CANDOUR
News and Views for Ministers

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Critical times in ministry

Contents

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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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Worship Resource Bank

Many of us who prepare worship are interested in both having access to other people's ideas and to sharing our own resources with others. One way in which we can do this is through the worship resource bank which is being developed at www.presbyterian.org.nz.

Go to www.presbyterian.org.nz, then to "minister's resources" and then to the "worship resource bank". Any resources you would be willing to share with others on these themes would be gladly received.

Contributions can be sent to Sharon Ensor: ministerwpc@xtra.co.nz (04) 472-6402.

Editorial

The changing rate of change

Amanda Wells

You might argue that any period in parish ministry can be labelled critical. But this issue of Candour explores facing crises and self-reinvention. It's about change. In a rapidly changing society, how can we best take advantage of opportunities to change direction? Life begins at the intersection[1].

Critical lines are most easily revealed by retrospective analysis. People have pet theories about things happening at regular intervals, like having a bad year every seven years, or five years, etc. But we often go through the same cycles, like a change in circumstances; by which we are challenged, then adjust, then become comfortable with, then bored, prompting renewed change. Whether it's a new job, change of location, or alteration in key relationships, such cycles are inevitable and perhaps even shortening in contemporary society.

When I was employed as a journalist, I wrote a weekly career-advice column. At that time, average job tenure in New Zealand was two years and four months, which I doubt has altered significantly since. It's a staggeringly short length of time, especially when you consider the spin-off affects.

From an employer's point of view, it generally takes six months for a person to accrue enough knowledge and skill to become profitable in a role; factor in the costs of recruitment and lost productivity arising from any vacancy, you can see why reducing turnover makes a substantial difference to the bottom line.

But when you think about it from an employee and community point of view, it just adds to the impermanence of individuals' relationships. Unlike our predecessors, who stayed in the same towns and jobs for life or long periods of time, our contemporaries learn that investing a lot of energy in workmate, neighbour or friendship relationships can have a frustratingly low pay-off.

As Chris Konings observes in his article, "it used to be that we would know a small number of people quite well. Now it is possible to have a shallow acquaintance with a frighteningly large number of people". Our society is facing a time of crucial transition in the ways in which we relate to each other, driven in part by the frequency of significant changes. If Chris' analysis of the next generation's communication skills is correct, will their people skills ever catch up with their predecessors'? Or will this be the start of a downwards trend? You might counter that each generation faces its own communication and relationship challenges, but it's hard to deny that the frequency of recent change far outstrips anything ever previously encountered.

A news item last month suggested that Generation Y (roughly those in their 20s at the moment) made terrible employees, seduced by reality television into greater concern with their own stardom and prospects than with loyalty to employers or building a solid portfolio of experience. The talking head being interviewed for the item suggested that many business leaders were simply deciding not to hire this group, preferring Gen Xers with their work ethic shaped by the post-1987-crash recession. Though when Gen Ys dice with negative economic circumstances for the first time, it's likely we'll see some kind of reality-adjustment in their approach to work.

The pressure on ministers to reinvent themselves to serve people themselves going through frequent and unprecedented numbers of significant transitions is high. The stress this creates shouldn't be underestimated.

So what happened to the June issue? My gratitude to Peter MacKenzie, the first person to miss *Candour* and ask me that question. The answer relates to a combination of unforeseen staffing difficulties and lack of contributions, for which a drastic solution was required.

The August issue will have the theme "Planning for mission: managing change and strategic direction". Spontaneous contributions are very welcome; please email them to candour@presbyterian.org.nz by 31 July.

I have fixed the technical problem we had with the Candour archive on the website. You can now again access back issues online in pdf format: go to www.presbyterian.org.nz and click on the small padlock next to "Login" at the top right of the page. Enter the username **minister** and the password **candour**, then click the link to the archive.

1 "Life begins at the intersection" is a line from "Faust, Midas and Myself" off Switchfoot's *Oh! Gravity* (2007). Perhaps not their best album but still worth a listen.

Times of crisis and opportunity

Susan Werstein, School of Ministry, Dunedin

Rev Pat sank into the office chair following a meeting with the Clerk of the Parish Council. It was clear that these next few weeks in a new ministry would be crucial. There was unfinished business from the previous minister, and there were expectations that Leslie address several pressing matters before the next council meeting. Pat sat quietly, sending up a silent prayer for inspiration, tact and wisdom. These would certainly be needed.

Ministries have life cycles – beginnings, "honeymoon periods", maturity and endings. At any point during a ministry, personal, congregational or community circumstances can move the mission ahead or challenge it. In some cases, the circumstances can be overwhelming.

Consider the impact both the addition and the loss of a family member creates. If we view a congregation or institutional setting (for example, school, hospital, hospice, prison) as an extended family system, we can see how the birth or a new ministry or the departure of a minister can have far-reaching effects. How can church members and church leaders prepare for these times of transition?

Knowing What to Expect

Have you ever noticed how much time the Bible spends describing beginnings and endings? The births of Isaac, Jacob and Esau, Solomon and Christ himself are given special notice – how they affected their parents, extended families, even nations. We have stories of succession as well: Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, Paul and Timothy, and Christ with his disciples. In all of these situations, time and energy is spent with the successors so that they understand the vision behind the passing ministry, and have time to grieve and say good bye, and can carry on as effectively as possible in a new era.

Dr Edwin Friedman understood these insights and wrote "Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue" in 1985. He includes an entire chapter on "Leaving and Entering a Congregational Family" – pointing out why these times are critical for a church's mission and health. So what can we do as both ministers and members to see these times as opportunities for growth and transformation? What can we do so that hurt feelings, disappointment and blame don't become stumbling blocks to mission and ministry?

I begin by looking at the context of new ministries – when a previous leader leaves.

Leaving a Ministry

Many times, when a minister knows they are going to move on, the tendency is for Rev Joe or Jane to wait as long as possible before telling the congregation or team. They do this to avoid their own grief about leaving and to minimise a "lame-duck" period.

If we think about the congregation as an extended family, however, when a person is leaving home for the first time or a marriage is ending or a loved one is terminally ill, common wisdom tells us to spend time and energy preparing for the separation. These can be opportunities for emotional growth and a deepening of faith.

> Congregations carry over the memory of the past into the structure and attitude of the present

There are four interconnecting elements for leaving a ministry.

1. The one leaving needs to be aware of his or her reactions to the upcoming change.

No ministries this side of heaven are perfect. Because of this, there can be regret, resentment or a sense of unfinished business. If ministers do not expect these things, they can be caught off-guard when congregants refer to unreturned books, or when Parish Councils hesitate paying for untaken holiday time.

Such situations arise just as squabbles over inheritance arise at the death of a loved one. The minister must take responsibility for a tendency to withdraw and avoid saying goodbye during this period.

2. Church leaders need to allow others to express their reactions to the loss. Even though it seems easier to avoid expressions of grief, in the long run, both the current and future ministries will benefit from opportunities to stay engaged.

Providing adequate time for all members to process the change has far better results than last minute information or an attitude that nothing is happening. Having a sermon series on transitions, creating the time to meet with individuals and groups of the congregation, listening to each other carefully and pastorally, combining worship experiences with pastoral interaction enables all to move on following the end of a ministry.

