

Candour

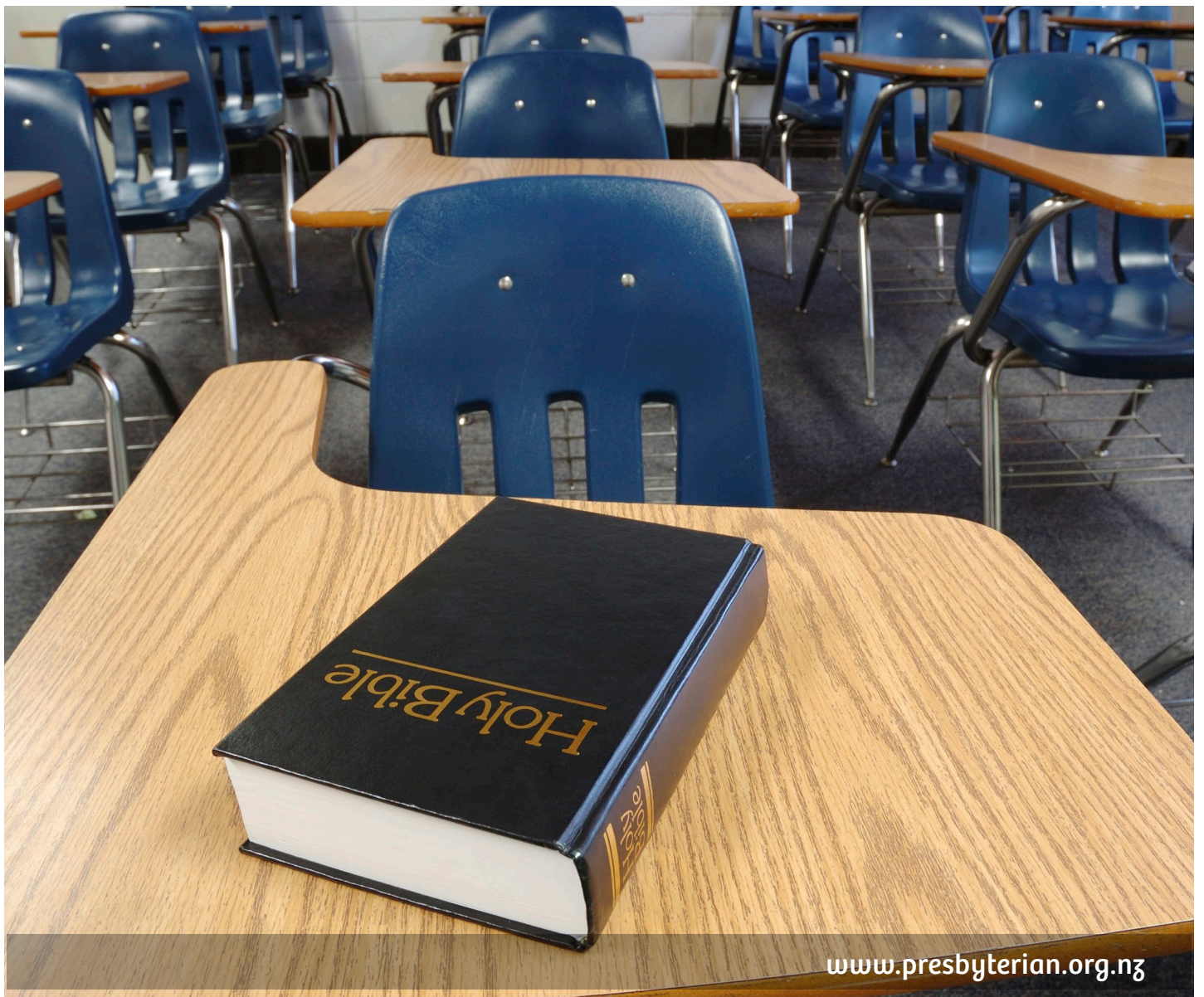


Presbyterian Church
of Aotearoa New Zealand

NEWS AND VIEWS FOR MINISTERS

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Religion in Church Schools



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Candour 2015

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Candour

This is the last edition of Candour in printed form. From May 2015, Candour will be published as an online blog. Current subscribers will be sent information about how to access articles in the new Candour Blog in due course.

