

CANDOUR

News and Views for Ministers

Number 8, October 2007
Published by Presbyterian Publishing Company Ltd
PO Box 9049, Wellington

Men and Church

Contents

Editorial	Amanda Wells	3
Essays		
Blokes and church: A question of identity	Chris Purdie	4
“Why Men Hate Church”	Howard Carter	7
Research		
<i>Letter to a Christian Nation</i> by Sam Harris	Juliette Bowater	19
AES column	Martin Baker	20



Presbyterian Church
of Aotearoa New Zealand

Noticeboard

Candour is a monthly magazine about ministry and leadership. For more information, contact:

Amanda Wells
Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand
PO Box 9049
Wellington

The articles in *Candour* reflect the views of individual ministers or contributors writing in a personal capacity. They are not representative of the Church's official position. Please approach the author for permission if you wish to copy an article.

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:

Amanda Wells (editor) on (04) 381-8285 or candour@presbyterian.org.nz

Advertising

One-quarter page: \$80 plus gst (87mm x 117mm)

One-third page: \$95 plus gst (87mm x 160mm)

Half page: \$130 plus gst (184mm x 138mm)

Any artwork must be supplied electronically and in a high-resolution format. Measurements are indicative only and subject to layout requirements.

The next advertising deadline (for the October issue) is 28 September 2007.

Glen Innis Vacancies

October 15 - 22	Cottage
October 22 - 29	Cottage
November 5 - 12	Homestead/Cottage
November 19 - 26	Cottage

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

Ministers are welcome to inquire regarding vacancies due to cancellations.

The Church Property Trustees have reluctantly decided to introduce a **refundable \$50 booking fee** for Glen Innis. This fee is payable to Margaret Black and refunded on arrival at Glen Innis. Changing your booking will require payment of another booking fee.

Bush Telegraph

Are you on the list?

Bush Telegraph contains news from the Moderator, Assembly Office, Presbyterian Youth Ministry, and the Global Mission Office, among others, as well as notices and job vacancies.

BT is sent out by email on the 1st of every month.

To sign up for your own email copy of *Bush Telegraph*, visit:

www.presbyterian.org.nz/btsubscribe

If you're unable to receive email, please contact Assembly Office to receive a print out: (04) 801-6000

Ministers' Information Forms

Ministers' Information Forms are an essential tool for ministry settlement boards looking to make a call. They are also an effective way for ministers to record their achievements throughout their career – including any additional training they undertake.

Ministers are strongly encouraged to update their Ministers' Information Form every three years so that the information remains current. If you would like to update your Form please email Juliette on juliette@presbyterian.org.nz for a template. Alternatively, you are welcome to send additional information to PO Box 9049, Wellington.

Let's not talk about men

Amanda Wells

It's not that I didn't try. I approached the usual number of people to contribute to this issue of *Candour* and allowed for the normal 50 percent refusal/non-reply rate. But you can see the results; a startlingly short 12 pages.

Men and church; is it just something we don't want to talk about? Chances are that any random church you go into on a Sunday will have a majority of female worshippers, with 60/40 ratios near the norm.

However, there are a number of successful men's ministries being run in our churches (no, not just Promise Keepers). But like most efficient people, those running them have been loaded with tasks and were unable to write for this issue of *Candour*.

Lacking the usual range of contributions, I turned to the internet in search of inspiration. Many Americans are concerned about this imbalance and will hold forth at length.

One not-atypical comment: "The problem in the church today is just a bunch of nice, soft, tender, chickified church boys. 60 percent of Christians are chicks and the 40 percent that are dudes are still sort of...chicks. It's just sad."

Despite this, there are a lot of thoughtful discussions being had via blogs. Many point to the fact that while leadership remains male-dominated, the church has somehow become "feminised". Particular reference is made to modern worship trends; the "Jesus, lover of my soul" type of song may not be something that sits easily with men. Some have suggested excessive singing is itself not every man's cup of tea.

One interesting result of online discussions is that they often boil down to a reductionist debate; in this case, do men have a problem with church or do they have a problem with Christianity? In other words, should church be fixed to attract more men, or should men take the blame for not connecting with Jesus? The latter approach explores ideas of whether the values usually associated with masculinity (toughness, achievement, a reluctance to seek help) are compatible with Jesus' ethos.

