

CANDOUR

News and Views for Ministers

Number 8, September 2005
Published by Presbyterian Publishing Company Ltd
PO Box 9049, Wellington

Life of clergy

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Noticeboard

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

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

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

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

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Contributions

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

Articles on upcoming themes are also appreciated:

October: Cross-cultural mission

Deadline: 30 September

November: New congregations

Deadline: 1 November

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

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In praise of parish ministry

Kerry Enright, Assembly executive secretary

Ministry of Word and Sacrament remains crucial to being Church. People set apart to listen to, reflect on, and break open the Word of God for others perform a function of inestimable value. People who lead the ritual enacting God's love, hold out the possibility of a new community and a new humanity: the world needs newness.

As John Calvin said, "where the Word is truly proclaimed, and the sacraments rightly celebrated, there is the Church."

The Church is constituted by Word and Sacrament. God calls and the Church ordains some people to focus on that purpose. Every year, people leave more-prestigious and better-remunerated roles to be ministers. I had got so used to the funny comments about ministers that a recent induction sermon from the Very Rev John Evans without any cynicism was noticeable for being unusual, and it was inspiring.

When a Church is in such significant decline in participation, blame and guilt head ministers' way. Yet, as my Edinburgh supervisor said, we don't blame the coal miners of Britain for the closure of coal mines. We need to recognise that our partner, modernity, has died. The growth spurt of the late 50s/early 60s was an aberrant end to the modern era.

It's time to move on from the grief and lament. It's time to let guilt and blame go. And, as one of my colleagues puts it, it's time we stopped moving forward into the 60s, imagining that what grew the church in the modern era will grow it now.

What does Ministry of Word and Sacrament involve now the modern era has ended?

The challenge is evident. As I contemplate parish ministry after nine years away, it's risky. The chances are I will be minister of a congregation that has been reducing in size for decades and with mainly older parishioners. I will need more of the skills of a church planter than a pastor, be more of a team builder than a solo performer, and act as more a change agent than a guardian of tradition. I will be facilitating a fundamental rebranding; a

change in culture and the start of new "congregations" amid the remnants of an older one. And I will need all the interpersonal skills I can muster to help build a strong team of diverse leaders keen to participate in God's mission. I'll need to be entrepreneurial in finding partners in the wider community – whether they be local body, retailers, schools, or media. There is a risk I will not succeed, with consequences for the Church and my reputation and finances.

Developing congregations is multi-level. Turning sessions and parish councils into active, visionary groups of leaders seems fundamental. Yet often those people emerge only when there is energy and inspiration in congregations, for which

Postmodern ministry is uncharted

ministers are a key factor. This means being positive and creative in leadership of worship and personal engagement. On the one hand, burdening ministers with unrealistic expectations kills. On the other, ministers make a big difference; a factor we cannot ignore.

When skill does not match challenge, stress and anxiety results. Postmodern ministry is uncharted, so the learning curve is steep. I'll want to learn from people and congregations that seem to have made the transition, those where once dying congregations now seem to thrive.

They show me it is possible, sometimes in unpromising circumstances. And they show me it is enjoyable and fulfilling and worthwhile. And God still calls me, it seems, to be part of it, and part of the Presbyterian Church which wants me to give it a go.

More becomes possible with encouragement. I see that in the Assembly team. It was great to be able to say to people we interviewed recently for a position in Laughton House: "We expect people who work here to perform at a high level, often with limited resource. You will need to be active in taking initiative, in looking for guidance, in finding information you need, and in supporting colleagues. And we offer you a warm, positive and encouraging environment, which has much laughter, where your accomplishment will be affirmed, and areas for growth identified."

That's what I would like in parish ministry.

Ordained clergy: Endangered species?

Graeme Munro, Waitaki Presbyterian Church

A colleague once observed that the fastest growing category in the yearbook of our Church was “Ministers within the Bounds”. I am not aware of any research that has been done as to why this is but I suspect that some have found the pressures of parish ministry too much and have sought a less demanding life than one in which they can be dumped on by disenchanted and disappointed parishioners.

I have just finished a piece of research that indicated that a number of ministers within our church have felt heavily and unfairly dumped on. My research made no attempt to judge whether these feelings were justified - because their existence, justified or not, is cause for concern. People not happy in their work are probably not doing their best work, nor staying around.

Of course this will not be the only reason for moving out of a parish to being listed as “minister within the bounds”.

Ministry in today’s church is a shared partnership between ordained ministers and people; especially those called and likewise ordained to serve on sessions or parish councils. But this very proper emphasis on the “ministry of the laity” (although this is not an appropriate description in our church) has created uncertainty about the role of the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. It is an often ill-defined role even for those who exercise it. Most of us recognise that our understanding and practice has changed (developed, been required to adapt to a very different world) since ordination. But there are many within congregations who have both a very clear expectation of what is involved and the view that their minister is not meeting these expectations! For instance, she or he is still “stuck in the past”; or too “way out”, far ahead of those paying the stipend.

The minister’s role is multi-faceted and no one gets it completely right in the perceptions of all parishioners. It seems that more than at any previous time, formal complaints against ministers are surfacing at both presbytery and Assembly levels. My research indicated that presby-

teries found such complaints difficult to deal with. The ministers involved believed not only that the outcome was inadequate and/or wrong but that the process employed by the pastoral committee, senior colleague, or whoever, was woefully deficient. This was not just that it is always difficult to sit in judgment on a colleague (ordained or lay). Most presbyteries seem to be conditioned by an understanding of what it is to be “pastoral” — meaning that they must be “nice”. Niceness involves offering a prayer of encouragement, an exhortation to all parties of humility and co-operative working together for the good of the Gospel, and not rocking the boat.

Ministers being dumped on unjustly ought not to be persuaded that it is their role (because they are ministers) to be “nice”

It is my view that the Gospel demands of those who are trying to represent it (both ministers and presbyteries) the ability to be appropriately angry. Some behav-

our is wrong and destructive and must be named as such. Behaviour that is destructive of other people makes us rightly angry and forgiveness, properly understood, comes after the anger and not instead of it. Ministers being dumped on unjustly ought not to be persuaded that it is their role (because they are ministers) to be “nice”. If they find themselves being misused by those who want to maintain the power they have been used to - sometimes through many ministries - or by those who want only their own version of the Gospel to get airtime, then they have the right to be angry and there is often no other way to get the issue into the open.

Obviously there is also anger that is not appropriate because it is simply resentment at being questioned, pique at not getting one’s own way, abuse of clerical power, etc, and the culture and structures of the Church need to be such that this improper anger can be controlled.

I believe elders need to be encouraged to take seriously the ruling role our system gives them and as ministers we need to let them fulfil this responsibility. Many of them exercise it in their businesses, schools and families. I am aware of instances when elders have been strong, even magnificent. To know support from one’s elders as we wade through the stuff that has been dumped on us is reassuring. It takes away the feeling of isolation and gives

us hope of a better outcome. I believe presbyteries need to be encouraged to better understand that a pastoral approach to parish discord is not inconsistent with holding people accountable for their actions.

In the business world, most appointments are subject to annual reviews. While some ministers would consider this with scepticism, it could complement the requirement that ministers have regular supervision and spiritual direction. But even before this, a dwindling number in parish ministry today remember the role played by Bill Watt, Ian Provan and others. On regular visits they ministered to manse families and kept ministers from becoming

too comfortable. It is now assumed that the presbytery will do this but few presbyteries do.

I still believe in the importance of the job I was called to, but when there are many in the congregation knowing better than I do how it should be done, and when the world is so different from the one I was trained in, and when there are some “parish alligators” who want to use the church to work out their own agendas, it is sometimes hard going. I want permission sometimes not to be “nice” and so superficial. And I would like some help from colleagues who know how it is and are realistic in holding both me and my people accountable.