3. The departing minister can be actively involved in the transition process without being controlling.

A few Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand congregations are doing this already, establishing Ministry Settlement Boards prior to the minister's final Sunday. Here there is an opportunity for the minister to write down what they do, list a summary of values and guiding principles and/or produce a history of their time with the institution or church. This information, much like what Christ said to his disciples in the farewell discourse of John's gospel, can provide inspiration, comfort and insight without manipulating the future direction of the congregation or team.

4. The prior minister can stay in contact with the congregation in a healthy manner.

The overall goal of the leaving minister is disengagement, both before the departure date and afterwards. The latter is analogous to visiting the graveside following the funeral. When done helpfully, memories can remain realistic rather than taking on mythic proportions of good or ill.

Triangling

There is a tendency for members of the congregation or institution to compare and contrast the previous minister with the new (this is certainly a major theme in the gospels). All parties need to avoid this tendency.

Essential to a positive transition is for both previous and new ministers not to fall into the temptation to interfere or to encourage comparative comments. Congregants will quite naturally tell the new minister how well she or he is doing compared to the previous person, and they will similarly assure the past minister how much they miss the way he or she did things.

Both past and new ministers need to see these comments as opportunities to encourage people to relate positively with the current minister. A pastorally sensitive approach that does not engage in the comparison is the best way forward. Listening to discover issues, rather than focusing on the personalities, is the goal.

Entering a Ministry

Two factors influence the how a minister begins a new ministry. One is the length of time the congregation's previous minister served them. The second is the nature of the previous separation.

Congregations carry over the memory of the past into the structure and attitude of the present. A new minister's understanding of these dynamics aids all to live and work together in the name of Christ.

Strategies for a Smooth Entry

1. Avoid making changes too soon – especially those that involve existing groups. A minister is coming into a system of relationships – equivalent to moving into a house of an entire extended family. New ideas and ways of doing things will have effects far beyond the change itself.

For example, changing the time the youth group meets may seem simple. But each young person and leader, as well as their families, will have developed ways to work with the current schedule. Make sure that changes are made in consultation with all affected. And when there is a negative reaction, do not think of this as a rejection of the idea. It may simply be that others know what is involved in adopting a new idea. It may also be that the current arrangement is connected to a treasured memory. All parties keep talking – and don't be defensive or aggressive.

2. As mentioned above under triangling, be wary that unresolved issues and internal conflicts will result in attempts to get the new minister "on one's side". Take care not to become emotionally committed to one group over another. Relationships in the early stage of a ministry are often based on a false sense of intimacy or an idealistic expectation that a new person will "heal all ills". Avoid any tendency to scapegoat the previous minister's style or another group's goals. Also avoid feeling overly proud of compliments when they are made in contrast to the previous minister.

3. Work at individual relationships with as many members as possible. This is a concrete, positive approach for avoiding many pitfalls of a new ministry setting.

In churches where the first priority of the new minister is to get to know the people involved rather than initiate new programmes, both satisfaction and effectiveness abound. In this scenario, relationships are based on reality. Changes come out of knowing the hopes and needs of the members rather than ideals that may or may not fit a particular church or institution.

The Wider Context – the Presbytery

Before concluding this article, one must mention the vital role of the Presbytery. In the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, as in many denominations, regional and national church bodies are involved in ministry transitions. When one thinks of the way parents are involved in their children's weddings, we see both the positives and negatives of this wider context.

Positively, there is a collective wisdom and knowledge in Settlement Boards, made up of a combination of congregational/institutional representatives and the Presbytery. It is often easier for needs to be seen from outside. If things go wrong, these boards can support and guide congregations in the interim period.

Negatively, there may be multiple agendas, power plays and interference with one another's visions. If all concerned are aware of the parallels of helping someone select a mate and prepare a wedding, all parties can work together to further God's purposes. Communication and dialogue are key. Respect and understanding essential.

Conclusion

In conclusion, both when leaving or entering a ministry, patterning oneself on Christ's relationship with his apostles provides a faithful and healthy means of transition.

When leaving, inform people early enough to allow for time to say goodbye properly.

Have worship be the context of the farewell and the welcome. Celebrate the Lord's Supper, share one's stories and express one's dreams for the future.

Pray for one another.

Give the gift of listening to as many people as possible.

Do not hesitate to answer questions that will assist the others to move forward in their plans.

Accompany people where they are. Know the stages of grief and how people react to change.

Get to know people individually and in their significant groups – spend time with them before asking them to change.

Do not play favourites when asked to take sides.

Remember not to get emotionally involved in comparisons with the "other" minister.

And always, always, remember: we are surrounded by the cloud of witnesses whose prayers and lives were heard and loved by God. In our transitional times, we can learn much from their stories. May all your times of transition embody Christ's loving care.

Hello? Hello? Can you hear me?

Chris Konings, Stated Supply, North Taieri Presbyterian, Mosgiel

My son Zack got a present the other day. It consisted of a couple of pieces of bamboo, connected by a piece of string. One end of the bamboo was covered with thin paper. I remember making the same sorts of string phones from tin cans growing up. I've seen pictures of the same thing made from plastic cups and we've made paper cup versions at holiday programmes.

Zack's "low-tech" phone has a variety of incarnations but they all perform the same function. It has some advantages. It is easily replaced if lost, stolen or broken. It is environmentally friendly and doesn't need a lot of training to use. However, it only works on line of sight and, as a communication device, well, we can do a lot better.

Communication technology has come a long way since smoke signals and string phones. There have been enormous changes, even in the past 20 years. We've gone from cell phones the size of a brick to cell phones small enough to leave in your pocket and not notice when thrown into the washing machine. And it's not just the size that's different – the number of features has increased exponentially.

On a slower note, people are changing too. I hate to be the one to tell you but we're all getting older. Are any of us driving the same car we had 20 years ago or eating the same kind of food, or watching the same TV programmes? Not only are we getting older, but our environment, our context, our culture is changing.

Society is changing. The thing to remember is that the basic function of the cell phone is still the same. It is a tool for communicating.

In ministry, we have a number of tools, from communication devices to programmes. If we are still using the same tools we were using 20 years ago, perhaps we need to have a re-think. The purpose and the function of the tools don't change, that's true. But two things continue to change. One of those is the environment or context in which we use our tools; call it society if you like. The other is the people with whom we work and want to communicate.

Most of my ministry experience is from youth ministry but the leadership training we had at the School of Ministry and other conferences reinforced these principles.

Now, as a bloke, I am all for adding new tools to my tool box. It is always good to have new tools. But the basic task, the purpose for which the tool was designed, does not change.

For example, youth ministers need to reinvent themselves every three to five years. With young people, you tend to have them for five years, at the most, if you are lucky. They come in generally at Year 9 and go off at Year 13. You start with raw, abrasive kids with potential and often find they grow into raw, abrasive young leaders with potential. You grow to know them and love them. Just when you've invested enough for them to be really useful and are becoming friends in ministry, they move on to higher education or the big OE. In rural areas this happens earlier; in urban settings they can hang around a little longer. But the group you start with will eventually leave and be replaced by another group, often with completely different gifts and abilities. This natural transition can leave the unaware youth leader and minister shattered and questioning their ability, calling and training.