Like many binary oppositions, it seems unlikely the truth lies squarely at either end of the spectrum. To speak in generalities about men (or women) is never going to reflect the truth of our unique creation.

Researcher Christopher Ducker has written a paper on the feminisation of the church in the United Kingdom: *Disbanded Brothers: Has a "Feminised" Church Alienated Men in the UK?* His research revealed that 35-40 percent of British churchgoers are men and that men aged 15-30 are least likely to attend.

I'd suggest that it's this lack of men in their 20s and 30s that's at the heart of the problem. Perhaps you might say that the absence of this age-group is the Church's greatest problem, irrespective of gender. But the bald fact is if there were more men, there would be more women. The lack of suitable partners is a key driver for women in this age group dropping out.

Ducker's research revealed that 35-40 percent of British churchgoers are men and that men aged 15-30 are least likely to attend

You could argue that becoming a Christian requires a more fundamental psychological shift for men. To be Christian is to admit that

you're broken and not perfect; not complete in yourself. Has our culture made this more difficult for men? You might think that the dismantling of the traditional macho male pose that's been underway since the 60s would make it easier. But it is true that it's still more culturally appropriate for women to admit to weakness and to seek support.

This imbalance is an issue we need to at least think about and talk about. It's not going to go away.

If you'd like to write something about men and church, I would be happy to run some more contributions on this theme in the November issue of *Candour*, which is the final issue for the year. It has the theme "Doing church differently" and will explore models such as local ministry teams, multi-congregations in one building, one minister/many worship centres, etc. If you would like to contribute or suggest someone else I could approach, please email candour@presbyterian.org.nz.

Blokes and church: A question of identity

Chris Purdie, New Zealand army chaplain

Let me tell you about a Bloke who we will call Lance. Lance is a friendly and out-going Bloke, a farm boy. He and his partner live together in a house on the farm. She is from farming stock too. Lance is about 6 foot tall, and 85-90kg, which gives him that tall sinewy look and of course he plays for the local rugby team.

Lance is a 23-year stock manager and is managing two staff, and a farm with several thousand sheep, as well as hundreds of deer and beef cattle. Lance is a Bloke who works 14 hours a day, 6 days a week. He is highly competent with the use of a tractor, a quad bike, a chain saw, a shotgun, his dogs and the cattle, sheep and deer. At times he is a carpenter, a plumber, an electrician, a drain layer, a vet, a woodsman, a mechanic, a boss, and a mentor.

These are all skills that Lance hones by constant practice and also by competition and rivalry with other men. How many rooks can you shoot? How fast can you drive? How quickly can you bring in three mobs of cattle? How many fence posts can you put in, in a day?

Lance is deeply enmeshed in this role. He doesn't stop being a stock manager; it is difficult to separate the stock manager from Lance. He starts work at 5 o'clock in the morning and may well be found building a dog kennel at 10 o'clock at night. Lance is a practical Bloke. He is continually thinking about what he is going to do next and problem-solving the issues that come up. He has his tea with milk (blue) and three sugars, and a six-pack of Tui is his pre dinner drink.

How would the church speak into the life of this man? What would it say to him?

The issues of Blokes in church and male spirituality are complex, and at this time in history in this country they also interlink with issues of the search for a male identity and the decline in the church.

Significantly, it has been noted that men are more likely to leave the church than woman, and men and boys are less likely to enter the church than woman and girls.

In aiming to address this trend, the starting point for many churches has been to ask the question, "what can we do to attract more men to the church?" And churches

have sought to plug the gap with programmes and activities that address this; the likes of men's breakfasts for example.

But asking "what can we do to attract men to our church?" fails to recognise a key cultural dilemma in this country. This is the gulf, the proverbial cultural ditch, between Bloke Culture and Church Culture. The question of how we fix the problem is one for later; other questions need to be asked first.

I believe there is a serious stumbling block in how Christian communities relate to men, in particular "hard core" Blokes in New Zealand. This stumbling block is highlighted for me by a contrast in allegiance; the difference between the belief in "Man alone" and "God alone".

