrament. The Spirit is the key driving factor even at the moment of having to choose where to go after the lengthy training down south,

directing the way in which the gift of the Spirit is sent to places. However, it is not only the active driving factor, but also requires and prompts the individual to act upon their call. With

this understanding, the call is not the call of an individual but of God to the church.

In conclusion, the task of the Church in identifying candidates for ministry is the task of the Spirit, which is done in Spirit and truth. It cannot be separated from the community of faith in which God raises some to be the ordained ministers, who are called to dedicate their lives to the study of the Scripture, of the way of the Spirit in History and in people’s lives, and the meditation and prayer through worship and sacrament, to serve the purpose of their calling. The purpose is to preach and to make disciples for the Saviour, who did not hesitate but risked all to save us. It is not to grow the Church here on earth in numbers, but to change people’s lives and change the society and the world in which we live. We need to recognise that the Spirit is at work in our world and in our Church to shape and reshape us to His purpose. Whilst the purpose remains, the practice and shapes of ministry will be different and therefore we ought to listen to what the Spirit has to say to us at all times, through prayer and reflection and through the study of the Scriptures, so as to be relevant and effective fishers of people. Are we prepared? Do we understand what the Spirit is saying to the Church, now in 2006?

# Embracing the unexpected call

Jill Kayser, Kids Friendly coach, Auckland

I've always been in awe of people who knew all their lives what they wanted to do or be. I reached 35 and still didn't know what I wanted to be when "I was big". I'd done 10 years being corporate, I'd loved my five years of being a stay-at-home mum but what now? I decided to return to uni to explore the world of "ology's" and become a child psychologist, but soon found out that as a person of faith I didn't enjoy proving things and psychology left me stone cold.

Then I received the call. It was from our minister Martin Baker, asking if I would consider applying for a newly created position in children's and community outreach ministry. "Absolutely not," was my reply. I'm on my way to being an academic, not a minister, was my thought. And then there was one of those washing line moments. I think God talks to me at the washing line because he can't get a word in any other time. Anyway, it was an infuriating discussion that ended in me accepting the position. "OK God, you win," I pouted, "but I'm only doing it for two years while finishing my degree, then it's back to 'real' work." It's true that stuff about God working in mysterious ways, because here I am still ministering 10 years later.

So to ask me to write about my call is no simple thing. Am I called?

Like so many things about Christianity I just don't have a definitive answer, but what I do know is this. I am in this place because of God rather than because of me. I am called to love my fellow humans and though I don't think it is humanly possible to love one another as Jesus loves us, I am convinced that if I and others loved one another even with a fraction of that love, the world would be a changed place.

It is this knowledge that calls me to do what I do. In developing the Kids Friendly initiative for the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, my ongoing challenge to myself and our church is this: how do we, the church respond to Jesus' call to love and share His message of love with our communities?

Children and families provide a number of opportunities for the church to share the love of Jesus and our faith. There's the evangelistic opportunity. Children are more open and receptive to the gospel than any other group.

Statistics show that children are more likely to come to faith (50 percent come to faith before the age of 13 and 90 percent before the age of 18), and the values, beliefs and attitudes formed during these years are unlikely to change as the individual ages.

Then there's the sociological opportunity. Christians not only have a tremendous opportunity to help build a better world by investing in the moral and spiritual character of our young people, but we have a responsibility to respond to the needs of our society's children and families. Researcher Margaret Mead declared that "the society that neglects its children is one generation away from destruction".

And there's pragmatism. Children and families are easy to reach. Children's ministry is within the reach of just about every church, in that it can be done at a variety of levels by just about any minister. Children love being part of social activities with a message, organised by churches and most parents welcome help and encouragement from churches in raising their kids. Research reveals that even the unchurched are more likely to give church a go if it is seen as serving of its community. (AC Nielsen: "Attracting New Zealanders to Spiritual Life"). As Bill Hybels suggests: "The single remaining common interest or entrance point for non-churched people in the life of the church is children... we have a wide-open door to almost every family in every community worldwide when we love and serve their kids."

But more than just responding to opportunity, Kids Friendly is responding to Jesus' call to love children: "Whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me."

My call is to remind churches of this and to inspire them and resource them to respond to this call of Jesus. The vision I cast in response to this call involves doing church or being church in a new, Kids Friendly way. As we face the reality of fewer children and families coming to our churches, we need to change the way we do things. We need to dream new ways of being.