For example, we had this vision to have a sports ministry happening to attract and cater for the young sporty kids. Could I get people interested and motivated for this? No! People agreed with me that it was a good idea but didn't have the time to make it happen. I gave it up, wondering if I had heard right and doubting my ability to lead. The next year we had a new bunch of young people. I mean, they had matured over the Christmas break and were like new young people! Suddenly I had youth leaders coming to me asking if they could start a sports ministry because they had all these young people who wanted to play sport. Of course I said ok and the ministry took off. As scripture says, and the Seekers remind us, "There is a time for every purpose under heaven."

Now the thing to remember here is that it is not about having cool programmes that the young people come to, or adults for that matter. The programme you use is the vehicle for the gospel. It is not the gospel. Youth ministry programmes are designed so youth leaders can spend time with young people, build relationships and be available and connected when those "God moments" happen, so they can see how Christ lives in their life and what the difference is. If the programme doesn't work for the new group – you can change the programme! This may seem obvious, but it isn't.

The signs that things aren't working are subtle and the vibrancy in the older age group will mask the fact there are very few or no Year 9s coming in. There will be resistance, anger, grief and bewilderment if you change something which is "obviously successful" for one age group. Our young people are much more used to having things change and yet they still struggle at times. As we grow older, and I can relate to this, it is easier if things stay the same; they are familiar, you know how they work, and don't have to put in so much effort, which is good when you have all those other responsibilities to deal with .

The trick is to recognise this is happening and be intentional about monitoring the changes. They don't have to be big changes to the programme, which tend to take time to build up steam. They can be small, incremental differences. That means you need to be making them all the time. Find out why the Year 9s aren't coming. If possible, adapt the program so your amazing leaders can spend time with them in ways that suit the Year 9s. Sometimes what they want is sports or "rough and tumble"; other times, breakfast Bible study is what connects. Sometimes our communication strategies have to change. We are only just beginning to unpack the profound effect txting is having on young people. They prefer to communicate via technology and are simply not developing the skills in face-to-face conversation, particular anything of depth and significance. Having recognised the impact of technology, our challenge is to create ways of harnessing it. I find I get more information about a young guy's inner life from the txts than a sit-down over a hot chocolate. Go figure!

My daughter set me up with a Bebo account the other day. Bebo is all about networks and relationships. Once you accept another person online, you have the opportunity to see who all their "friends" are and make a "connection" with them. It used to be that we would know a small number of people quite well. Now it is possible to have a shallow acquaintance with a frighteningly large number of people. I'm not quite sure what to make of all this yet and I am quite sure that the online community will go through a whole raft of changes as they sort out what matters to them in this new environment. I am also quite sure that this way of communicating and being a community will have a profound impact on my daughter's generation and therefore on youth ministry in the future.

When telephones were growing in popularity, commentators lamented the impact they were having. Rather than meeting face to face, people would call and talk on the phone, which had an undeniable impact on the way that people communicate. Yet today, we recognise the landline as a fundamental ministry tool, not just for delivering phone calls but as a means to access broadband internet. While it is tempting to lament the impact of cell phones and the internet, and it is important for us to recognise that impact, what matters most is the Gospel. The question in this crisis in ministry becomes what might the Gospel look like in this new environment.

dad@hvn,ur spshl.we want wot u want&urth2b like hvn.giv us food&4giv r sins lyk we 4giv uvaz.don't test us!save us!bcos we kno ur boss,ur tuf&ur cool 4 eva!ok?

(Lord's prayer in txt language)

Abbotsford: A critical time in ministry

Ian Robertson, Chaplain, School of Ministry, Dunedin

On the evening of 8 August 1979 I had returned from a meeting, just after 9pm, and flicked on the TV to receive a news flash that a major landslip was occurring in Abbotsford, almost opposite where we lived in Church Street, Green Island.

It all seems so long ago and yet the memory is still very vivid.

The Abbotsford disaster, as it became known, was in one sense a quite minor affair, with a limited section of the community being devastated in a landslip affecting 69 homes, with another 130 being evacuated on the night. But for those involved it was far from a minor affair. Some people never fully recovered from the shock and loss experienced at that time. But grief is grief, however and whenever it impacts upon our lives.

There was a long period of impending doom before the landslip broke free. This was an important factor at Abbotsford and helps to explain much of the anger, fear and frustration expressed by the residents. On 30 May 1979, the Borough called in its engineers, as a water main had burst. The resulting inspection gave rise to a full scale investigation. By 5 June there was a strong suspicion that a substantial landslip was occurring. By late July large cracks had opened up.

On 5 August, the Dunedin Combined Area Civil Defence Committee agreed to declare an emergency from Monday 6 August. Civil Defence HQ was operational from 3pm on 6 August and a plan for the evacuation of residents in the affected area was set in motion. All residents were to be off the slip area by Sunday 12 August. It was not considered likely that there would be a sudden earth movement.

But on 8 August a major landslip did occur. At the time there were 17 people still on the slip face. Emergency Services immediately swung into action. Fortunately radio contact was maintained with this group as a rescue team was dispatched to assist in bringing them off the slip face to solid ground. At the same time and as a precaution, a further 130 households close to the slip were evacuated. I had left the house immediately on hearing the news, and was one of the first at the Welfare centre in the Civic hall. People arriving there were met by doctors, ambulance officers, clergy and members of various welfare groups. Some of us were already under the direction of the Civil Defence authorities.

Cups of tea and stories were shared, lists were prepared and by 2:30am everyone had been provided with, or had found accommodation. By 6:30am a full list of everyone, 640 persons, and their whereabouts had been provided to the CD Officer. The time lag came about because not everyone who was evacuated came through the Reception Centre. Some went directly to friends or relatives.

The next morning I was appointed assistant welfare officer and immediately became very involved in welfare aspects of disaster relief.

However, as the parish minister, I was already involved before the emergency was declared. I knew some of the people well and had moved about amongst them listening to their growing concerns and anxieties and offering what help I could. Those families on the growing fissure, or graben as it is called, were in a terrible situation. Their homes were being destroyed and it appeared that no one was acting on their behalf. Frustration had mounted into anger. Successive community meetings did little to alleviate their anxiety and fear.

On the day the Civil Defence Emergency was declared (6 August) I was called in by the Civil Defence Officer. He explained the situation and requested that I follow up the engineers and officials who were issuing evacuation notices to the householders in the possible slip area. My role was to listen, to encourage, and to check that people understood and took appropriate action.

Most people were relieved that an official decision had been made at last and were prepared to move within a day or two. One or two thought that nothing major was going to happen and they weren't at all enthusiastic about leaving their, as yet, unharmed homes. One gentleman told me he had a rifle in the cupboard and no engineer nor minister would move him out. His house remained on the edge just out of the danger zone. But he saw reason as the situation developed.

About 6pm on Wednesday 8 August (just a few hours before the slip occurred), the CD Officer asked a Red Cross worker and myself to visit a young couple who were living at the bottom of the slip face and inform them that

they must vacate their house by 7pm. Motel accommodation was arranged for them. They had a young pup and he was left in the shed overnight. That house and shed were engulfed in the landslip 2 hours later.

The next morning a very sad young woman was asking at the Welfare Centre if there had been any sign of her dog. We knew nothing.