When problems occur in people's lives, who is it we turn to? People of faith in the end look to and find reassurance in God. By contrast, competent, self-reliant, jack-of-all-trades Blokes look to themselves. This is "God Alone" verses "Man Alone". This contrast in allegiance for me is the crux of the matter.

How is it possible then for a competent, self-reliant, jack-of-all-trades, kind of Bloke, like Lance, to own up to needing a higher power in his life? That would be costly for him. To say to him that he hasn't got it all sorted, that he needs additional support in his life, that he needs salvation, that he needs saving from himself, and sin, and that he has a deep need for God, will be offensive to him.

What we are suggesting? We are suggesting that he doesn't actually have the recourses within himself, that he lacks some fundamental skills to deal with what comes in his life. This is a counter claim to his very identity: it is an attack on who he is; on the very nature of his being.

The Christian community needs to understand that "God Alone" verses "Man Alone" is a significant clash of world views.

Now, I believe that we all need God in our lives; that people like Lance do actually need salvation. I have also come to know, particularly in the environment in which I now work (NZ Army), that the stoic, tough, self-reliant,

"I've have got it all sorted" belief system of many New Zealand Blokes is psychologically problematic. It's often found wanting in the face of tragedy or when things in their lives go wrong.

However, what I believe is not what is at stake here. We as a Christian community need to seek effective ways to communicate and build relationships with a wide range of peoples outside of ourselves across this country. New Zealand Blokes are but one of those groups of people.

If the Christian community is actually serious about seeking to minister to and with Blokes in New Zealand, one of the first things it needs to recognize is the cultural clash of allegiance between our two world views. The Christian community needs to recognize the threat that our Christian claims are to the identity of New Zealand Blokes.

Blokes understand that committing to a Christian way of being requires a transformation of them. Intuitively, however, Blokes fear a significant loss of their identity in that transformation. They fear giving up and giving over a significant portion of who they believe they are in the process; Church culture is not good news for them.

What would Lance see if he walked into your church on a Sunday morning? What kind of people would he meet? What kinds of people would he see leading the worship? Who are the role-models there for him... who might he aspire to be? Is there anything that he would naturally be good at in a service of worship? Who would be the people that he would respect and be challenged by? Who could he compete with in the church environment?

Instinctively we all recognize that to fit in to any new environment requires different things of us and sometimes we have to change. For many Blokes when they look into to our church culture it is too hard; it requires too much. What they fear is that the change would mean they would become non Blokes; weak men, effeminate men, impotent men, being tied down to things that deny their maleness, with nothing to do or nothing to contribute in any real way.

They are afraid of feeling trapped in a feminine world; of emotion, of spiritual mumbo jumbo, warm fuzzies and relational chatter, with other men who they think are either pathetic or boring.

Maybe this sounds harsh to us; the fundamental point that I continue to struggle with is that being a self-reliant, jack-of-all-trades kind of Bloke is almost mutually ex-

clusive to believing in a Christian God and being part of the church.

At times in my life I have wondered why I felt uncomfortable in church settings and very often thought that there was something wrong with me as to why I didn't fit in. This would also seem to be experience of other Blokes too. Yet maybe it wasn't us not fitting the church which was the issue; maybe it was the other way around, and it is that church didn't fit us as Blokes.

The challenge for the Christian community is how we shape a church culture that connects with both women and men, allows for distinctive leadership styles and diversity in worship, and finds ways to model and communicate authentically male ways of being Christian.

*This article has been re-worked from a presentation to the Focal conference in September 2007.

ST ALBAN'S UNITING PARISH CHRISTCHURCH

- St Alban's has committed, caring congregations.
- It has property and people resources ready for development.
- The parish is seeking a minister who will offer creative worship, warm pastoral care and imaginative leadership.

The Board will welcome expressions of interest.