Stipends, sacrifice and Mammon

Martin Stewart, Highgate Presbyterian Church, Dunedin

I was interested to receive the survey form from the Stipend Task Group earlier this year. The preamble states that the survey’s purpose is to gauge the practical effect of the level of the present stipend and other allowances and the financial effect on households.

At one level (a somewhat selfish level) as a recipient, I am grateful that some serious reflection on the rate of stipend is being carried out, and that, for the first time, I get to have some input!

But I have some greater concerns that I think the church should also be reflecting on alongside any discussion on stipend. Paying the stipend is dependent on parish giving, so people’s attitudes to money, people’s expectations in a consumerist society and, last but not least, the power money holds over us, ought all to be considered at the same time. In other words, any reflection about stipend needs to be a dimension of a much larger theological discussion about the church and money and the society we live in. I walk into this area with some trepidation – I will name things that I also struggle with, and I am rightly judged a hypocrite. But to keep silent seems to be the greater sin.

The stipend as a sign of the self-sacrifice of a people

The survey provides a helpful definition of stipend that I wholeheartedly support: “The concept of stipend is to enable ministers to devote their whole time and talents to the service of God through the medium of the Church and that the income provided would enable ministers to

perform these duties without undue concern for their economic stability.”

One dimension of stipend that I think is implicit in this concept is that it is a sign of sacrifice. I accept that the ministry is a vocation and that this means that I will put what I am called to do before my concerns for remuneration, even while that means that I am paid less than my peers with similar university qualifications, and a great deal less than my plumber! I readily accept this because it is both a privilege to be serving Christ in ministry and because I understand that self-sacrifice is an implicit part of Christian discipleship; for it is hard, if not impossible, for any who would follow Christ to have more than one Lord in their lives.

But I do not make this self-sacrifice in isolation. The minister is not the only disciple who is called to a life of self-sacrifice, this call is on any who would follow Christ (see Mark 8:34). Therefore the vocational call to the minister, and the clear decision that the minister should live on less than his or her peers, has to be set in the context of a people who also commit themselves to living on less. Surveying only the clergy to see how they find life on the stipend serves to separate the notion of stipend from the relationship all the Church should have towards the stewardship of its resources. The stipend should not be the only expression of sacrifice – the stipend is simply an extension of the broad sacrificial life that the Church expresses, and more than that, it is but one aspect of our relationship to mammon – one of the “fallen” powers that compete with Christ for our allegiance.

Don't get me wrong, I know that there is a lot of sacrificial giving in the life of the Church by many people, and there are many people who give up more than the clergy. The very notion of paying someone a stipend requires that there is an underlay of sacrificial giving in the life of the church. What I am arguing here is that when the church discusses stipend separately from Christian discipleship in relation to mammon, then we are inadvertently dancing to mammon's tune. We focus on our needs and wants (in this case, those of the minister) rather than what it means for us all to be in relation to God, and in light of that, in relation to each other.

The Church and Mammon

"No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and wealth (mammon)." (Matthew 6:24)

Jacques Ellul, a somewhat maverick but compelling French sociologist and theologian, has this to say about mammon and its expression in the life of humans as money: "The Christian life is not a matter of having but of being spiritual in Christ. When this is weak, having immediately becomes dominant." (*The Subversion of Christianity*, 1986, p178)

We live in a society that is marked by an ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor. There is an attitude of irresponsibility among us in that we always desire more than we have and we accumulate much more than we need. The expressions of our surplus are everywhere to see, excessive holiday homes, late-model cars, expensive lifestyles, frequent trips to exotic destinations, an obsession with keeping up with the "Joneses", the constant desire for more and the investment in false hope (expressed most obviously in the Saturday Lotto draw). On a global-scale, there is only one way of describing us: we are greedy. Our surplus requires that someone else has a deficit, and it is usually someone who is already deprived who is hit again.

What is the place of the church in such a society? Surely we are called to exhibit a critical witness – our faith should make a difference in the way we live our lives. The parable of Jesus that absolutely slams the rich farmer who accumulates for himself must guide us, as must the profoundly counter-cultural community described in Acts 2:43-47. Instead, our churches wallow in the same pool of greed that drowns our society. We constantly moan

about our deficits (even though we are materially rich); our talk about mission is uncritically shrouded in the language of commerce; we have replaced "grace" with "user-pays" (don't we now have to pay levies in order to belong?); the people about us can only see the faith as affirming their expression of surplus because materially we

are no different from them; and, the poor people of the world look at us and they draw one of two false

conclusions: either that our material richness means that we are blessed by God, or that Christianity is simply the same thing as western capitalism, individualism and consumerism.

"Mammon," Ellul argues, "sets up its law in the church precisely to the degree that the church loses its relationship with Jesus Christ. But Mammon is a power that waits patiently for faith to fail. In its abundance it prevents faith from coming to birth... What use is faith or hope when we have everything and need only a little more to spend? Mammon with its satisfactions (everything may be bought) and its law (nothing for nothing, or no free lunch) builds up around us an impenetrability to grace." (*The Subversion*, p178)

Some critical questions:

- What might the church begin to offer as a witness to our society if by claiming the victory of Christ, it was to name and resist the power of mammon?
- What is the nature of our witness to our society about God's provision, when most of us have more than we need but our parishes struggle to meet their financial commitments and we have to fundraise?
- Is it fair, or even appropriate, to discuss the rate of stipend in isolation from the call on all of the church to self-sacrificing discipleship?
- What effect will an increase of stipend and expenses have on parish budgets that are stretched and straining because people have chosen to only give out of their surplus?

The question I am asking here may be dismissed lightly by those who believe that they give out of something other than their surplus: can I suggest they be encouraged to pop on-line and try the simple and interesting little exercise at:

www.epa.vic.gov.au/Eco-footprint/Households/Calculator.asp

Re-inventing yourself in ministry

Pete Willsman, minister emeritus, Queenstown

Looking back over the past 30-odd years, I am unsure how one apportions the instruments that cause personal growth in ministry. God scores high, as does working alongside leaders and staff who challenge and provoke, and one's own willingness to grow personally and professionally more Christ-like; all these influence the journey of growing as a person in ministry.

I found that many road blocks hindered me at particular times from growing as a person and as a leader:

A fear of failure. As when Peter was getting out of the boat, the waves suddenly appear overwhelming. I could catch myself out in an "if" mode of ministry: "if we decide to employ a youth worker, we may run out of money". Those big waves could appear overpowering. What became abundantly clear was my lack of trust in God. Grace covers one's human fears and failures. "Trust me," the Lord constantly assured me. Personal waves of fear attempted to set the agenda of mission.

A tidiness syndrome. I read and listened to other ministers and leaders explaining their personal life and their church. They seemed to have it all sussed and tidy. A longing to have everything orientated to a smooth-running, motivated, and vital, mission-focused church was my dream. In actual fact, church is a messy business. People get offside with each other, they lose motivation, and significant outreach ministries suddenly fall over. Longing for the ideal instead of accepting that ministry is working in the midst of messiness oiled by grace is a constant learning curve.

A shot-gun approach. Doing things and doing ministry comes easily to me. I enjoy being out among people doing stuff but the constant activity often held back what God wanted. A major forward-planning leadership issue demanded time, thought and prayer. Amid the business of activity, it lay shelved. An elder sharply criticised me for a lack of focus. The rebuke hurt but it revealed a major flaw. I thanked him ...later!

Some of my helpful growing points have been, and are:

A great spiritual director. Someone who helped keep me accountable in growing a little more Christ-like, who gently asked searching questions, held a mirror, introduced me to classical writings and made me think about

growing spiritually. Disciplining myself to a director earlier in ministry would have made the journey even more fun.