Traditionally evangelism of children and adults has imitated a linear progression namely; people must believe certain truth, then they will belong to a community of faith, and finally they will behave in a way that reflects

Jesus. But the Biblical pattern suggests that the disciples responded to the call of Jesus to belong. In the belonging, they grew to believe, and at the same time, to adopt a way of behaving that showed they were followers of Jesus. Their belonging was the breeding ground for belief and action. (Evangelisation of Children, Lausanne Occasional Paper Issue Group 18). Kids Friendly encourages churches to begin with a faith community that invites children to belong and which demonstrates how Christians behave. In such a community, we believe children will begin to understand and embrace its beliefs and adopt the Christ-like behaviours they have seen demonstrated.

One way to engender belonging is through the worship event, so Kids Friendly churches are encouraged to engage and involve children in at least some all-age worship experiences. But providing a community of belonging should not be limited to our congregations. Kids Friendly churches are prompted to look beyond themselves to develop community outreach programmes as stepping stones for their communities to cross the cultural barriers of the church.

The vision or call of churches to build community across generations cannot be the project of one tired children's and families worker or a group of dedicated volunteers; it has to be a whole-church commitment led by the minister and church leadership to:

- Commit the necessary resources to reach children
- Intentionally welcome and embrace, rather than endure, children in our expression of community
- Create opportunity for children to belong and participate in the life and worship of the faith community and explore, learn and experience the love of Christ
- Value children for the immense love and life they bring to the whole church family
- Believe that children can minister to us.

We call this commitment the heart of Kids Friendly. It's a call I respond to, now that "I'm big", with a little knowledge, some experience, and a great amount of heart.

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# Gen Xers and a sense of call

*Mary-Jane Konings, Student for the Ministry, Dunedin*

I was reminded of the huge differences between generations in one of our recent Theological Reflection classes. Our lecturer was sharing about events in her adolescence and her general sense of optimism about the world. I grew up in the seventies, wondering if there was going to be a future, between global warming and the threat of nuclear war. This sense of pessimism is typical of people my age and younger, sometimes labelled Generation X<sup>1</sup>. Most of us are now in our thirties and middle age is being re-defined as much later. The next group down is often labelled Generation Y, and that is a whole other article.

I am not claiming to be an expert in this kind of analysis, but I have noticed one or two things. For example, by and large, Gen Xers are missing from our congregations in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. Many of us have good educations and most of us have families and have spent time overseas. We're also the people who grew up knowing we were facing five or six career changes in our lifetime. I remember thinking I needed to choose a course with transferable skills because the job I was training for might not exist when I graduated.

There are a raft of reasons why we are not in church. Many of those reasons boil down to simply not making the transition to stay with church when we left home for university, or left university for work or to go overseas. Most of our Presbyterian churches have not been great places for young adults. In my experience, the ones who stayed have hooked into either youth ministry or some sort of music. The rest either took off to a church with great music or a more student-friendly environment or dropped out of the church scene altogether.

What does that dynamic mean in terms of a sense of call? Well, personally, I have had a sense of call to full-time service in the Kingdom of God since at least my late teens. That is one of the reasons I went to Bible College for two years.

But I don't remember ever having a conversation about "a call to ministry". I don't even remember having a long conversation with any minister. As far as I knew, people were "called" to the mission field, but not into the ministry. It took me quite some time to get my head around

what people meant by this “call” thing, when I started in the National Assessment process.

I am also pretty sure that at 18 or 22, I would not have been prepared to commit myself to the lengthy process of ministry training. Now, with years of youth ministry behind me and some worship-leading experience, I value the study opportunity I have been given. However, I wonder if we need to find some better ways and more flexible ways to help people understand and respond to the move of the Spirit in their lives. I am convinced we can do more to offer people supervised and supportive environments in which to test out a “call”.

The length of time required for training for ordained ministry can be off-putting, particularly for a young person. This is not necessarily a bad thing. However, I do think we can and must do more to encourage every lay person involved in ministry to do some training. Most of the current crop of ordinands have worked as lay people in the church already, some for over 10 years. Training helps keep our lay people, whether they change to ordained ministry or work out their call in another way.

Those Gen Xers are out there, people with a church background and a sense of call on their lives. Part of our job, as I see it, is helping them work out how to be church for themselves, not fit them into the “Builder” or “Baby Boomer” models. It is tempting to think of this age group as providing the necessary people power to run existing programs. But most Gen Xers aren’t interested.

What they are interested in is relationships. These are often re-thought in times of transitions and there are plenty of those – job changes, moving house, the list goes on. There is an opportunity to begin conversations at this time.

In addition, we need to reflect on the situation of young adults of today. We need to be having these sorts of conversations with students, in those critical choices they make about what to study and where. Distance courses in ministry and theology have opened up this kind of study in a way that makes it possible to access. Including some theology papers in their Otago degree has been really helpful for many of the students involved at Student Soul in Dunedin. The key is having someone around who can have those influential conversations with students at those critical times.