For a parish profile, please write to
Rev. John Hunt
11 Virtue Place
Harewood
Christchurch

Why Men Hate Going to Church

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

David Murrow, *Why Men Hate Going To Church*, 2005 Nelson Books, Nashville

When people ask me to describe the church that I am serving in I say, “I have been blessed with many mothers in the faith”. Like many Presbyterian churches, we suffer from a gender gap. Murrow’s book defines a gender gap as more than a 12 percent difference between men and women. Based on his research, most mainline Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox and, increasingly, Pentecostal churches and the new denominations suffer from this gap; not just in the United States but worldwide, leading him to suggest that men are the most unreached people group in the world today.

David Murrow worked in television programme production. He was a Presbyterian elder and is now involved in a new church called ChangePoint, where he heads up a video production team. He lives in Anchorage, Alaska, and leads an organisation called Church For Men set up to help churches reconnect with men (www.churchformen.org).

In his introduction, Murrow quotes business guru W Edwards Deming, “your system is perfectly designed to give you the results you’re getting”. His book goes on to explain how the modern church is perfectly designed to get the results it has: a church filled with women and children but not men. He then explains how churches fail to connect with the physiological and sociological make-up of men, and suggests some significant changes that can be made to make church more man-friendly.

As you may guess, the book is not what you might call politically correct. Murrow is emphatic that he is not talking about men as they ought to be but men as they are. His hypothesis is that church is dominated by a feminine spirituality and viewed by many men as a women’s place. Under a veneer of masculine domination (the majority of the clergy are male), the way that we do things, our emphases and values, are definitely feminine. He even suggests that our understanding of pastoral ministry is geared towards less masculine men (ouch!).

Worship services are more women- than men-friendly, especially with our emphasis on congregational singing, public reading, lecture style sermons and touchy feely stuff (for example, holding hands to say the blessing is not a favourite with the blokes). Most men value competence and excellence in music and performance. Murrow says, “what a women often sees as heartfelt and homespun, her husband will often see as corny and half-baked”. Many of the lyrics of our hymns and songs express our worship in very emotive, feminine ways.

Murrow maintains that the church fails to give men a vision to inspire them or adventure to excite and challenge them. I found both revealing and disturbing research suggesting that the majority of people in church leadership had a passive personality. Ministers and church leaders are valued for the keeping of tradition not their ability to innovate; their care for people rather than their ability to cast vision. This makes it hard for them to lead men.

There is the need to provide opportunities for men to form bands of brothers working together for a common goal

Murrow does give some very insightful suggestions on how to do church with men. He works through changes to worship services and church structures, teaching and ministries offered. At the heart of the matter is providing men with male role models and mentors to disciple them. There is the need to provide opportunities for men to form bands of brothers working together for a common goal. This fits in well with the New Zealand idea of “mates” rather than “friends”. Men are more project than programme orientated.

Why Men Hate Going To Church has a lot to offer a church that is wanting to be effective at ministering to men and mobilising men for ministry and service. I recommend it to you. It does not have all the answers but it opens up the topic, challenging us to explore the issue.

On the lighter side, there is a great story in the book about a minister who took a young man to a Presbyterian General Assembly. The young man asked, “Who was the person in the wig and gown up the front?” When the minister said, “it was the moderator,” the young man responded, “this place does not need a moderator it needs an accelerator”.

Space

Why don't more people want to write about men and church?

Is it not enough of a problem? Or too much of a problem?

Lincoln Road Childcare & Kindergarten

Henderson, Auckland

Head Teacher

Seeking a person with proven leadership skills B/Ed.Dip Tchg ECE with commitment to our Christian philosophy.

Start January 2008.

Details: Susan (09) 838-8872 or lrchildcare@xtra.co.nz



Presbyterian Church
of Aotearoa New Zealand

National Assessment date changes

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

Candour planning

During October, we plan the themes of *Candour* for the following year.

If you have any ideas of themes you would like to see canvassed in 2008, I would love to hear from you.

Please email candour@presbyterian.org.nz

Yearbook 2008

During October, each presbytery clerk will receive pages to correct for next year's yearbook. The pages that we send presbytery clerks reflect the most up-to-date information in our database.

The final deadline to submit any amendments and corrections to Assembly Office is 20 November 2007.

Coming of Age: *bring on the baby boomers*

The first of a series of group study resources produced by Assembly Office is now available. Copies have recently been posted to all parish ministers.