The Candour editorial committee welcomes suggestions for topics to be covered in the new blog. Email ideas, suggestions and feedback regarding the change to the committee candour@presbyterian.org.nz

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Contents

EDITORIAL

Times are a-changing 3
Jose Reader

ESSAYS

Religion in Schools – 4
a Presbyterian privilege
Sharon Ross Ensor, Auckland Presbytery

Experiences of a Church School Chaplain 8
David Jackson, Wellington Presbytery

COLUMNS

When a system is capable of evil 12
Andrew Norton, Moderator, Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

People of Influence 13
Wayne Matheson, Assembly Executive Secretary

REVIEWS

Adventure of Ascent: 15
Field Notes from a Lifelong Journey
Reviewed by Mike Crowl, Southern Presbytery

Finding the Forgotten God: 16
Credible Faith for a Secular Age
Reviewed by Rob Yule, Central Presbytery

Times are a-changing

Jose Reader

Religion in education is a topic most people have a view on. In my case, when the public school our children attend sought feedback on whether religious education classes should be discontinued, I voted (unsurprisingly) to continue the classes. I was in the minority unfortunately, because classes are now less frequent, and are only available for the junior students (year 0-4).

In fact, our school is one of few in the local area that offer religious education classes. As several writers note in this edition, these days religion is more at the edge of our society, rather than in at its centre. A decline in availability of religious instruction in public schools is just one example of this.

In this edition of *Candour*, people offer their perspectives on religious education in church schools, and reflect on the changed environment in which religious education takes place, even in our Church schools, where their special character protects the right to offer religious instruction.

Times are changing for religious education, as they are for most parts of church life as we engage in mission in today's fast-paced, ever-changing world.

Candour is also facing change. The editorial committee would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the efforts of the Rev Dr Bob Eyles, who for the last year and half has dedicated many hours of effort to bringing *Candour* to life each edition. This is Bob's last edition. Bob's passion for the written word has flowed into the magazine, and his commitment to seeking out relevant contributions has been a significant influence on the quality and breadth of articles in recent magazines.

With Bob moving on, an opportunity presented itself to reinvent *Candour*, to try and better meet the needs of today's ministry leaders, so it has been decided to move *Candour*, which most readers currently access online via email link to the Church's website, to a blog, rather than a printed or digital magazine. For those unfamiliar with blogging, a blog is website that is regularly updated with articles that people can respond to and engage with.

Candour – the version you have in front of you now – is the latest in a long line of publications for our church leaders: *For Minister Only* (from 1949 - 1957) if you can remember back that far! And then it was *Forum* which was published from c1958 - 1987, and *Candour* has been around since 1991.

As of May 2015, we will usher in a new era, with the new *Candour* blog.

We have high hopes for the new format which will allow us to engage in two-way conversation in ways that just aren't possible in the online magazine and print format of our predecessors. One of the best things about blogging is that it allows conversation, and the committee is hopeful that this blog will in some way contribute to building a sense of community and engagement among our leaders.

More information on the change will be going out to all current *Candour* subscribers over the next month or so, so watch this space for more details.

On behalf of the Editorial Committee

Jose Reader – Associate Communications Manager

Religion in Schools – a Presbyterian privilege

Sharon Ross Ensor, Auckland Presbytery

I have been director of the Presbyterian Church Schools' Resource Office since May 2014, having followed the Rev Dr Carolyn Kelly and Rev Caleb Hardie. The position was established in 2011 after the Presbyterian Church Schools' Conference decision to establish the Office to help support and resource the 'special character' of the schools, that is, their Christian ethos and Presbyterian/Reformed tradition.