But later the pup was found wandering about the village in a dazed state. He was checked by the vet, given a shot and returned to his owner. By Friday this story about the pup who had survived being engulfed by the landslip had got about and had become for many a sign of hope and encouragement.

For the next few days the displaced residents were in and out of the Welfare centre.

They had two major concerns: what was the extent of the damage and what was their future to be? These were questions that could be answered only after adequate investigation.

Police and Army personnel were maintaining security. Engineers and contractors were assessing the damage and how best to proceed. The Department of Social Welfare (WINZ) was on site to assist with emergency payments. The Salvation Army mobile canteens were there. The Red Cross and many other groups were assisting.

The goodwill of the nation began to pour in. A national relief fund was established. Holidays were being offered for children and families in various parts of the country.

Journalists and TV crews were continually pressing for interviews from victims and authorities alike.

The whole community was drawn into the disaster as helicopters and planes flew overhead and sightseers blocked the streets.

I was very appreciative of the personal support of the Rev Ken Irwin, Director of the PSSA (Presbyterian Support) and for his understanding of how the welfare response can so easily get out of hand in emotionally charged crises. People of goodwill can send vast quantities of goods, toys and blankets way beyond the need. Careful administration is required so that local businesses are not put at risk.

The church community responded well, offering accommodation, food, voluntary assistance and transport. Our local church, St. Margaret's, was used for meetings and as a place of quiet and prayer. Ten days later our hall was used for a sale organized by church people for emergency funds for those whose homes had been destroyed.

On the Sunday after the landslip we had scheduled a Worship and Work Sunday for laying out gardens and planting shrubs and trees around the Church following worship and a shared lunch. After discussion, we decided to continue as planned. Many positive comments were received from the wider community about how the Presbyterians had confidence in the future and were getting on with "business as usual".

So what did I learn?

I remember Abbotsford as an exhausting experience and I am particularly thankful for a personal faith and theology that helped me identify with the immediate situation while not being overwhelmed by it. I am also grateful for my education which gave me an understanding of how people act under stress, grief and loss.

I learned that Civil Defence is a community response with a military style administration. For example, I had to request leave from my welfare position to conduct a wedding on the Saturday afternoon.

Communication was all important. People needed to be kept informed of decisions affecting their lives. So I learned the importance of keeping concise diary notes. I learned too the importance of keeping families together. I learned the effectiveness of working in teams.

I came to appreciate the natural resilience of the human spirit and how important it is for people to be given useful activities in times of community crisis; to normalise the situation as soon as possible. Above all I learned the importance of trust at all levels.

An observer driving down the Green Island motorway today would see no evidence of the 1979 landslip. Terraced playing fields and stands of trees cover the physical scars and have brought healing to the hillside. Many of those affected by the landslip were likewise healed and quickly got their lives together in another locality. Others healed only after long-term therapy and support. Some struggled for many years to come to terms with what had happened to them in the groaning landslip and subsequent chasm that took away their home.

Leading change in congregations

Kevin Ward, School of Ministry, Dunedin

> *"In a time of drastic change, it's the learners who inherit the future. The learned find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists"*. Eric Hoffer

Most of us are aware today of the need to transition the Church from models that worked in a previous era but clearly are inadequate in the very different context in which we find ourselves in today. One of the University courses I have taught this year has been called "Studying Congregations". One student in the class was a Presbyterian minister of considerable experience. He wrote in his final assignment that "an unprecedented focus in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand has risen to this formidable challenge. The assumption is made of course that ministers and leaders who want to lead and manage change already know how to! This assumption is not in my view valid… In many ways ministers of my ilk were taught to map read on well marked roads, not navigate on stormy seas. Changes are significant and irreversible – while tomorrow continues to arrive ahead of schedule, yesterday can never be revisited." My engagement with a wide variety of ministers doing post graduate study in courses I teach as well as in seminars I run around the country would concur with this assessment.

1. Change today

This situation is made even more challenging because not only has the need to lead and manage change become a critical element of pastoral leadership, but the very nature of change itself has changed. There are two critical issues.

(1) The way in which we view and engage with change itself has changed. Change used to be episodic. It was about movement from an old stable situation, through a period of instability, to the new stable situation. It didn't happen very often and took place within the traditional framework. The issue today is very different. Change is continuous and permanent. It is a world of constant white water. Part of the challenge of pastoral leadership is that we are responsible at the same time for leading change and providing stability. Our communities demand change and reward us for stability.

(2) We are now in a time of diversity and divergence. After World War II it was a time of great conformity and convergence. Charles Handy, a leading business thinker, suggests these are two different conditions leaders face.

a. Convergence: When everybody in the group is asked the same question you get a similar answer. This was the world of the 1940s, 50s and early 60s. Votes were taken because consensus was viewed as the resolution to problems. Everybody would buy into the result and go along with the decision.

b. Divergence. The questions are the same, but the answers are different. Votes no longer solve problems as everybody does not converge around the dominant view. They keep working for their own divergent view or leave and form a new party or church, to further their view. This is much messier and it is difficult for leaders raised in a consensus world to understand. And most of our leaders were raised in that. It is why so many of our processes do not work.

The world of constant change ("white water rafting") in which we live confronts congregations and ministers with ongoing challenges that require new ways of thinking and responding; ways of responding that Ronald Heifetz in Leadership Without Easy Answers calls "adaptive" rather than "technical". Technical responses are responses to routine problems that are clearly definable and have relatively fixed solutions that are based on what others in the tradition have already done. In contrast, "adaptive work consists of the learning required to address conflicts in the values that people hold, or to diminish the gap between the values people stand for and the reality they face. Adaptive work requires a change in values, belief or behaviour." Many of the challenges that ministers and their congregations face today require adaptation, not technical responses, if they are to reshape their congregation's culture in faithfulness to the Gospel.

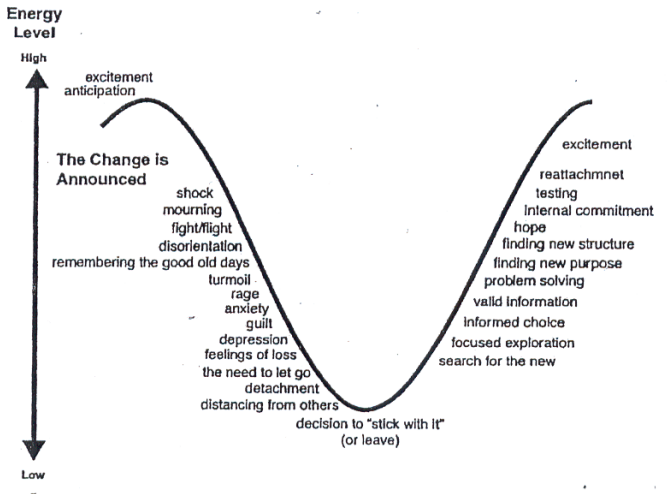
This kind of leadership involves holding in creative tension the challenges of the present situation and the goods of the Christian faith, both Scripture and tradition. In doing so each informs the other in an ongoing dialogue or argument. In this conversation, Scripture and tradition remain living resources that are newly interpreted in the encounter with present challenges as ministers and congregations seek ways of responding in faithfulness to the Gospel.