Graphing the phases of ministry. Although we spent 24 years in one church, four quite different phases of ministry were needed to grow the place. Initially being the minister to an ageing congregation required fronting most stuff, placing a high priority on visiting, on evangelism, and teaching that ministry belonged to every believer. As growth happened, greater time investment in leadership training and development meant reprioritising each week during this phase. Lay-led ministries, for instance in drug and alcohol rehabilitation and unemployment training schemes, all took support and required a different style of ministry. When we reached the stage of taking on staff for youth ministry, outreach, and administration, a different ministry style was required or the place would stalemate around my inability to change and grow. I found these changes hard to discern and even harder to make. I loved being out with people, visiting and interacting but my time needed to be re-apportioned to supporting the staff leaders who had more effective ministries than I could ever offer.

Selling the bed and getting to seminars. Attending seminars stimulated and challenged me. They also scared me until I learned to say "God, I want to pick up just the issues you wish to raise with me and not have to take on or remember everything". It stopped the comparison between those who were doing well and one's own limitations. Taking a team of leaders to seminars and then reflecting together on how the learning material may change us proved enormously helpful. Good seminars are like a mirror that reflects God and the local mission in a fresh way. It took disciplined diary time to prioritise the growth that seminars bring.

Painting the big picture. We were privileged to visit a number of key Anglican senior leaders in England while on study leave. Most of them spoke of taking at least a day or two a month for getting away to pray, think, walk and reflect on the way ahead for their church. In reply to a question about where the church was going, they could almost instantly outline the big picture vision.

I'm not sure that we can reinvent ourselves. We can determine before God to grow.

Burnout: A journey to wholeness

Alistair Smales, Knox—St Columba Presbyterian Church, Lower Hutt

Burnout was something that happened to people whose lives were unfocussed and whose faith was a little below par. Then it happened to me and while I was very busy in my previous parish, it is probably true that spiritually I was well below par. Let me try and explain.

I was in a busy parish on the North Shore that had two morning services at which I led and preached the same sermon. There was also an evening service attended by a good number of youth and I used a different sermon. Around that time, I was also taking an Indonesian service at lunchtime over the bridge in Auckland, and every second Sunday doing off-air counselling for a Christian programme at Radio New Zealand from 9 pm to midnight. I was also chairman of the Challenge Weekly board of directors. The parish, too, was demanding in terms of its size and expectations. The feeling of invincibility was never far away.

Burnout came gradually over a period of months and basically crept up on me unawares. Around that time I had also been approached about shifting to more than one other parish as well as considering an overseas appointment.

As time went on my capacity to relate to others became more difficult and I started to have panic attacks and was dry retching before and between taking services. On one occasion I almost collapsed in the pulpit. What did I do?

I was thankful that someone alerted the presbytery that I was unwell and they insisted I took time out. I was also under medication from the GP and saw a psychologist who told me nothing I didn't know, but since I was paying \$90 an hour I listened and applied what he had to say.

My one objective at that stage was to shift to a small country parish and see out the remaining 15 years until retirement. God has a sense of humour and I now serve in a large congregation in the Lower Hutt.

It took me all of the two months I had off work, to work through the acute stage of the burnout. It took me another six to eight months of steadily putting boundaries and coping mechanisms in place to ensure that I could cope.

The medication was obviously helpful during that stage, but I was able to be free of that after a few months when the panic and anxiety attacks eased off.

Exercise became part of my daily regime and since early mornings had been the most difficult to cope with, attendance at the gym during those early hours was important. Another vital aspect in growing wellness was prayer and the reading of scriptures. I found the reality of the Psalms to be particularly helpful and this seemed to help bring a sense of calmness to the soul. I also started journaling my spiritual walk and this provided a positive barometer of progress. I continue to journal to this day. Being able to share my feelings with others, although initially

It is never God's intention that we die of unnecessary stress

difficult, has been helpful. I will always be thankful to my wife for her patient understanding during this time. She continues to monitor my stress levels today and reminds me when they rise to unacceptable levels. We take regular time out and ensure holidays are taken well away from the phone or easy parish contact. I have also put boundaries on the number of nights out and limit activities (but not entirely).

I operate on a fairly tight timetable by having a "standard" week and add and subtract depending on needs. This parish has a wonderful staff who are able to operate as a team, thus releasing me to work on the areas of strength and this allows me to say "no" when necessary. Everyone says hobbies are important but apart from the gym this is an area I am still not good at, and my wife would be open to suggestions on this.

Apart from a couple of major health issues, I am now able to cope at a very intense level because I have learnt from the past and now take control of my life rather than allowing others to run it for me. Some stress in life is important to ensure things happen but when life gets out of kilter, it's always better to get help as early as possible. It is never God's intention that we die of unnecessary stress.

My aim now is to keep the stress levels manageable and if that means disappointing some people's expectations of the minister, then that's unfortunate. I enjoy ministry and the satisfaction of helping people know Jesus and following Him.

Put your own oxygen mask on first

Sue Pickering*

Whether we've seen it firsthand or in a movie, we're all familiar with the pre-flight briefing that calmly explains what we are supposed to do in case of an emergency. We are assured that the best thing to do is to put our own oxygen mask on before we try to help anyone else.

How hard it is for many of us in ministry to put ourselves first.

We come into ministry with a sense of enthusiasm and anticipation, drawn by God, desiring to feed and lead the people entrusted to our care; but, sometimes, almost imperceptibly, the relationship that began in joy becomes routine even to the point of losing its meaning. Flora Slosson Wuellner explains the dilemma for ministers when she writes :

*"We are confronted by a unique problem that arises when we identify our spiritual life with our professional work - when we connect spirituality with our daily job and our financial support, spirituality can easily become just another responsibility, more of the same old thing."*¹

We may have full diaries to manage, our own and others' expectations to fulfil, feelings of dissatisfaction or loneliness to suppress, doubts to hide. Somehow our time for personal prayer, time to talk to God about how things actually are for us, has been eroded, minute by precious minute, by a flood of need and busyness which, it seems, we can never stem.

How hard it is for many of us in ministry to put ourselves first long enough and regularly enough to spend quality time attending to our own spiritual, emotional and physical well-being. Yet if we don't, we will run out of breath, out of life. If we tend the needs of others without making sure that we are adequately resourced ourselves, we run the risk of burnout or disillusionment, of dryness or apathy, even of a lost faith.

How can we ensure that we are energised and refreshed for ministry?

Firstly we can have a fresh look at Jesus' words "Love your neighbour as you love yourself" (Mark 12: 31a.) We take seriously the injunction "love your neighbour" but the challenge remains for many of us in ministry to take

seriously the second half of this verse: to love ourselves, not in a self-centred way but with the kindness we would gladly give to a friend or someone in need. If we really want to go on giving out to others without becoming depleted ourselves, paying attention to our own needs is not a luxury but a necessity.

Secondly, we can do a "support system" check:

One of the risks of being overwhelmed by our ministry responsibilities can be a sense of isolation - as if somehow we have to make ministry happen all on our own. God made us for community, to have support ourselves as well as to be part of the support system for other people.

A minister's support system starts with his/her relationship with God. Much of our struggle occurs because we find it hard to acknowledge what is going on in our inner selves, especially if we have been taught to hide or control our feelings; we may not want to attend to our inner reality if we suspect that we will find anger, disappointment with God, worry about our effectiveness, niggling questions that won't go away... Yet it is precisely in this reality that we encounter God.

Alan Jamieson writes of Paul Ricoeur's useful image - the knot of reality that "explains the role of both our hope and faith in God and the role of questioning and doubt or despair in our lives".² Jamieson describes how many Christians, when faced with difficulties and doubts, either suppress their questioning or jettison their faith. Ricoeur's image points to a third way that "affirms both realities alongside and interconnected with each other".³ We are called therefore to bring the wholeness of ourselves into relationship with God - all our hopes, fears, joys and challenges are potential entry points for God's grace.