The resource series is intended as not only as a means of encouraging reflection on the matters of importance, but also as a call to action.

Contact us at info@presbyterian.org.nz or on (04) 801-6000 if your parish hasn't received the resource.

We would welcome any feedback you have on the resource; please email jose@presbyterian.org.nz

Minister retirement survey: conclusions

Juliette Bowater, employment advisor, Assembly Office

Recently the National Mission Team undertook a survey of ministers to answer two questions:

1. What concerns do ministers have around retirement; what do they need to know?
2. How can the Assembly Office best address these needs?

Two groups of ministers were selected – those who had retired in the past 10 years (ages 66-75) and those who could be expected to retire in the next 10 years (ages 55-65). If the response rate is anything to go by, retirement is of concern to ministers with over 50 percent of the younger cohort and 66 percent of the older cohort completing surveys.

Both cohorts were asked questions around a series of topics which I have summarized here:

Age of retirement:

64 percent of respondents aged 55-65 expect to retire at age 65-66 years. However, data from the older respondents suggests that a portion (approximately 30 percent) will retire earlier (60-64 years) due to ill health and family reasons.

Expectations of retirement during training:

For both cohorts, tradition and norms and church policy were the most significant factors in shaping expectations of retirement. The average length of service for the older cohort was 30.5 years.

Planning for retirement:

Both cohorts reported a lack of support from presbyteries and parishes. 26.3 percent of the younger cohort reporting that their “discussion” with their presbytery and/or parish consisted entirely of the minister giving notice of their intention to retire.

Of those who did not discuss their retirement with their presbytery and/or parish, 61.4 percent of retired and 50.7 percent of retiring ministers reported they would not welcome such a discussion. Throughout both sets of responses, anecdotes were provided by respondents which suggest a belief the Church does not have people with the appropriate skills to undertake such a discussion with retiring ministers.

There was a big difference between the cohorts when it came to topics ministers would like to discuss with their presbytery and/or parish. The older group wanted to discuss Beneficiary Fund entitlements and the transition process to retirement whereas the younger cohort wanted to discuss succession planning for the parish.

Retirement and Beneficiary Fund seminars:

32.6 percent of retiring and 44.5 percent of retired ministers have attended a retirement seminar with 85.7 percent and 93.3 percent respectively finding them “useful”. The most common topics that were covered were finances/Beneficiary Fund, the transition process/psychosocial factors and lifestyle.

In comparison, 26.7 percent of retiring and 37.6 percent of retired respondents have attended a Beneficiary Fund seminar with 78.3 percent and 100.0 percent respectively finding them “useful”.

For both cohorts, the most significant reason for respondents to have not attended either a retirement or Beneficiary Fund seminar was that they did not know about it.

Concerns around retirement:

The cohort aged 55-65 reported their biggest concerns were financial issues and house ownership (54.7 percent) and psychosocial issues (11.6 percent).

In comparison, 4.9 percent reported they wished they had more information on their exact Beneficiary Fund entitlement. A further 47.5 percent of older ministers reported that, looking back, there was nothing they wished they had known more about.

A significant minority of the younger cohort opposed the idea of a minister staying on in their last parish. Despite this, a similar proportion of this cohort is intending to remain in their old parish compared to those who actually did stay on after retirement (16.3 percent compared to 14.8 percent).

For the younger cohort the most significant factors when considering where to retire to were long-term community involvement, location of property and family and friends, and professionalism and fairness to the new minister. In comparison, the most significant factors for the older cohort were location of family and own home, long-term

community links and where they had an agreement with the parish (in the case of those choosing to stay in their old parish).

Retired ministers who had stayed in their old parish were asked about their relationship with the new leadership. Interestingly 26.7 percent declined to answer. However, 66.7 percent did report a “good” relationship although some (26.7 percent) reported they actively kept a distance from the running of the parish.

Retired ministers were also asked what strategies they had used to manage the transition to retirement. 31.7 percent reported they remained active in ministry activities, 26.7 percent developed new and existing hobbies and interests and 11.8 percent became involved in charity or community work.