Nancy Ammermann in her study on Congregation and Community notes that where the congregations she studied failed to "adapt" to their changing communities, it

was often because they lacked pastoral leadership and the pastors themselves often confessed to a lack of necessary leadership skills to face the challenges the congregations were experiencing. Some were unable and other unwilling "to undertake the difficult (and often conflictual work) of dislodging old routines".

2. Responding to change

The process of change produces strong feelings within all of us. This is especially so in regard to those institutions that contain and convey our beliefs and values. People are hesitant about uncontrolled and rapid change in our key social institutions. The church is such an institution and attempts to introduce change will often generate strong emotions.



Gilbert Rendle, Leading Change in the Congregation (Alban, 1998, p. 110), provides the following helpful diagram. Because we are living in a period of unprecedented and rapid social change, many people are already anxious about change and may feel their church is the one place at least where things will be relatively stable. There is a significant generational difference because those under about thirty five have grown up in this rapidly changing world and so not only are they more comfortable with change, they may even expect it.

Change generates powerful feelings:

- It disturbs and threatens our security
- It creates fear
- It disorientates and confuses us; things are not where or what they used to be.
- It causes loss and grief.
- It creates anger.
- It seems to declare some people irrelevant; their experience and knowledge are no longer valuable, they don't seem to fit anymore, they feel alienated.
- It can seem accusing. We may be saying – "the way you did it before is no longer appropriate". But it can sound like – "the way you did it before was wrong and ineffective".
- Change also excites and challenges, creates new possibilities, opens up new visions.

These are strong feelings and that is why most people's reaction to change is at first more emotional than reasonable. That people respond this way does not mean they are difficult people out to stymie our precious schemes or even evil people opposing the will of God. Just that they are ordinary human persons. Managing change means dealing with people's hearts as well as their heads, and in the change process the initial focus needs to be on the pastoral aspects of dealing with this dimension. We are never just reasoned or argued into change.

3. Principles of the change process

Machiavelli wrote in the 15th century. "There is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle than to initiate a new order of things." The following are three key principles to increase the chance of success.

1. Changing people is more important than changing things

In the final analysis, people think, feel, choose and act - and will therefore determine what real change occurs. Particularly in the 1980s, people became enamoured with restructuring in the belief that if things were structured differently then they really would be different. However, it is people rather than structures that determine the culture of an organisation; if the people are not changed, then reality will stay much the same. I remember becoming acutely aware of this while I was at Bible College of New Zealand in the 1990s and going through another phase of restructuring. Another set of diagrams was produced with the boxes having different labels and different lines connecting them. I said "We can change all these structures, put different titles on office doors, but if you still have the same people behaving in the same way nothing has really changed." There is an increasing realisation that real change is about changing the culture of organisations, and that takes significant time. We will never change our churches to a missional mode, however much we restructure, unless we change the people in them to think and act missionally. That means often changing their thinking (theology) as well as their behaviour. This takes much time and energy.

2. Change runs more smoothly when people participate in its planning

Involvement in the planning process tends to generate the necessary force for the change itself. Facts personally

researched are better understood, more emotionally acceptable, and more likely to be utilised than those passed down by someone else. Participation in analysis and planning helps overcome resistance, which arises from proceeding too rapidly or too slowly.

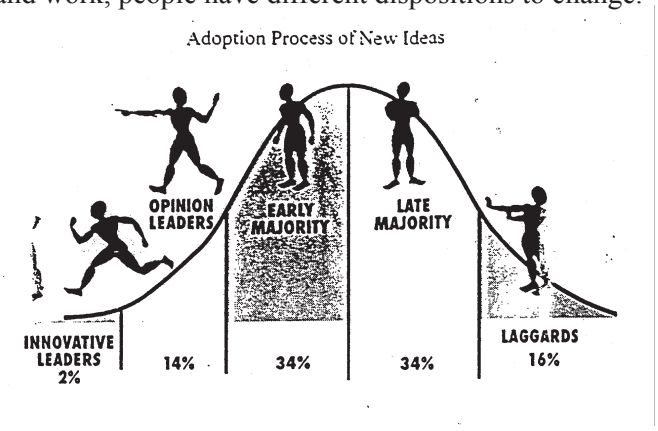
Involvement helps counter the following axioms of the change process:

- People naturally feel somewhat awkward and self-conscious in a period of change, particularly if it affects their specific areas of responsibility
- People first focus on what they will lose and feel a need to express this, perhaps to others, perhaps to top leadership
- People believe others can handle change process better than they can, so the idea that everyone in the organisation is involved doesn't help much
- People can handle change in direct proportion to their experience at handling change
- People tend to immediately turn to the argument of insufficient resources to thwart change that they find distasteful.

Again time is of the essence here, allowing people to fully participate with all the questions and perspectives they bring.

3. Change includes overcoming resistance

People feel threatened by the thought of innovation in something of which they have long been a part. Most people's first response to the thought of change is one of resistance. Here is a helpful graph of how in a normal population individuals might adapt to the idea of change over time. By virtue of their personalities, life experience and work, people have different dispositions to change.



Many of us who are leaders fall into one of the first two categories – often it is why we are leaders. But the mistake we make is to think others are as enamoured of change as we are. We are often impatient and fail to remember that we have been thinking about and working through the issues for months, sometimes years, before others. Frequently we do not allow enough time for others to catch up, process the ideas and their emotional reactions and "catch" the vision. Acceptance of change takes time – usually more time than the change leader allows.

An important point in this is that the most important groups are the early and late majority. The "silent majority". Most of the noise and emotional heat comes from either end of graph. There is a need to consult widely (surveys are very helpful) to find out where these people are at and my rule of thumb is that by and large you are going at about the right pace if the early majority are reasonably comfortable and the late majority are not squealing too much. You need to accept that maybe the laggards will never be happy. A great piece of advice I once read is: "I cannot give you a certain formula for success but I can give you one for failure. Try to please everyone!"

One final insight from this graph is that the best people to communicate with and deal with the emotional issues of each group are those from the group just ahead. It is a rather pointless exercise having those who are innovative leader trying to convince the laggard. It just produces a lot of heat and little light. The best people to talk to them are the late majority. Likewise the early majority to the late majority. This is also helped by the fact that people in each group tend to have significant social networks with those either side of them, but few with those further away. This illustrates the importance of having within the team leading the change people from all of these groups (or at least the first four) instead of having it all lead by a group of enthusiasts. Slower and messier work in the earlier stages but much more guaranteed of success in the long run.

4. The process of change

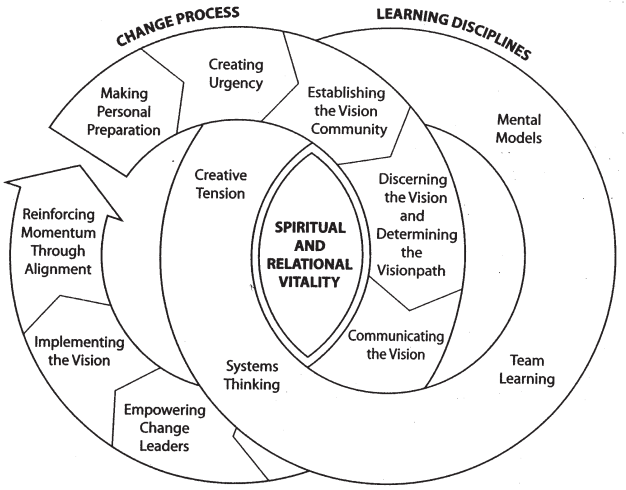
The most important principle relative to the change process: GO SLOWLY. Grandfather's theorem: "A person convinced against their will is of the same opinion still".