The role is funded by the schools which pay an annual levy based on their school roll. It is administered through the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership. My role involves building relationships with the chaplains and religious education teachers, principals and board members of Presbyterian schools.

I aim to provide support for chaplains and religious education teachers along with resources for them to use in worship and curriculum delivery. I also work to strengthen the connection between the Presbyterian Church and the schools.

Background to the Presbyterian schools in Aotearoa New Zealand

There are 13 Presbyterian-connected schools in New Zealand, with Saint Kentigern College in Auckland having a secondary school and two primary schools on separate campuses, making fifteen schools in all.

Together, our schools represent the range of schools present within the NZ education system: primary through to secondary (with some schools also offering a pre-school), independent (private), state-integrated, single sex, co-educational, day and boarding. Around 10,000 students attend Presbyterian schools across the country.

Our Presbyterian church schools were individually founded (ie there was no overall strategy by the national Presbyterian Church unlike the Catholic school system) by men and women of vision, faith and entrepreneurial skill who were variously ministers, business people and/or educators, all actively involved in the Presbyterian Church.

Rangi Ruru Girls' School in Christchurch was founded in 1889, initially as an Anglican school which, the school web-site says, was then "purchased" by the Presbyterian Church in 1946. *Turakina Maori Girls' College* was founded in 1905 as part of the Presbyterian Church's expression of mission amongst Maori. Eight more Presbyterian church schools were founded in the years 1914 to 1919 namely: *St Cuthbert's College* in Auckland, *Iona College* in Havelock North, *Solway College* in Masterton, *Queen Margaret* and *Scots Colleges* in Wellington, *St Andrew's College* in Christchurch, *Columba* and *John McGlashan Colleges* in Dunedin.

While the motivations for founding a school during those five years were sometimes complex (eg denominational rivalry, seeing a "gap in the market" for a private school), it was largely in response to the failure of "a Protestant plan to introduce the Bible into the state school curriculum."¹ That failure, along with the successful establishment of the "Roman Catholic education system - a parallel to the state system - encouraged the foundation of Presbyterian church schools."²

Saint Kentigern College (Auckland) and *Lindisfarne College* (Hastings) were established in 1953 and *St Oran's College* in Lower Hutt was founded in 1958 on the initiative of the Queen Margaret College Board. Each school then has its own founding story and sense of connection with the Presbyterian Church. There is also often an historical Scottish/Celtic Christian connection which is reflected today in the school's uniforms, house banners and names, school songs, occasional visits to historical sites in Scotland and traditions around things like pipe bands and Founders Days.

¹ Presbyterians in Aotearoa 1840-1990, Presbyterian Church of New Zealand 1990, p86

² Ibid, p87

The church and school relationship

The relationship between the schools and the Presbyterian Church has long held some ambivalence for both parties. For many years the Presbyterian Church had a Board of Education for the Presbyterian schools which reported to General Assembly on the work and issues of the schools and their governing boards. In 1953, the convener of the Board, the late Very Rev Jack Somerville wrote in his Assembly report:

“The Board has been engaged on the question of constitutions and the relationship of schools to the Church. There is great divergence of constitutional alignment as well as of interpretation and this is an obvious weakness in our Presbyterian school system. On the one hand, the schools need to come closer to the Church constitutionally to fulfil the functions of Church schools, on the other, the Church needs to take a closer and livelier interest in the schools in order to win the confidence of their Boards and staffs.”

(with thanks to Rev Dr Allan Davidson for pointing me to this reference)

The ambivalence from some within the Church towards Presbyterian schools seems to be largely around their sense of the elitism and privilege of a Presbyterian school, particularly if it is independent (private), which they believe is at odds with the call of Christ to identify and stand alongside those on the edges of society. There is a strong argument to be made though, for a healthy and active relationship between the Church and Presbyterian schools, engaging in mission with what some say is the Church’s biggest youth group. It is encouraging to see some of our congregations investing time, energy and resources in the relationship with a Presbyterian school and finding it mutually rewarding.