Which brings us to a second element of the support system: working with a trained spiritual director enables ministers to have a safe space in which to explore their experience - or lack of experience - of God ; it provides a confidential dedicated time for paying attention to changes in prayer; it offers a context to play with changing images of God; it allows ministers the freedom to attend to the constantly unfolding call of God. Working with a trained spiritual director also helps ministers deepen their

awareness of how God may be present in any of life's circumstances, however challenging. This awareness means that pastoral ministry can be approached with confidence, knowing that our God is already at work within the lives of those we visit. Ministry then begins to regain its ancient and unique focus: the cure (care) of souls as we help others recognise the glimpses of grace around them.

Other critically important elements of a minister's support system are the minister's family and friends and those who have special responsibility for the congregation; people who have their "finger on the pulse" of the community in which the minister serves.

Also vital is spending regular time with a trained supervisor with whom ministers can reflect on such things as: issues emerging from pastoral ministry, leadership dynamics, interpersonal relationships and how best to manage time and resources.

The final element in the support system brings us back to the initial focus: taking time for ourselves. There are all sorts of ways we can care for ourselves - getting enough sleep, eating nourishing food, exercising, spending time with people whom we love, for example. Wuellner proposes a manageable model for treating ourselves with kindness, using the concept of Sabbath to draw our attention to God's desire and provision for our health and wellbeing:

EACH HOUR - take a **SABBATH MOMENT** for inner renewal. This may be something simple like looking at a rainbow, putting seed in the birdfeeder, rereading a text message from a child overseas, stroking the cat, listening to a favourite song. Whatever it is, we are renewed by the connection made with the Creator, with people, with sources of inspiration, comfort or encouragement.

EACH DAY - take a **SABBATH HOUR** to be and do what delights us most. Wuellner invites us to "do this with joy not compulsion for God is present with us in these moments of personal delight as much as when we are praying"⁴

We are beginning to understand self-care "as a holy act, not only as stewardship of God's 'temple' within us but as a deep witness to the faith that we are Christ's beloved. We are not instruments or slaves. We are the friend, the child, the spouse, the close, the dear one in God's heart."

EACH WEEK - take a **SABBATH DAY** to engage in life-giving activities and quality rest for body, mind and spirit. In our market-dominated culture, when the rhythms of

re-creation are all but eliminated from public consciousness, it is particularly hard to make this amount of space a priority. Those in ministry have a unique challenge: Sunday is anything but a day of rest, so another day has to be chosen and claimed. This requires planning, flexibility and the co-operation of those around us if we are to be adequately resourced for service.

EACH YEAR - take a **SABBATH WEEK**, a solid period of time with no cellphone, no diary, no appointments, commitments or demands, and **NOT** the family holiday time! This week of retreat allows us to rest, to relax and intentionally give ourselves quality space with God.

It doesn't matter whether we are actively tramping a bush track or reflectively sketching, the focus is on making ourselves available to listen to God's unique communication to us, so we can recognise our unfolding call and make our response. And we can be confident that God will honour any time that we set aside, if our desire is to deepen our relationship with God.

It is not easy to make time for ourselves a priority; we can find our pattern of busyness, open availability, and ready reactivity to need hard to break.

BUT - God longs for us to rest and find refreshment. If Jesus needed to take time out, how much more do we need to do the same, so we can be re-created as we reconnect with God who is our life source and lover of our souls.

**Sue Pickering is the co-ordinator of SGM's Formation Programme for Spiritual Directors. Sue is an Anglican priest, spiritual director, supervisor, retreat conductor and writer who lives in New Plymouth. More information about SGM's programmes and retreats can be found on their website, at www.sgm.org.nz*

References

¹Wuellner, Flora Slosson, *Feed my shepherds*, (Upper Room, Nashville, 1998), p21.

²Jamieson, Alan, *Called Again - In and Beyond the Deserts of Faith*, (Philip Garside, Wellington, 2004), p.37

³*ibid.* p.38

⁴Wuellner, Flora Slosson, *Feed My Shepherds*, (Upper Room: Nashville, 1998), p.122,

Continuing ministry formation

Neville Emslie, School of Ministry, Dunedin

When ministers and denominations speak of continuing ministry formation, many think immediately of continuing ministry education. Worldwide, the emphasis is on upskilling, developing professionalism, and improving performance. It's become about knowledge of leadership development, hermeneutical skill or systems theory. A critical definition is the difference between ministry education and ministry formation. And even then the definition of ministry formation requires attention. For instance, many denominations view formation as participation in clergy conferences and retreats.

Of course, in an age of denominational decline and congregational autonomy, highly pragmatic approaches to ministry are welcome as they, supposedly, attend to the pressing issues of arresting decline and the keeping of spirits up (pardon the final preposition but we must ever keep positive, so they say).

Nothing wrong with all this; there is much to learn from those who are suave of presentation and smooth on performance. Slicker services, polished sermons, up-to-date technology and user-friendly, multi-function buildings are very attractive, and I'm all in favour of reducing the "cringe factor" of standard-fare worship services. We would never, ever, invite our next-door neighbours to these because they have too many flat-out embarrassing features.

Ministry education, it may be said, is much about improving performance; whereas ministry formation is much about improving person. My favourite line is that ministry can be a crucible and if a minister cracks up in ministry it is not generally due to theological orientation or exegetical shortcomings or even leadership incapacity, but to character and personality flaws. The pressures of offering pastoral leadership and theological engagement in a sometimes indifferent if not (occasionally) negative environment open up the internal cracks like nothing else and cause unhealthy effects in mind, soul and body. To this end, a very helpful book is *Clergy Stress: the Hidden Conflicts in Ministry* by Mary Anne Coate (SPCK:1989).

The School of Ministry (SOM) reminds its graduates and informs older ministers of the four planks to ministry formation in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand that we have worked on since the establishment of the SOM in 1997. The Ordination Studies Programme

(OSP) seeks to integrate: cognitive learning, emotional maturation, development of professional skills, nurturing of Christian discipleship and spirituality.

The key word is integration. Ministers are used to integration of sorts, as we are always on the lookout through the week for illustrations, news items, conversations and so forth that we can integrate into the sermon on Sunday. We observe life and integrate our observations so that the sermon and services we lead are relevant, applicable and helpful for the worshipper.

Yet the mature minister, I posit, observes her- or himself. The most mysterious subject, and least understood, is the matter of self. Unfortunately, the observation of self can too easily be understood as the completion of personality type indicator tests such as Myers-Briggs or the Enneagram. While these can be very valuable and helpful, they are not in themselves formative. Formation is the result of reflection and integration. I may be an INTP but unless I reflect on what that means as a (47-year-old, pakeha, married with three adult children, male, etc) person and integrate those reflections, then the personality indicator is merely a subjective and descriptive articulation of how I generally behave. Without a context, it will not lead me to work on the motivation, values, beliefs and resources that inform my responses to the world nor will it help me become a larger, more mature, wiser and lovelier person. To this end, I cannot recommend more highly Karl Rahner's book *Encounters with Silence* (Burns and Oates: 1975). Also helpful are Gerard Hughes' books, perhaps especially *God, Where are You?* (DLT: 1997) and Thomas Keating's *Open Mind, Open Heart* (Continuum: 1992).

Professionally, the SOM can assist with:

- **Planning for Continuing Ministry Formation.** Email John Roxborough or other members of staff.
- **Study Leave in Dunedin.** Contact Neville Emslie.
- **Consultation about study leave elsewhere.** We are happy to offer general advice on topics and resources.
- The **Master of Ministry (MMin)** through the University of Otago. This was designed in conjunction with the School of Ministry and members of the staff teach a number of the papers.
- **Postgraduate Funding Grants for ministers.** Contact Elaine Wooliscroft for information about eligibility and application dates.
- **Refresher Courses** such as Presbyterian Studies.