John Kotter of Harvard Business School is widely considered the major expert on change today. In Leading Change, (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1996) he outlines an eight stage process of creating major change:

1. Establishing a sense of urgency
2. Creating a guiding coalition
3. Developing a vision and strategy
4. Communicating the change vision
5. Empowering broad-based action
6. Generating short term wins
7. Consolidating gains and producing more change
8. Anchoring new approaches in the culture

J. Herrington, M. Bone, J.Furr, in Leading Congregational Change (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2000) have built on this and the work of the other secular expert Pete Senge's, The Fifth Discipline (New York: Random House, 1990, p.13) to produce the following model for congregational change. This from my reading is the best book available on this subject. They make the critical point that "The transformation of an existing congregation is never a quick or easy process… A realistic figure for comprehensive transformation of a congregation might be five to seven years."

FIGURE 1.1 Congregational Transformation Model



When dealing with change in a local church we are working with powerful feelings. We are dealing with people's beliefs and values, their place of belonging and therefore their identity. These things are all tied up with people's history. Every community, every congregation has a history and "myths" associated with that history. People who have been around for a long time, particularly key leaders and shapers of opinion, know the history and value it. Change threatens this. The relationship between change and a congregation's history is important to understand and respect. Change leaders must value and respect the past, celebrate the history and its heroes and heroines. It is vital to build positively on history, to see the past as a foundation for the future. "While we do need to change, we only have the possibility of doing so because of the faithful witness and tireless energy of those who have gone before."

5. The ingredients needed for change

Arnold Mitchell, a social psychologist, contends three ingredients are necessary for change to occur:

a. Change comes from dissatisfaction. An example of this is with conversion. Effective change leaders assess the chances for change by evaluating the level of dissatisfaction within the group. If dissatisfaction is strong, the potential for change exists. Incidentally this means the first task of a leader wanting to bring about change might be to increase the level of dissatisfaction.

b. Change takes energy. Altering the existing conditions experienced by a group consumes a terrific amount of emotional and physical energy. To effect change we must have a change-friendly environment. Without such a setting, an extraordinary degree of energy is spent fighting for or against the change process rather than investing in establishing the change. Notice that in Herrington et. al. the first phase is personal preparation, and in their widespread church consultancy they have found this so important that they have published a second book dealing with the spiritual and emotional preparation needed to do this. (J Herrington, R Creech, T Taylor, The Leaders Journey, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003).

c. Change requires insight. A group considering the acceptance of change requires a leader who is credible and trustworthy. It seems that there are two situations of generally successful change in church life. First, when there is a crisis. People will take on board almost any change to avoid impending disaster. Second when an existing congregation is in a sufficiently strong relationship with their leader(s) to trust them not to do anything which might cause harm. Trust develops over time being together. So it is important to develop trust before you begin significant change. It is interesting that church growth research indicates that the most effective years of a minister are between years five and fifteen.

Conclusion

This is just a brief introduction to some of the key concepts and literature on the area of change. I was not introduced to it until I had the change to attend a Fuller Seminary D Min course on change in 1984 and then the subject was just beginning to make an appearance. Much has been learned since then, but for most theological schools it has only begun to be a subject of learning in the past decade at best, meaning that many of our congregational leaders are like those referred to in the opening remark. I believe this is one of the most critical learning areas for many of our ministers today if our churches are going to be able to make the kind of transitions desperately needed to ensure any kind of viable future. We may decry the focus on leadership, but as Nancy Ammermann has pointed out in studying congregational adaptation to changing contexts, the critical factor in those that failed to make the necessary changes was at the level of leadership. Sadly I have seen many a new idea introduced to churches fail, not because the idea itself was not good, but because the process was so poorly led.

Global challenges affecting theological education

Graham Redding, principal, School of Ministry, Dunedin

Dr Redding delivered this address to the World Alliance of Reformed Churches' consultation on theological education, which was hosted by Princeton Theological Seminary last month.

If I were to add anything to the title of this address it would be, "A New Zealand perspective". For the difficulty one encounters in talking about challenges of global scope in any field of inquiry is the impossibility of overcoming the particularity of one's own context and the perspectival nature of truth. Acknowledgement of this difficulty, however, should not reduce us to silence. As varying perspectives are put in conversation with one another mutual understanding is advanced and new possibilities are identified and explored.

It is in that spirit of dialogue that this paper is offered. It is organized around three situations from New Zealand, which will serve as windows on global challenges and become catalysts for reflection on themes that impact upon the task of theological education.

The first window concerns a recent decision by the Speaker of New Zealand's House of Parliament to review the prayer by which each sitting of Parliament is opened.[1] Members of Parliament are being asked to consider the desirability of having a prayer at all and, if the prayer is to be retained, whether it should continue to be prayed "through Jesus Christ our Lord" or whether it should be made less specifically Christian so as to reflect New Zealand's religious diversity.

The decision to review the prayer is triggering all kinds of questions: Is New Zealand a secular or a Christian nation, and what are the implications of that answer for public life? How does a post-Christendom society handle religious pluralism without disregarding historical particularity? How might the Church portray the Gospel as public truth, and not merely a matter of private belief, without reverting to a Christendom mindset?

Such questions are not confined to the New Zealand situation. They reflect a rapidly changing missiological context for the Church and for the task of theological education. At the School of Ministry, of which I am Principal, we are asking ourselves: How well are we equipping our students to grapple with this profound shift in the West from a Christendom to a post-Christendom phase of history? This question has implications not only for the kinds of issues that our students need to think about, but also for the skills and competencies many of them are required to exercise in a post-Christendom context. The so-called 'missional' and 'emerging' Church demands a certain style of leadership. Parish ministry is a very different ball game to what it was even twenty or thirty years ago.

In asking these questions, we are mindful too of a myriad of other missiological issues of a global nature. Some of our Pacific Island students, for example, come from small island nations that are literally being swallowed up by the sea. For them, climate change is not merely an inconvenient truth – it is a life-threatening reality. What does it mean to be missional in this context? What does it mean to be missional in the context of the intensifying conflict between parts of the Islamic world and the West, the alarming incidence of religious violence, including acts of terrorism, the deep tensions experienced in parts of Africa and Asia through the imposition of Shari'a law, and the acutely pressing question of interfaith relations between Christianity and Islam?

What is the mission of the Church in the context of globalization, in which new economic associations and communication networks are being formed, and traditional political and geographical boundaries are being crossed? What is it doing to our notions of community? What deep tensions are manifesting themselves? Which biblical insights and theological doctrines may help us interpret what is happening?