Ministry opportunities and activities:

The most popular forms of post-retirement ministry for the older respondents were stated supply (42.6 percent), non-parish based ministry (30.7 percent) and honorary ministry (12.9 percent).

In comparison, the most popular forms selected for the younger cohort were stated supply (57 percent), training enabler/resource ministry and non-parish based ministry (both 43 percent) and transition ministry (36 percent).

For non-parish based ministry, chaplaincy is the most popular option (51.6 percent for retired and 29.7 percent for those aged 55-65). However, there was a sharp decrease in the popularity of itinerant preaching from 22.6 percent for older respondents compared to 10.8 percent for the younger group. The category supervision/mentoring/counseling was also popular with the younger cohort with 29.7 percent of respondents selecting this.

These differences in both parish and non-parish based ministry seem to indicate a move away from retired ministers acting as locums for parish ministers and a move towards taking up new forms of ministry where the retired minister can use their experience to mentor other leaders and managing change within parishes.

Another interesting difference between the two cohorts was the location of their ministry. Just 5.9 percent of retired ministers undertook activities in their last parish. This is compared to the younger cohort where 23.2 percent are intending to undertake ministry in their last parish. This is even more interesting considering how vehemently some of the younger ministers opposed staying on.

In regards to traditional parish ministry, only 12.9 percent of older respondents indicated a willingness to return part-time compared to 33.7 percent of the younger group. Likewise, only 1 (1.0 percent) retired respondent was willing to return to full-time parish ministry compared to 10.5 percent of those yet to retire.

Non-ministry activities:

For the older group, the most popular activities in retirement were travel (64.3 percent) and charity/community work (55.4 percent). 22.8 percent also engaged in secular employment. In comparison, the younger group is intending to also travel (81.4 percent), engage in community/charity work (72.1 percent) and secular employment (41.9 percent).

Of those who selected secular employment, in both cohorts a third required or expected to require training to up-skill for the workforce.

Training for the older group included self-directed reading and seminars, trade training, obtaining commercial drivers’ licences, training for real estate, transition ministry and to become a Justice of the Peace. In comparison, respondents in the younger group expected to require training in computer skills, and to update counseling and nursing qualifications.

A difference between the two groups was thinking about making a career change with respondents in the older group deciding to up-skill after retirement compared to the younger group who indicated they would welcome financial (58.3 percent) and non-financial (85.7 percent) support from presbytery to train before they retired.

Conclusions:

Ministers require good financial advice to ensure they know how much they will receive from the Beneficiary Fund and that they are also prepared for the possibility of early retirement or shifting to part-time roles before retiring at a later age.

Ministers also need career-planning advice including the possible implications when selecting a location to buy property as it may mean the difference between staying in their last parish or not.

Ministers want support from their presbytery and/or parish. But there is a concern that the Church lacks the people with the skills to help ministers plan for retirement.

Ministers also want their retirement acknowledged. To put it another way, it is virtually unheard of in an employ-

Research

ment setting for an employee of 30 years' or more service to retire without so much as a morning tea.

Possible Outcomes:

The current Beneficiary Fund seminar is very useful to ministers. However, more work needs to be done co-ordinating the scheduling of these seminars (including going outside the main centres) and communicating the availability of these seminars to ministers.

Guidelines need to be developed for presbyteries to ensure they are aware of ways they can provide pastoral care for their ministers. Such care may initially consist of:

Identifying people with the skills to assist ministers transitioning into retirement.

Valuing the wisdom of retired ministers and matching them with younger ministers in a mentoring capacity.

Becoming more involved in succession-planning for parishes. Ministers are not responsible for finding their replacement when they retire.

Ensure younger ministers are receiving supervision that addresses career-planning so that ministers do not end up in their last parish and that they are actively making decisions at a younger age about when to retire from ministry, moving to part-time roles and other ministry opportunities available to retired ministers.

Provide non-financial assistance to ministers seeking to retrain before they retire.

Registration as a charity

The deadline for Presbytery applications to be received by Assembly Office is **31 October 2007**.

More information, including downloads of letters sent to parishes and presbyteries, can be found at www.presbyterian.org.nz under parish tools.