Tackling ministry as a team

Brett Johnstone, Somervell Memorial Presbyterian Church, Auckland

After eight years in a city suburban parish, I felt the call to a country setting. I came from a small country town and romantically wanted to go back to one and have my children grow up in a country environment, away from the hassles of city life. I accepted a call to a parish in the Hawke's Bay. I certainly enjoyed the setting, the easy access to all that the country has to offer - with the added bonus of the sea close by.

But the move did not work out for us as a family. After two years at the Bay, Bonnie didn't have a local job and was effectively having to commute to Wellington for work. As it didn't look like this would change, we made the decision to move. I had also become tired of working in sole-charge parishes. Having worked in a team ministry situation when I started in ministry, I was attracted to a city parish that had an existing part-time associate minister.

I found working with another minister in the parish just a delight. It was good having someone to share the load of ministry with, to bounce ideas off and talk about issues in the parish with in a way that can't be so easily done with members of session.

What makes a good teamwork?

Shared values. If the talking that you do is always around different understandings of the Bible, different expectations of worship or different approaches to evangelism or pastoral care, then I don't think the relationship will work. Our working week as ministers is too full to constantly have to check out core issues like these with the other clergy in the team.

Shared vision. Questions like "what does the future of the parish look like", and "what is our part as a team in achieving that future" are important. If, as a team, you have different radically answers, then I don't think the relationship will work.

Complementary or similar style. At parish level, I think that widely different styles or ways of doing things can create problems and lead to some in the parish backing one style over another.

Having reasonably similar styles is good because then each minister backs up and reinforces the other, and this

can be a strength. It also means that each minister has more confidence that the other will do things well.

This might sound like I am saying that the team needs to be alike, agree on everything and that the parish will get a team whose members are just blandly the same. This is not the case. Each team member, because they are a unique person, will bring their own gifts and talents to the task of ministry. But reflect on this: what is better, a lively and intelligent debate about the form and content of the Christmas Eve service or a heated and unhappy debate about whether to have a Christmas Eve service at all? Teams work well when they share certain core things, such as values, vision and style.

What are the down sides to ministry teams?

Potential to be too minister-centric. A ministry team can exclude lay people from some of the critical conversations about the ministry of the parish. Ministers can talk too much amongst themselves and not share those conversations with session or other parish leaders. But on the other hand, talking and re-talking about the critical areas of the parish is vital to keeping the relationship alive and well.

Hard to be your own minister. It can be hard to feel that you have your own identity as a minister in a parish with more than one. This can especially be the case where one member of the team is part-time or where one is considered to be the "assistant" or in some other way junior. Where there is a senior/assistant relationship, or a full-time/part-time split, the senior or full-timer really has to be sensitive and ensure the assistant shares in those ministry tasks that tend to establish and maintain ministry identity within a parish – such as funerals, baptisms, and other key services.

It can take more time. Team-work involves talking. Sometimes lots of it. When parish life gets crazy, it can be hard to find the time for this, or even to see it as valuable. But if it doesn't happen, the team can drift.

However, whatever potential problems there can be, if the team shares those core values, vision and style, then these can be overcome. I am fortunate in having been in good team ministries that did share those things and were great to work within.

Is youth work a career path?

Kevin Finlay, St Peter's Presbyterian Church, Tauranga

Youth work is for young people. This is a common assumption, but is it a valid one? It is common to focus on the disadvantages of older people working with youth, but there are major advantages as well, which are the focus of these thoughts. Two issues are interwoven: ones facing local churches employing long-term workers with youth and ones to do with surviving long-term in youth ministry.

A crucial place to start is with one's calling. If God calls someone into a ministry with young people, there can be fear they might never get out – but why would they want to? If that's what God wants, then it's the only place to be and it would be disobedience to leave it for other ministry. It's not for everyone; many will only be called to work with young people for a season, but for some the call is a long-term one. We must be prepared to recognise this and not push them into other ministry areas if that's not their calling. So why do we try to talk people out working with youth as a lifetime career?

Sadly the attitude still exists that youth ministry is somehow a lesser ministry than real ministry with adults: "when will you get a hair-cut and get a real job?" Others in ministry often say or imply: "but you can't do this all your life: what's next?" But if it is your calling then - this is your real job, it is real ministry!

An objection, which is raised against long-term youth ministry, is that youth culture is always changing, so how can you keep up with the changes? But in every profession there is a continual need to keep learning and youth ministry is no different.

One of the keys to long-term youth ministry is being able to progress through transitions. Tim Hawkins has written in *Fruit That Will Last* of five stages in the life of a worker with youth.¹

Stage 1 – "one of the gang"; the leader who is a couple of years older than those they lead.

Stage 2 – the "big brother/sister"; they are a bit older but still in touch with youth culture.

Stage 3 – "uncle or auntie", identified through the mid-twenties to mid-thirties in age. The leader is too old to be one of them, but not old enough to be one of their parents.

The leader is no longer from their culture, so becomes a cross-cultural missionary; a visitor to their planet. Because of this there can be questions about losing touch by the worker themselves, the youth they lead and the congregation, but this is not necessarily the end of the road. As these barriers are reached one does need to work hard to keep in touch (though a 35-year-old trying to be 15 is just weird). The key to strengthening your ministry at this stage is to raise up others. Mentoring/role-modelling, training, encouraging, releasing are key areas to develop.

Stage 4 – "parent" begins sometime after age 35. By this stage you really do need others around you to work with you in this ministry. There are real advantages by this stage. Parents are very happy for you to be there, it gives an air of stability and maturity to the ministry. You can actually get away with more than when you are young and people were suspicious of you!

Tim Hawkins believes this is the best life stage to be working with youth. If the lessons are well learnt in the auntie/uncle role, then he says "the 'parents stage' is a breeze":

"In stage four you can minister with wisdom. I find far more teenagers will come and cry with me now than when I was a younger youth pastor. They will now ask really deep questions about their life, and be accepting of my answers. Their parents too will also turn to oldies like me for wisdom about bringing up their kids. Younger youth leaders look for wisdom as they tread the path that I trod over 20 years ago."

Stage 5 – "grandparent" not sure if anyone has survived this long.

If you win the young people over by giving them respect, listening, caring, going the extra mile and being prepared to have a bit of fun (you are never too old to have some fun!) you will be given huge respect. A major advantage through stages three to five.

With a few grey hairs and significant experience in working with young people, I feel more relaxed about who I am and my identity is not tied up in perceived successes or failures in ministry. A good event doesn't leave me on a high, but neither does a bad event leave me wanting to

dig a hole and fall in it. This has a significant effect on the stability of the youth ministry.

I used to be a bit fearful of the parents who dropped their progeny off. I thought they always looked at me with suspicion, seeing straight through to the worst parts of me. Gradually there came a confidence in what I can offer a ministry, and a realisation that the parents really liked me because I spent time with their children – and hopefully sowed some good things into them. Having parents open up to you can be a great privilege but also needs to be handled well.

Church leaders: think carefully about the stage from which a potential youth leader might be employed. There are advantages and disadvantages in every stage. It depends on what you want them to do and who is around to support them.

One of the most helpful things I picked up from Tim Hawkins was the encouragement to stay in it until you are good at it. So many people stay in youth ministry for a few years, then fall out, burn out or move on to other things. When this happens, their experience is lost from youth ministry. It's often when the person is becoming good at what they are doing that they leave, taking their experience with them.