Finally, I read recently that today’s adolescents faced 27 career changes. I wonder how that is going to affect their sense of call. I think we also need to look carefully at the environment we provide in our churches, and the help we give our students to make those key transitions into churches. In the end, relationships matter more than advertising.

### References

<sup>1</sup> Confused? Definitions vary but I am using the wider version of those born between 1961 and 1975ish. If you are interested, check out this book list: [www.youthministry.org.nz/?sid=14&id=69](http://www.youthministry.org.nz/?sid=14&id=69)

## Kids at General Assembly 2006

We encourage you to invite children aged 8-12 years to apply to be part of K@GA - a fun, Kids Friendly programme that will creatively explore what it means to be a “Christ-Centred Community Facing” church. K@GA will run alongside General Assembly 2006. K@GA kids will have opportunities to share their experiences, insights and activities with assembly delegates..

**Theme:** Body Builders: “There are many parts, but one body” *1 Corinthians 12:20*

**Cost:** \$120 covers programme, activities, & food.

**Accom:** Children will be billeted locally in pairs.

**Travel:** The child’s church, Presbytery or family is responsible for the cost of travel to K@GA.

**Applications:** Applications are open to children from churches in the Presbyteries from Northland to Bay of Plenty. Closing date - Friday 18 August. Confirmation of enrolment - 25 August.

Send applications to: Kids Friendly, 100 St Heliers Bay Road, Auckland  
Information: Email: [jill@sthelierschurch.org.nz](mailto:jill@sthelierschurch.org.nz) Phone: (09) 585-0959

# MISSION POSSIBLE

## When you're questioning your call

John Daniel, National Mission Enabler, Dunedin

The diagram to the right suggests that the call to Christian ministry is exercised within the framework of community. Our questioning and questions to do with our call are often in response to our community context; our response reflects our level of competence, our character and sense of calling and impacts the community. As the African proverb suggests, “there is no I without a we”.



The following are observations from our own context that others in ministry have found helpful. (NB While these are specific to the call to a particular position, role or ministry, much of these are equally relevant in questioning the bigger aspect of our calling or vocation/life's work). Three common times of questioning our call:

### 1. The difficult times:

- When we have let ourselves and/or others down
- When our competence level doesn't seem to match the expectations, demands and requirements of our chosen vocation
- When facing conflict with those we are called to lead, including constant or significant and energy-sapping criticism
- When facing a loss of meaning in what we are doing
- When tired, disillusioned, burned out, depressed
- When experiencing/entering new life-stages such as the last five years before retirement, mid-life, menopause
- When there is a disparity between our type of leadership and the one that may be required to take the organization to its next stage of growth/decline
- When there is a conflict between our personal sense of call and vision, and the mission vision of the congregation/organisation

### 2. Regular, planned, expected times:

- Approaching the end of a contracted/covenanted period – as in transitional ministry, Uniting congregations, other set term
- In conjunction with or as a consequence of a process of regular feedback/review
- Regular personal retreat, reflection and review

### 3. Unexpected, unsolicited, affirming times:

- An itch inside you can't scratch
- Find yourself criticising another ministry situation/person from the outside (dissatisfaction); you have a vision/passion/energy for another situation, role, ministry
- Friends and/or other people tap on your shoulder and suggest/ask you consider a role/position/ministry

It is usual to be experiencing more than one of the above at any time, and to have a crisis and/or a period of questioning precipitated by the entrance of yet another one.

### Questioning and responding to the call

Life in ministry often has us making decisions on the go. Like fish and chips as a meal, such take-away decisions have their place. Life decisions, as we point out to those we minister to, require more. In a call crisis and/or period of questioning and deciding, it is helpful, if at all possible, to Retreat, Review/Reflect, Relate, Respond:

#### Retreat, Relate

This aspect has to do with stepping back, being apart and being with trusted companions. It has to do with restoration and regaining perspective.

Many things are put in perspective by simply changing our environment, even briefly. A friend of mine suggests “go sit on a beach (or its equivalent for you), do nothing and be for a while”. Rest and recreation are also key. For many, study leave has been instrumental. Ongoing study is also important. Silent or directed retreats are very helpful. On a longer term basis, a minister exchange to another country has proved fruitful for some.

# MISSION POSSIBLE

## Review/Reflect

A key help for people has been to identify their particular situation from the above list of three common times of questioning, and to reflect and respond specifically to these.

Revisit the place and remember the time when you first chose this current call. Do the reasons still exist? What has changed if anything? What must change if you are to stay? Is there change required of you? Are you willing to make the necessary changes? Is this still the time and place and people for you to serve and exercise your gifts?