Signs of global upheaval are all around us. Theological education can neither ignore these realities nor confine them to the margins of the curriculum, for they form an integral part of the context in which the missio Dei is located and to which the missio Dei is directed. Moreover, to the extent that one of the primary purposes of theological education is to form people to participate effectively in the missio Dei, as revealed in Jesus Christ and empow-

1 The Parliamentary Prayer: "Almighty God, humbly acknowledging our need for Thy guidance in all things, and laying aside all private and personal interests, we beseech Thee to grant that we may conduct the affairs of this House and of our country to the glory of Thy holy name, the maintenance of true religion and justice, the honour of the Queen, and the public welfare, peace, and tranquility of New Zealand, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

ered by the Holy Spirit, it will seek to equip churches to critique, inform and transform their contexts and cultures, including those of a global nature.[2]

To this end, we should be encouraged by the launch this year of the International Journal of Public Theology and its sponsoring Global Network for Public Theology. As William Storrar says of this movement, there is a commitment not only to collaborative theological inquiry into public issues, but also to ecclesial and emancipatory ways of doing theology and employing research methods that include the marginalized as agents of social transformation.[3] On a similarly encouraging note, the University of Otago in New Zealand has just established a Chair in Theology and Public Issues. Having said that, the task of public theology is too important to be left to specialist networks and specially designated Chairs. It is high time that the disciplines of Dogmatics and Missiology are brought closer together, that the Church's understanding of mission is informed by its doctrine of God, and that the missio Dei is seen to lie at the heart of that doctrine. It is not a secondary step.

The second window or case study concerns that of a very hotly debated topic in my Church over the ordination of homosexual persons. After twenty years of divisive and inconclusive debate the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church finally resolved last year to bar the ordination of anyone who lives in an intimate relationship other than faithful, heterosexual marriage.

There were a number of factors which led to a binding decision eventually being reached. One of these was the growing influence exercised by Asian and Pacific Island voices. In New Zealand, the largest and fastest growing churches in the Reformed tradition are those comprising Asians and Pacific Islanders, reflecting immigration patterns of recent decades. A Pacific Island Synod and a Council of Asian Congregations were formed recently to encourage and facilitate mission in culturally specific ways. Their formation was a consequence of a prior recognition of the importance of a contextual approach to theology, ministry and mission.

The growing influence of these Asian-Pacific voices is consistent with the massive shift in the centre of Christianity from the North towards the South and from the West towards the East. As Andrew Walls puts it:

On the one hand, the church is more widely spread throughout the world than ever before, the withering in its old Western heartlands more than compensated for by the new growth in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. On the other, the end of the great European migration, which took millions of Europeans to the rest of the globe and established a world order we once knew, has been followed by the great reverse migration. This has brought millions of people permanently from the non-Western to the Western world. These two events have transformed the Christian situation.[4]

It was noticeable in the homosexuality debate the extent to which the Asian and Pacific Island voices tended to support a swing in the Church towards a more theologically conservative position, especially when it came to the issue of biblical authority.[5]

The debate brought to the surface a crucial hermeneutical challenge: How does the Bible function as the Word of God in the life of the Church? In the face of a multiplicity of perspectives, some of which are mutually exclusive, what does it mean to uphold the Reformed principle of sola scriptura? How should we (a) address our differences, and (b) understand what it is that holds us within the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church?

Attempts to accommodate diversity and modify Church structures to reflect new multi-cultural realities have brought fresh problems and challenges. It would be a mistake, for example, to assume that within the Pacific Island Synod Samoans and Cook Islanders agree on all matters, and that within the Council of Asian Congregations Korean leaders see things in the same way as their

2 Cf. Yau-Man Siew, "Theological Education in Asia: An Indigenous Agenda for Renewal", With an Eye on the Future: Development and Mission in the 21st Century, edited by D. Elmer & L. McKinney, California: MARC Publications, 1996, p.64

3 William Storrar, "2007: A Kairos Moment for Public Theology", International Journal of Public Theology, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2007), p.5

4 Andrew F. Walls, "Evangelical and Ecumenical: The Rise and Fall of the Early Church Model", Evangelical, Ecumenical and Anabaptist Missiologies in Conversation, edited by J.R. Krabill, W. Sawatsky & C.E. Van Engen, New York: Orbis Books, 2006, p.37

5 This fits with what a number of commentators, including Philip Jenkins, have observed. Christian communities in non-Western countries, he says, are often struck by the directness with which Biblical texts seem to speak into their situation – whether it is the movement from oppression towards freedom in the Exodus, or the Beatitudes, wherein Jesus pronounces blessing upon the poor and the persecuted. The cultural strangeness of the Bible is far less apparent from the underside of history than it is from the top. Cf. Philip Jenkins, The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, p.18

Chinese counterparts. Tensions can and do arise from different cultural perspectives.

Further tensions exist between generations. When Christian migrants from non-Western countries settle in New Zealand, their churches provide more than a worship service in their own language; the churches serve a crucial role in preserving the culture.

But that which serves as an important function for a migrant generation, does not necessarily do so for their New Zealand-born offspring who, influenced by Western culture, often feel trapped between the ways of their parents and the ways of contemporary New Zealand. This intergenerational tension has a significant bearing on the process of identity formation among immigrant communities in the West.

We have experienced a flow-on effect of this in relation to theological education and ministry formation. In recent years a significant number of Asian and Pacific Island women, most of them New Zealand born, have been accepted as candidates for ordained ministry. But very few of them, upon graduation, receive calls to serve in Asian or Pacific Island settings in the Presbyterian Church, where at grass roots level there continues to be resistance to the ordination of women.

These multi-cultural realities highlight an underlying tension between the necessary task of inculturation and the danger of cultural captivity. No culture is immune from this tension. In the process of contextualisation, the Gospel constantly runs the risk of becoming a prisoner of that which it is meant to liberate.[6] Appeals to the importance of context and cultural perspective can easily become a means of avoiding the liberating judgement of the Gospel.

There is something to be gained here, I think, by reminding ourselves of the significance of the Reformed motto, 'Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda!' – the Church reformed and always to be reformed. The PCUSA website puts it well when it says of this motto:

Reform has a backward and a forward reference. It leads not only back to the Bible but also forward under the Word. The Presbyterian Confession of 1967 underscores this teaching: "As God has spoken his word in diverse cultural situations, the church is confident that he will continue to speak through the Scriptures in a changing world and in every form of human culture.[7]

No culture or context is above the need for extensive transformation under the Word of God; no church is above the need for extensive reform. Attentive obedience to the Word revealed in Jesus Christ and testified to in Holy Scripture, and the rigorous academic and vocational disciplines that accompany this act of obedience, is a hallmark of theological education in the Reformed tradition.

The third window consists of an observation of changing patterns of worship. What were once regarded as norms of Christian worship and distinctive features of Reformed worship are fading. Various components of worship are moved around at will, in some cases renamed, and at other times omitted altogether. In such services, the preaching of the Word often gives way to a multimedia presentation, the Minister becomes the facilitator of a worship experience, and a Eucharistic pattern of worship is nowhere evident.

In the age of the internet, Ministers and so-called worship leaders access a wide range of musical and liturgical resources and tend to opt for what they think will work rather than what may be prescribed in a denominational service book. Designated worship leaders (often the musicians) have little or no training in the history, theology and practice of worship. And permeating all these things is a loss of conviction that Christ is the true leader and mediator of the Church's worship, and that there might therefore be some norms for Christian worship which are grounded in this conviction and which the Church is obliged to observe.