In youth ministry we are always making fresh starts. We too easily let the new, inexperienced worker with youth sink or swim: often they sink. Usually they are blamed and labelled as too immature, not organised enough, could relate but not teach... But local churches must be accountable also. Often the position has not been well thought through. Sometimes there is no vision greater than “we must do something with our youth”, or “we can't reach the youth in our community, so we'd better get someone who can do it for us”.

We employ them and leave them to it – no wonder so many drop out! How will they fit into the church's system, accountability, mentoring and supervision? These issues need to be given thought. Do the gifts exist in the parish to actually sustain and support a worker with youth? There is more to employing lay staff than creating a loose job description and having enough money to pay them.

Local churches must get better at supporting lay staff. I don't primarily mean money here. Although some pull out because they don't earn enough to stay, most critical are support and communication issues. People can put up with a lot if they feel they are being supported and listened to.

Some practical suggestions:

- Have a youth ministry support/strategy group that will: help new workers succeed in their tasks; help their image with the rest of the church; protect them from or help them handle inappropriate criticism: press leadership to create appropriate systems for communication, decision-making and accountability; assist them to formulate a vision and put it into practice.
- Have plans for the ongoing growth of youth workers. Assist them with transition through the stages. Ongoing training is necessary, though many training events have to go over the basics repeatedly because there is such a high turnover of youth leaders. Seeking out other long-term workers for support needs to be encouraged. Supervisors aware of the stages can help the worker to make the transitions.
- Be prepared to adjust leadership structures. An experienced worker with youth will have a lot to offer and a willingness to be a part of steering the direction of the whole body. They want to feel like they are a part of the whole, so issues of governance and management surface. Therefore, flexibility in their involvement in the wider leadership as they mature is needed. Frustration at this point is not uncommon.

My plea is for a culture of professionalism. By this I don't mean one of distant aloofness, but for a generation of youth leaders who are well prepared for their specialist ministry, supported and mentored. We need to increase the number of workers with youth that stay the distance, and therefore increase the level of skill and experience across the country.

For this to happen, there needs to be a change in both mindset and action of the leadership of churches. We've dealt with issues concerning employing workers with youth and lay staffing in general. There must also be changes of attitude away from the assumptions that youth ministry is best done by young people, that it's only a short-term calling and that real ministry awaits them once they mature enough. The alternative is that we will continue to struggle as starters in youth ministry and never come close to the potential we have in God in this area. Youth need our very best efforts. We will serve them best if we can encourage a few good workers with youth to commit to a lifetime of youth ministry and bringing other leaders through.

¹Hawkins T, *Fruit That Will Last*, (Australia: Zondervan, 1999).

Celebrating community ceremonies

Nicky Jenkins, community celebrant, Mairangi Bay

Ceremony has been used by mankind for thousands of years. It helps us to connect with the mystical; that which is difficult to explain. It helps us to experience the divine. Because ritual connects us with our higher self, it has the potential for integration and transformation. It helps to ease change. It is an opportunity to mark our losses and celebrate our love. It is the work of families and friends; professionals are there to assist them with their work. Ritual speaks to the right side of the brain – the part of us that is open to the unknown. The left brain holds on, is sceptical. For ritual we need to be open, to trust and to flow.

My philosophy

What I am trying to do with ceremony is provide an avenue for people to have a spiritual experience when celebrating the important events of their lives. It helps to make our lives meaningful if we take time to notice and name what is happening for us in our lives. I choose the language and readings carefully for a non-religious clientele. It is important to be inclusive so as not to alienate anyone. Ceremony and ritual can help at difficult times in our lives, such as when we have gone through big changes, when we are making a new start and when we want to acknowledge past hurts. Because ritual is participative and symbols are used, it can help to heal and let go of anger from the past. It works subconsciously. For this reason there is not a need to spell out the message. It is experienced.

Where can you use celebrancy?

Almost anywhere they will let you! Most people will be familiar with the use of ceremony for the major life events; baptism, marriage and funerals. A celebrant can create ceremonies for a wide range of occasions that are far beyond these: new ventures, new homes, divorce, historical stillbirth, leaving a family home or pet funerals. Ceremony can be used for large groups or with an individual working on a particular issue.

I am interested in creating ceremonies for particular support groups and for civic organisations. Celebrancy is also useful to create ceremonies when there are two cultures or faith backgrounds, which can be blended into a ceremony with meaning for all. The main focus of the celebrant is their client's wishes. It is not for the celebrant to impose any set of beliefs or assumptions on the client.

What has all this to do with the church?

I know that there are many people who do not go to church and who have a sense of the divine, but have no avenue to make connection with that or express their spirituality. Some of them have left churches because of unanswered questions, major life events which did not fit their ideas of God or mistreatment by others in the church. Others have come from a secular background and are rejecting the belief system of the traditional churches. Still others will have sought answers in choosing to follow a faith outside their tradition or culture. Celebrancy can speak to all these. Celebrancy can be used to speak of our common humanity and our search for connection.

Difficulties

The main tension and challenges in the role involve being seen as neither part of the church nor of the community, and in establishing trust from both sectors while maintaining the integrity of my role within the church

Some ministers have commented that there is little difference in what they offer in the way of modern tailored services and what a celebrant offers, but I have found there is a difference in public perception. Some have been concerned that the wording in my ceremonies may not directly mention God. This, of course, is a conscious decision to meet the needs of those outside the church. The word "God" means many things to many people, and some of them are quite negative.

In the community, awareness of the range of events that a celebrant can help with is still limited and this needs to be improved. This is very much a pilot project and we are looking to see what works and doesn't work and what could be transferred to other parishes throughout New Zealand, as well as trying to find a way for celebrants to work with churches. If you want to know more about the community celebrant you can read about the post and my web diary on www.presbyterian.org.nz.

The Future

All my reading and research points to a change in the way people want to practice their spirituality in the 21st century. I can see a place for SSPs (spiritual support persons) in a role within the Church; a church with much less defined edges that is open to people exploring their spirituality and their relationship to the divine.

Passing our knowledge on

Brian Willisroft, minister emeritus, Dunedin

As part of our Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, there are more than 300 ministers emeriti. Ordained for life, their commitment does not cease at a particular age. Ministers who have completed active service and reached the age of retirement are said to be “ministers with merit”; emeritus.

For the most part, they are very well educated. Having attended university and theological hall, and with between 20 and 35 years of practical experience of leadership, they have been trained by the Church and its best teachers. They have known the vicissitudes that confront parish ministers and many have worked in the face of financial hardship. Most have made mistakes from which they and their congregations have learned, and their memories constitute a significant resource as a part of the corporate memory of the Church.

They are not evenly spread over the country, and some rural areas are more lightly blessed with emeritus ministers, but without the close ties of parish responsibilities, there are many who are willing to share their resources beyond their immediate neighbourhood. With the official retirement age linked to 65 years, there are few who are not well enough to contribute positively to the continuing life of the Church.

What can they do?

The normal diet of parish life has, in the past, involved anything from one to five worship services on a Sunday and sometimes others during the week. The emeritus minister has developed the skills necessary to prepare and conduct worship for a congregation in a wise and seemly manner. Their understanding of the Bible has been honed by long association with the discipline of exploring the texts and contexts, and a lifetime of experience gives them a rich resource of illustration. Their reading and study has meant the exploration of many books - not all of them heavy theological tomes - and their love of language means a broad and interesting vocabulary.

The Presbyterian Church, perhaps unintentionally, has provided ministers with an opportunity to learn the skills of administration. The community beyond the church is not well equipped to conduct meetings, guide decision-making or maintain orderly relationships. Emeritus ministers are in demand from secular organisations to chair groups or act as secretaries.

The Church has recognised this resource, and many presbyteries enjoy the skilled leadership of the emeritus ministers in visitations, special meetings, vacancies and other occasions. The pastoral experience of ministers who have learned that “people matter most” means that visiting the sick, the shut in, the confused, and the dying, are tasks for which they are ideally suited.