Reviewing or identifying your own personal vision and passion in ministry, your life-goals, your family situation, and safety and security issues can assist with deciding whether these are still congruent with your current call.

Getting the help of vocational professionals can help through completing checklists on your giftings, personality, and suitability for particular vocational situations. The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand human resources manager can confidentially assist with this.

## Respond

Two of our options are renewing our call and direction or rescinding our current call. Having followed the process

above, both have implications for us and those we serve. It is helpful to ponder the implications.

One helpful way is to imagine yourself five years from now and reflect back on this moment. What regrets would you have about the decision either way? What shows consistency and congruence with your ministry beginnings and your vision? Who would be helped/hurt if you decided or not decided in one particular way.

Whatever we are going through and whatever we decide, it is helpful as a final step to: remember again the times of God's faithfulness, and why we began this journey in ministry. You are loved and chosen by God. Your gifts and calling are irrevocable. This is a touchstone. As the prophet in his lament concludes: "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, God's mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness."

In summary, in questioning your call, be alert to your context and personal situation, especially your wellness and stage in life; (re)gain perspective; reflect on the questions and review the situation and options; cultivate at least one good friendship; keep studying; remember why you entered ministry and your vision and passion for the future; and remember God's faithfulness, sovereignty, and God's steadfast love for you and your loved ones.

## Birkenhead-Birkdale Parish on Auckland's North Shore

is seeking an ordained minister to offer leadership to its twin congregations, who are poised ready to embrace the future and reach out to their culturally diverse community.

Among the attributes of the minister we are seeking are:

- Young at heart and open to exploring ways of attracting younger generations
- Empowering pastoral and mission leadership
- Biblical roots, charisma and a love of music to inspire and feed the people in worship
- Wisdom to encompass diversity of theological viewpoint and the multicultural nature of the community
- Someone who is mature, transparent and prayerful

To obtain a copy of the parish profile, please contact the Nominator,  
Rev Lester Simpson, email [l.r.simpson@xtra.co.nz](mailto:l.r.simpson@xtra.co.nz) or phone (09) 424 4274.  
Or for further information see [www.sasp.church.org.nz](http://www.sasp.church.org.nz)

Expressions of interest are sought by 31 July.

Islam: A Short History, by Karen Armstrong  
(Chronicles Book)

Reviewed by Alan Goss

For numbers of people, the words Islam or Muslim are associated with a brand of religion that promotes acts of terrorism, oppresses women, and stirs up civil war. In this little book, Karen Armstrong takes on the Herculean task of writing a history of Islam in 187 pages and correcting some of the distorted images of that religion that have grown up in the West.

In 610, an Arab businessman, Muhammad ibn Abdallah, received a revelation in a cave near Mecca. From that time on till the present day, Islam has had a mission. Their sacred scripture, the Quran (Koran), told them that God is active in history and that they are “to create a just community in which the weak as well as the strong are to be treated with respect”. Armstrong guides the reader through a series of complex events - assassinations, civil wars, invasions, the rise and fall of dynasties - which, along with the interior religious quest, constitute Islam’s vision for the world. That vision is political as well as religious. While Christians are more concerned with beliefs and doctrines, Muslims see politics as the arena in which God works.

The book includes a brief and lucid section on fundamentalism. Fundamentalism exists in other religions and not just Islam; it is highly critical of Western secularism which it sees as the enemy, trying to “wipe religion out”. Fundamentalists feel they are fighting for survival and some resort to terrorism. Armstrong shows that Islam is not a violent militaristic faith as commonly assumed in the West. Some Muslims, in their fight against what they see as the evils of secularism, go to extremes and abandon those core values of peace and compassion that are at the heart of all the major world faiths.

Armstrong refers to the veiling of women (the burkah). Many Westerners regard this custom as a form of male domination (as it was under the Taliban). She suggests that veiling links the wearer with the past and is a mild protest against our Western compulsion to “bare all”, to idolise youth and to sideline age. The uniformity of dress also stresses the importance of community over Western individualism.

Armstrong shows Islam at its most triumphant between 1500 and 1700. Three large empires were established and by the end of the 15th century, Islam constituted the greatest power bloc in the world. “The whole world seemed to

be becoming Islamic”, she says. But the arrival and rise of the West from 1750 onwards, founded on technology and capital investment, and organized on secular, democratic lines, was a major turning point, not only for Islam but for all the major world religions. None of them, including Christianity, will ever be the same.