Mahurangi Presbyterian Church

"We are Family, United in Faith, Holy Spirit empowered, to proclaim the reality of Jesus Christ in today's world"

Our church is well established in the thriving community of Warkworth and surrounding areas of beautiful Rodney and we have a passion to connect people with God.

We seek candidates for a full time position as:

Director of Family Ministries,

who works to encourage, inspire and nurture young people and families in the Christian faith.

Expressions of interest to the Session Clerk :

mail: 5 Pulham Rd, Warkworth 0910

phone: 09 425 9348

email: a.a.georgetti@clear.net.nz

Applications closing date: 26 October 2007

Studentsoul

(a student Presbyterian church based on the Dunedin university campus) is looking for part time (25 hours) Ministry Assistants for 2008.

- We are looking for theologically trained persons in their 30s.
- Some experience of working with university age students and in particular of Otago University is also desirable.

A job description is available from:

Rev Helen Harray

hmharray@paradise.net.nz

Asking the right questions

Why did they leave Judas in charge of the money (John 13:29)? I assume it was because he was good with figures - and clearly he had a certain fondness for the stuff. Right from the start, the stories in the Gospel, in Acts, in the letters, there is the money question.

It remains difficult. What does the way we use our money and resources say about our faithfulness? For a business it's usually a pretty straightforward question. A business exists to provide a return for its shareholders. A business might want to do this responsibly and conscientiously, but at the end of the financial year, if there is not a profit the business will eventually fail.

When we ask a similar question about the Church and how we should use our resources, the question becomes less straight forward.

We have the financial balance sheet that can be the source of significant discussion. But the balance sheet as such may tell us little about our faithfulness to the Gospel.

For example, one of the figures I am finding most fascinating at the moment is the change in the sum of the investment funds held by all our congregations: it has jumped from just under \$60m in 2001 to just over \$90m in 2006. Wow. I find this figure more interesting in many ways (and I am sure it is more accurate) than the others identifying a somewhat rapid decline in the number of those who turn up to church. (For your interest, over the same period the number has gone from 36,000 down to 30,000 adults at church on a Sunday – a loss of around an 80-adult congregation each and every month over this time)

I do not know whether a good measure of a church's effectiveness or success in seeking and saving the lost will be found in counting how many come through the door on a Sunday morning. That might be part of it but there is always a danger that our use of such numbers draws us to incorrect conclusions. I think, for instance, that there is a real place for supporting ministry and mission in communities whose members may never put much into the offering plate, never turn up at our organised Sunday morning worship, who may be quite transient, who may worship together in small and more scattered groups, or come together on Thursday night in the local hall (take a look at

how the fastest growing youth church in New Zealand is organised – www.primallyouth.com).

But the fact is for most of us that if people do not turn up on Sunday, we no longer get paid. Almost every congregation when seeking a minister says that they want a good preacher and a good pastoral visitor. And yet it is possible that neither of those skills is going to support growth and outreach for this congregation. It's a toughie isn't it? Some of the congregations I spend time with feel like they have failed because they can no longer afford to support a full-time ministry. But looking back over years of decline, full-time ministry did not seem to make a whole of difference. And yet there is another possible truth here as well. Rebuilding this community by actively committing to some form of evangelism, outreach and community engagement might indeed be a full-time job.

Everyone agrees that we should be selling under-utilised resources (but not my church)

Working on a strategy document for the Council, I realise that I find myself in something of a conundrum. On one hand everyone agrees that we have experienced continu-

ing numerical decline; everyone agrees that we have too much money in buildings, and that as a national church we have too many of them.

Everyone agrees that we should be selling under-utilised resources (but not my church) and using the money to support the kind of new mission and ministry I've touched upon above. We know some of the places desperate for funds to support new initiatives, we know of the very few places where we probably should have a physical presence as a church, we have some trained and talented people who have experience in initiating this missionary and church-planting work, and we have enough "success" stories around to provide models and examples of how we can do this. We collectively have a lot of cash in the bank and hundreds of millions of dollars of buildings and real estate. The Council are praying hard. So.... What needs to happen now? How do we get there from here?

Please email me the answer.

I pray for God's blessing on your work