There is no limit to the opportunities available beyond the willingness of the person concerned. A formal link with a congregation that has worked well is “honorary associate”; a role whereby the minister is recognised as a member of the congregational team without stipend. The emeritus minister is then accorded a respect and an enduring association with the leadership of that particular congregation. However, it is recognised that it is not appropriate for a minister to retire from a congregation and then become their honorary associate.

Some become associated with production of newsletters, worship programmes, visitation teams, Alpha programmes, prayer chains, and study groups. Beyond their home congregations, some conduct retreats, study sessions, or Sunday worship and fulfil roles as relieving ministers in the case of sickness or study leave. In many cases, the natural interests of the retired minister will dictate new or particular involvement in the life of the congregation. It requires only their acceptance as part of the ongoing life of the community.

Why make use of them?

Before the days of the written word, and those ancient times before text messaging, television and computers, the history of the people was the treasure held by the older members of the community. Those treasures are still there. The accrued wisdom of the years is still held in the memories of the emeritus members of the Church - not just the retired ministers.

If you do not know where you come from, if you have no knowledge of the journey of the community to this point, you cannot know which way is forward and you are condemned to repeat the mistakes of history.

The ministers emeritus between them hold something like 700 to 1000 years of experience. That’s a lot of mistakes we don’t need to make again.

A view from the emeritus pew

Bryan Wilson, minister emeritus, North Shore

I like the story of the professor who was once asked to assess a declining parish. His conclusion: “put a fence around it and charge admission so that people can come and see how church was done in the 1950s!” Having begun my ministry in that period, I am filled with admiration for those who are tackling the challenges of the present day. We who began in the era of Arthur Horwell’s “the Church is going like a train” and the vigorous New Life movement need to remember that most of you are working in a different world! Those who happen to have a retired minister in their parishes can find them a source of warm encouragement or a real pain in the buttress.

Some are quietly supportive; others can’t seem to let go, while still others are limited by health factors. In my case I’m called to be caregiver to a loving wife who supported me in every way throughout my ministry.

I know some of us are hesitant to accept change, but maybe we too had to face criticism as we dared to introduce such things as using Moffat’s translation instead of the old authorized version, or using “You” in our prayers instead of “thee” and “thou”. In the 1960s, we received many a frown when we introduced several modern hymns. (I smile when I see several now in *With One Voice*). A youth service, complete with drums, guitars, and cornets, made headlines in a major daily newspaper, the only problem being the threat of legal proceedings from the APRA! We had written our own words to an old folk tune.

Audio-visuals were treated with suspicion, but our productions, crude by today’s PowerPoint standards, were eventually accepted. With the onset of television, we had to face the fact that Biblical preaching could be reinforced by the use of visuals. The days had long gone of the Scottish preacher in Auckland, who, glowering at the children, said “I’ll be preaching for an hour, and not one of you’ll move!”

We struggled in our communities, with no Relationship Services or Citizens Advice Bureaux. We were often out of our depth in counselling but at least with a basic knowledge of Rogerian listening and prayerful seeking of the Holy Spirit, we stumbled along as best we could.

In our preaching we tried to break away from the 19th century pattern of always having to use a single text and, thanks to a sound grounding by our Theological Hall,

aimed instead for Biblical preaching; giving the setting of the passage and believing in the power of the Holy Spirit to do the prodding and further enlightenment.

We sympathise with those who today wrestle with mountains of paperwork, increased presbytery commitments, the demands of amalgamated parishes and the shrinking number of volunteers (many of whom have to work weekends).

Pastoral visiting was such a core ministry in our day but we were so naive that we felt our integrity was never in question. Today, it’s understandable that pastoral style has to be reviewed, both for the safety of parishioners and the clergy themselves.

It was a privilege to ordain the first woman elder in our presbytery and to be invited to make the bronze pectoral cross for the first woman Moderator of the General Assembly. A far cry from having to listen to one minister’s harangue at Assembly: “It is a shocking thing for women to speak in church”.

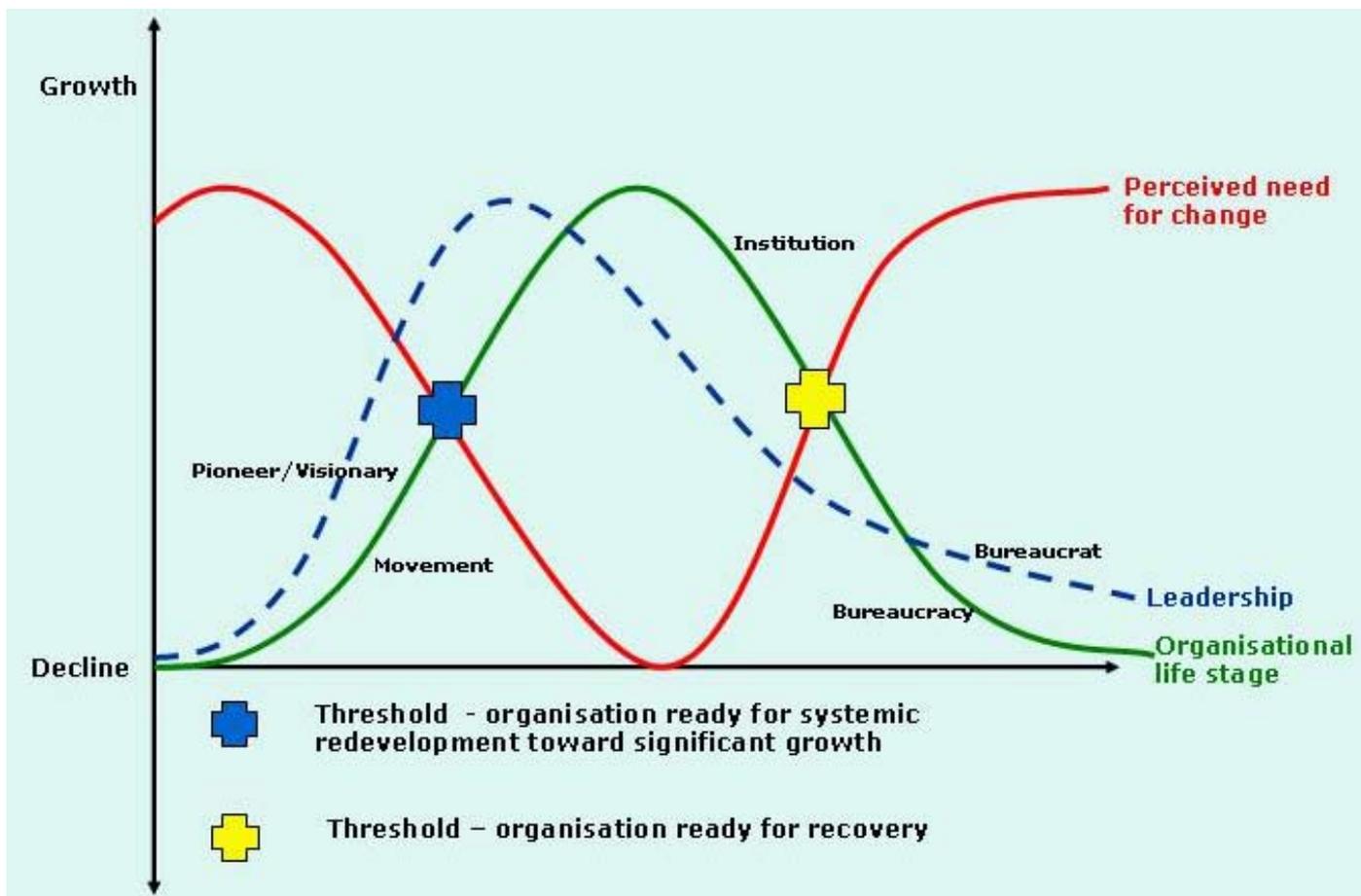
Often on a Saturday night, I think of some man or woman still struggling to “get it together” for Sunday. Maybe it’s been one of those chaotic weeks. Always remember that more than one of us old veterans are praying for you. We can’t walk in your moccasins, but we try to prayerfully walk beside you on the trail. We admire the courageous way many of you are tackling new approaches, but we also remember those of you in marginal parishes where there may be so little encouragement. A wise minister once said to me: “You are not necessarily called to be successful but faithful!”