Armstrong contends that “it has never been more important for Western people to acquire a just appreciation and understanding of Islam”. Today many Western people are expressing concern about the absence of spirituality in their lives, suggesting a diet of dry secularism is not enough. Muslims share this concern yet they welcome the more positive aspects of modernity without it being imposed upon them. They are anxious to retain their own religious traditions and some show a willingness to debate and reform them.

Armstrong’s book is a necessary tool for getting a fair and balanced handle on Islam. Westerners share this world with 1.2 billion Muslims. At their best, both societies have a common concern to promote justice, mercy and peace amongst all peoples. Highly recommended.

## **“Rethink” leadership seminar**

**Tues 26 September 2006, 9am-3.30pm  
St Columba, Botany Downs, Manukau City**

During this a unique seminar...

- you are given tools (a new way of thinking) to understand your leadership experience
- you are given time and space to think and process your ideas
- your learning style is catered for.

The conference material is research-based – real people sharing real experiences. This seminar provides you with a thinking space that engages with your experience of leadership along with a new way of thinking about leadership.

The cost is \$60 and includes work book, lunch, and morning and afternoon tea.

To register, email [office@stcolumba.org.nz](mailto:office@stcolumba.org.nz)

For more information about the seminar, call Andrew Norton on 021 224-3554 or Liz Smythe (Associate Professor – AUT University ) 021 063 6791

*Conflict and Reconciliation: the Future of our Historic Churches.* Edited by John Henwood and Tom Hazell. National Trust of Australia, 1988.

Reviewed by Jane Bloore

How Churches value and manage their historic buildings is the theme of this collection of articles, based upon a symposium held at St Mary's College, University of Melbourne, on 17 November 1984, and organised by the National Trust Moyle Restoration Appeal Committee. The symposium had two objectives, first to discuss the development of attitudes for and against preservation of church buildings in the Christian Church and the theological and philosophical justification for this development; and secondly, to discuss what had occurred in church preservation in Australia and overseas, and the solutions adopted.

Speakers came from different disciplines and backgrounds, and all of the major denominations were represented. Though this symposium took place 22 years ago, the questions it raised, and tried to answer, about the worth of conserving historic churches are no less urgent now. When a church becomes too small for its current congregation, for example, or too big, because the congregation has declined, what happens to the building? The values then placed upon it by different groups within the church and wider community can lead to serious disagreement, to the detriment of the building itself, and the congregation too. The June issue of sPanz highlights just such a disagreement in the article "Our building dilemma: restoration vs mission".

Though all of the papers presented at the 1984 symposium are worthy of attention, I wish to mention four in particular. "Churches - Our Australian Architectural Heritage" by Dr Joan Kerr; "The Case Against Static Preservation" by Kel Carr; "The Case for Preservation" by the Rev Albert McPherson, and "Changes in Patterns of Worship" by the Rev Robert Gribben. The authors grapple with issues facing many Presbyterian congregations in New Zealand today.

Dr Joan Kerr, who died in 2004, was at the time Associate Professor of Fine Arts, Sydney University. Kel Carr was a member of the Property Division Committee, Synod of Victoria, Uniting Church of Australia, and the Rev Robert Gribben was Lecturer in Liturgy at the Uniting Church Theological Hall and the United Faculty of Theology, Melbourne. The Rev Albert McPherson was Precentor of St. Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne (incidentally a building that was not readily acknowledged as worthy of preservation, although it was an important example of the

work of an outstanding English High Victorian architect, William Butterfield).

The Hon Evan Walker, MP, (then Victorian Minister for Planning and Environment) also deserves a special mention for his opening speech, which was a candid and succinct analysis of conservation issues from the point of view of the State.

The book is illustrated with 70 plates of important church buildings and their contents.

## St Stephen's Church and Community Centre

Bryndwyr, Christchurch

### *The People*

St Stephen's people are dedicated, lively, theologically informed, inclusive and caring.

There is a large core of people who give of themselves generously.

### *The History*

St Stephen's has a history of ministries offering rich worship, sensitive pastoral care and imaginative outreach.

A Community Centre outreach was established which is capable of funding a half-time director. This position was previously held by one of a two minister team.

### *The Ministry*

St Stephen's is seeking a ministry team which will offer thoughtful worship, pastoral care and leadership, though not necessarily management, of the Community Centre.

The people are open to possibilities of the movement of the Spirit in the minister or ministers God might call and the ministries they might have to offer.

### *Nominator*

If you sense God might be calling you to St Stephen's, please write for a parish profile and be ready to express your interest by July 31st.

John Hunt,  
11 Virtue Place,  
Harewood,  
Christchurch.  
[John.Burton.Hunt@xtra.co.nz](mailto:John.Burton.Hunt@xtra.co.nz)