If I were to choose two words to describe many of the current trends and innovations in worship, they would not be "Reformed" and "Catholic". They would be "experimental" and "eclectic".[8]

In this post-modern context, we find that many of our students are more familiar with Pentecostalism than Presbyterianism, with Rick Warren's 40 Days of Purpose than Calvin's Institutes, and with Hillsong music than a

6 Cf. Andrew Walls, "The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture", The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith, New York: Orbis Books, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996, pp.3-15

7 Anna Case-Winters, "Our Misused Motto", http://www.pcusa.org/today/believe/past/may04/reformed.htm

8 And I would concur with James Torrance's comment a few years ago that much worship today, especially in the West, "is in practice Unitarian, has no doctrine of the mediator or sole priesthood of Christ, is human-centred, has no proper doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and can engender weariness." Cf. J.B. Torrance, Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996, p.20

Church hymnal. In part, this is a generational issue. We find younger students identifying less and less with a particular denomination.[9] We also notice an increase in the number of churches renaming themselves with little or no reference to their denominational affiliation. The challenge this poses for the task of theological education takes the form of a question: In an era described by many as 'post-denominational', how effective are our academic and vocational programmes in equipping students to exercise ministry in ways that are fully conversant with the most important aspects of the Reformed ethos, history and tradition? How important do we believe this task to be?

Twenty years ago Edward Farley laid down a challenge to those of us involved in the task of theological education. Lamenting the fragmentation of theological education which he saw at the time, he called for a more integrated approach – for a recovery of theologia.[10]

Twenty years on, the challenge he laid down is still valid. Integrating the academic components of theological curricula with the Church's commitment to the task of ministry formation and leadership development is seldom straight forward,[11] if for no other reason than the goals and expectations of Church and academy are not always in alignment.

And now we have added challenges consisting of an interlocking mixture of missiological, ecclesial, hermeneutical and liturgical issues. I have highlighted a small handful of these. There are many more, of both a theological and pragmatic nature. I look forward to the discussions that will unfold over the course of this consultation as we continue to explore together what those issues are and how we might respond to them.

9 This is consistent with research on the religious beliefs of young people in the West. Cf. Savage, S., Collins-Mayo, S., Mayo, B. & Cray, G., Making Sense of Generation Y: The World View of 15-25-year-olds, London: Church House Publishing, 2006

10 Cf. Edward Farley, Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983; "The Reform of Theological Education as a Theological Task", Theological Education, Spring 1981, pp.93-117

11 We are indebted to people like David Kelsey and Stephen Bevans, who have mapped out some possibilities for us, but the challenge remains. Cf. David Kelsey, Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993; Stephen Bevans, "Theological Education for a World Church", Australian EJournal in Theology 4, February 2005.

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How to read the Bible by Richard Holloway (Granta Books)

Reviewed by Alan Goss

With brevity and expertise, the former Bishop of Edinburgh takes his readers on a conducted tour through some of the main themes in the Bible; a complex and controversial task.

God is the dominant character in the Bible so first readers must decide what they understand by God and his role in the whole multi-layered and rambling Biblical story. Views about God and the Bible vary considerably, even amongst Christians. For some, the Bible is literally God's dictated word, for others it is a human construct prompted by God and for a third group the power of its meaning lies wholly within itself. But whether the Bible's power is extrinsic, that is outside itself, or intrinsic, that is inside itself, readers will profit from the author's lively and fair account. While Holloway doesn't delve deeply into thorny theological issues such as the authenticity of all the sayings attributed to Jesus, he does bring some of them to the surface. Scholarly debates about the Bible do go on!

Holloway takes passages from both the Hebrew (OT) and Christian (NT) scriptures and works his way through a selection of Biblical themes.

On the topic of God, Holloway contends that whether we believe God is a supreme reality beyond the universe or whether we regard God as a human invention created by us humans to explain our existence, one fact is clear and unavoidable: all our thinking about God is a human process and it cannot be otherwise. We see God through the lens of our fallible human minds and therefore often distort God (whom no-one has ever seen) just as we misunderstand other people (whom we have seen). Hence our innate capacity to get God wrong.

Other themes covered by the author include Promising (Exodus), Exile (Isaiah), Suffering (Job), Challenge and Parable (Jesus), Apostle (Paul) and End (Revelation). In his chapter on suffering, Holloway claims that both Christianity and Islam, compared to the more stroppy Judaism, let God get away with murder. The Archbishop of Canterbury, on New Zealand Radio recently, was a typical example of a prominent church leader "blitzing humanity with explanations for suffering".[1] Holloway will have none of it; he finds all theological justifications for suffering morally repugnant and in two sentences suggests a better way.

The chapter on Paul (Apostle) was, for this reviewer, a superb assessment of Pauline theology and indeed of Paul himself. Like him or despise him as many still do, it was (in Nietzche's words) "this very tortured, very pitiful, very unpleasant man" Paul whose teachings provided the foundation for the worldwide Christian Church. Without him, the Church would have eventually disappeared and Jesus' words along with it.

The book concludes with a dissertation on Revelation and warns about modern apocalyptic movements that misuse Revelation for dangerous ends. Holloway leaves us with more profitable ways of reading this visionary tract and acting positively to renew rather than destroy the earth.

Balanced and readable, this book in the Granta "How To" series is highly recommended.

References

[1]Holloway "Looking in the Distance" p45.

Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

National Assessment date changes

Under the new training model for National Ordained Ministers, ordinands will be required to enter a two-year internship in a local ministry situation. Given that some candidates will present at the assessment weekend having already completed their academic requirements, they can be placed into internships immediately. Because an August date for assessment does not allow adequate time to source and prepare suitable locations and supervisors, from 2008 the National Assessment weekend will be held during May.

20 December 2007: Presbytery recommendations and student papers to be sent to the Registrar, School of Ministry, Knox College, Arden Street, Dunedin 9010.

May 2008: National Assessment weekend. Location and dates etc to be advised.

For more information, see
www.schoolofministry.ac.nz/nationalassessment.htm

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Applications close 20th AUGUST 2007
Early applications are appreciated.

Coordinator of Ministry Formation and Leadership Development, Auckland

Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand is setting up a Centre for Ministry and Leadership to train and equip people for ordained ministry and other leadership positions in the Church. From 2008, the Centre, which is in Dunedin, will replace the current School of Ministry.

We are seeking a Coordinator of the Centre's activities in the Auckland region, and other areas of the North Island as required. These activities will include overseeing Ministry Internships, fostering other ministry formation and leadership development opportunities, contributing to the delivery of the Centre's theological programme, and establishing and maintaining constructive working relationships with a broad range of groups within the Church.

The Coordinator will be a full member of staff of the Centre for Ministry and Leadership and will report to the Principal.

The successful candidate will have a suitable blend of high level theological qualifications and proven experience in ministry and leadership. Knowledge of the Reformed tradition and the ability to work within the theological and ethnic diversity of the Church are essential.

A position description may be obtained from the Registrar: registrar@schoolofministry.ac.nz

Applications should be sent to the Principal, School of Ministry, Knox College, Arden Street, Opoho, Dunedin by **20 September 2007**.