Would I do it again? When I left civil engineering, one response was “but Bryan, I’d always thought you were so intelligent and such a sense of humour too”. Another said “about time we had a Presbyterian Pope!” Yes, although I would do many things differently, I would gladly serve all over again.

Among my notes, I find this quote: “no other member of the community, except perhaps the family doctor, has personal contact with such a cross-section of the people. These wide and deep human relationships must be regarded as a privilege and a responsibility”.

Part one: Organisational life stages

The mission toolkit is a series put together in consultation with national mission enabler John Daniel



Every church fits somewhere on this diagram, whether a newly planted church full of energy and ideas or a historic parish with a slowly greying congregation.

The graph is used by national mission enabler John Daniel to help place congregations in terms of their life stage and of the style of leadership.

“You can see where you are at, see the need for change, and then consider the possibility for moving ahead.”

Strong, vibrant, healthy churches are often at the growth end of the organisational life cycle wave, nearing a transition into an institution, he says.

“But unfortunately a lot of our churches are at the institutional decline stage.” As you can see from the graph, this is when perceived need for change is low and leadership is moving towards “bureaucrat” and away from “visionary”. However, as some people start to see a need

for change, a threshold point is reached. It is here that the curve can be redrawn and recovery can occur: the organisational life stage can change its direction towards growth and start the graph again from the beginning. Or it can fulfil the prediction of the graph’s final third and decline until it dies.

Mr Daniel says the graph is about providing a tool that places a church in terms of their leadership.

“And they can make a conscious decision on the direction they take - because often it’s a non-decision. This allows them that chance.”

Next month, part two of the toolkit will feature a diagram that helps make some key strategic decisions as to where you can go from here.

If you want to know more about taking the the next step, contact John Daniel on 03 477-7948.

Spiritual guidance without the church

Juliet Batten, *A Cup of Sunlight: Discovering the Sacred in Everyday Life* (Random House, 2005, \$34.95)

By Susan Jones

I first noticed Juliet Batten's work when she published *Celebrating the Southern Seasons: Rituals for Aotearoa* and thought "what a good idea for us to begin making our

This is a sobering read for Christian ministers

own celebrations of the southern hemisphere year". This book is not a group of ritual liturgies but a prose volume encouraging the reader to take more time to practice being open to receive, to contemplate and to express gratitude within their everyday lives. Batten's own meditative practice is Siddha Yoga, which, she says, encourages balance and effective living in the world.

I would suppose Christians from different places on the theological spectrum will react differently to this book. Those who fear syncretism with other religions may not want to read recommendations for discovering the sacred in everyday life written by a Yoga disciple. Others finding orthodox Christian practice difficult to maintain may

One of us should have written this book so seekers could find what they needed in church

find Batten's encouragement timely. Her down-to-earth suggestions about how to order one's life for maximum experience of the sacred in everyday life can enhance already existing Christian practice.

Batten does not push her own Yoga orientation onto the reader, in fact she bends over backwards to include anyone who seeks a more centred life, or those who already have a spiritual practice in any religion. In doing so she somewhat compromises official definitions of sacred. She writes for the person who is finding life mundane and "lacking in dimension" and for those who already have an established spiritual practice that they want to integrate more fully into everyday life. In the latter group she acknowledges this practice might well be Christian.

On a wider level, this is a sobering read for Christian ministers for two reasons. This is instruction and encour-

agement we need ourselves. Opportunities named for experiencing the sacred are exactly those that in a busy ministerial life we may often miss. This makes it an uncomfortable read. The book is also what many of Batten's readers would have embraced gladly while they were still church goers, but now must find in a book of spiritual guidance which remains content-free as to the object of meaningful spiritual practice. One of us should have written this book so they could find what they needed in church.

But it is Batten who has. Whether or not there are parts of the book you would not swallow, I dare you to read it and put into practice the aspects that will enhance our spiritual practice being integrated with our daily life and ministry.

Reviews and letters to the editor are very welcome. Please email candour@presbyterian.org.nz or post to Candour, PO Box 9049, Wellington, making it clear that your text is intended for publication.

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A sense of Christian family?

John Roxborough, School of Ministry, Dunedin

I was recently asked to provide a statement on how Presbyterians express the catholicity of the church in our local congregations.

It is easily overlooked. Connecting with our heritage and our contemporary context is important, but there is more to relating to other Christians than connecting to movements with which we identify personally. Episcopal traditions can formally make a link to the rest of the church through bishops. What about Presbyterian and Congregational traditions? Do we make the connection much at all when saying the Creed is rare and formal ecumenism seems like yesterday's dream?

The request came in relation to a local ministry team in a co-operating venture. This was how I responded:

In Presbyterian congregations it is sometimes forgotten that one link with the wider church is expressed in terms of ministry through the role of the Presbytery in the induction, and if necessary ordination, of the minister. This is true whether the minister is a national ordained minister, a local ordained minister, or a local ministry team of three or four people.

The local congregation also appoints an elder to the regional court of the church, the presbytery, and also to the General Assembly and to any synods or groupings that the congregation may be connected with (Maori, Asian, Pacific Island, Otago and Southland).

It is sometimes helpful to see presbyteries as having parallel responsibilities to bishops. Ministry and presbytery are important dimensions of a congregation's sense of linkage to the wider body of Christ. As ministry is increasingly shared with the active membership of a congregation, then other elements that affirm being part of the Christian church as a whole are needed. Informal linkages and fellowship matter, but so do some of our formal statements and relationships.

The standards and subordinate standards of the Presbyterian Church should also help us see ourselves being part of the wider Church of Jesus Christ. Presbyterian involvement in co-operating churches is an important witness to this. Sharing globally in the work of the Council for World Mission, and connecting with bodies such as the Council of Churches in Aotearoa New Zealand, the

World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and the World Council of Churches are also important.

Historically, churches in the Reformed tradition were in continuity with the pre-Reformation Catholic Church, even as they disagreed with it in important respects. The

We are Christian before we are Presbyterian

Westminster Confession and related documents was part of an attempt to determine a proper basis for the entire church in Britain. The missionary and ecumenical movements enlarged Presbyterian involvement with other branches of the Christian faith and the emerging younger churches of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The Presbyterian Church in New Zealand was an active participant in the development of a council of churches in New Zealand and in moves towards church union.

The informal links to the wider church are no less significant. The fellowship of local ministers and co-operation with neighbouring churches at Easter and Christmas and for special events are vitally important for both identity and witness.

Inter-denominational events and gatherings, such as through Vision New Zealand, meetings of heads of churches on social issues and involvement of congregations and individuals in mission societies and theological education bodies such as the Ecumenical Board of Distance Theological Studies and the Bible College of New Zealand have ecumenical functions that also serve to remind people of dimensions of the Kingdom of God that are at risk when we are easily caught up in the life of our own congregations.

New instruments of ecumenical affirmation and co-operation are now required for an era in which people make quite different assumptions about how the bonds of Christian faith need to be expressed and still be real. However we do it, I suspect we need to be reminded of the importance of seeing ourselves as part of "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic" church.

Because we are Christian before we are Presbyterian, the theology of this affirmation from the Apostle's Creed remains fundamental to our understanding of what it is to be church.