Past and present context

The context that Presbyterian schools operate in today is vastly different to the one operating back in its founding days. The schools were established in a context of Christendom, where there was a clear sense of “Presbyterian place” in New Zealand, which tended to reflect the values of the society surrounding it. The vision of the founders was often described along the lines of a “well-rounded/ holistic/liberal education”, grounded in Christian faith and Presbyterian/Reformed teaching.

A great deal was able to be assumed in those years in regards to students’ involvement in their local church with an underpinning of Biblical knowledge and Christian living and values. The religious education curriculum in those earlier decades of our schools could be said to be one of “educating into religion”, where faith and belief was assumed on the part of both student and teacher and the focus was on nurturing and reinforcing what was already known and accepted in regards to Christianity. The model of school chaplaincy was different back then as well, with the local parish minister often holding this role and leading weekly chapel services and even teaching religious education classes.

With increasing school rolls and changing patterns of parish ministry that model has largely changed to a chaplain being employed by the school (with only six schools currently having an ordained Presbyterian minister in the role) in a liturgical, teaching and pastoral role. Only one of our schools, Columba College in Dunedin, now has the local parish minister as their Chaplain.

Presbyterian Church schools operate in a very different climate in the 21st century to that of its founding years. The age of Christendom is well past. The Presbyterian Church, along with other Christian denominations, no longer occupies a place at the centre of society, but at its edges.

A clear minority of students attending Presbyterian schools – quoted to me by principals as ranging between 5-20% – are actively involved in a church. As a result, Biblical literacy and understanding of Christian faith is very limited. Often the only engagement with the Christian faith and/or the Presbyterian Church a student will have is in the worship and religious education offered by the school.

The world our students are growing up into is a far more complex and challenging one than when our schools were first established. Students are grappling with questions of identity, meaning and purpose within a fast-paced, multi-cultural, multi-faith and increasingly secular New Zealand society, situated nonetheless within a global village where, it is said, two-thirds of the world’s population ascribes to a religious faith.

Approaches to Religious Education

One approach that a religious education curriculum can take in the midst of this complexity is to “educate *about* religion”, giving students information about different religions and cultural traditions, in order for them to be better informed and to develop tolerance and respect for those who are “other” to us. One educator has quipped that this approach merely produces well-educated atheists and that as church schools we can surely do a lot better than that!

Our best approach to religious education today could be described as “educating *from* the context of religion”. This approach gives students the opportunity to grapple with existential questions within the context of Christian faith and invites them to reflect on their personal views and responses.

Around 10,000 students attend Presbyterian Schools across the country.

These are some ways I see this approach happening within our Presbyterian schools today:

- Firstly, our schools take the opportunity of giving students the space to engage, within a framework of Christian faith, with the big questions of meaning, purpose, belonging and “how we are to live”. Through the general “culture” set by the school, as well as in religious education classes and regular chapel services, students can reflect on these deep issues in a society where there is a real hunger and thirst for things of the spirit, beyond what can be seen, grasped and understood.

All schools have their share of trauma and crisis – most often it is the death of a student, parent or staff member which rocks a school as it reacts to the news and aims to support its staff, students and wider school community. Our church schools are uniquely placed to create space to give grief a voice, to offer support and to speak a hope-filled gospel word via worship and pastoral care into the experience of trauma, shock and sadness. When this is done well, students are given the space and support to question, reflect and find meaning in those deep and painful experiences which are part of the human story.

- Secondly, there is the gift offered to students of stillness and silence in the context of worship and religious education classes. For many students intentional silence and stillness is a more foreign concept than we might imagine, living as they do in a fast-paced, always-connected, constantly-noisy world. One of our schools continues the tradition, instituted at its founding in 1919, of the students walking to chapel in silence and sitting without speaking as they wait for the service to begin.

Other schools I have visited have a practice of beginning their religious education classes with a time of silence, or of students quietly passing a candle around the room and offering some words of thanks or concern gathered up in an opening prayer. In the pressured environment which schools are these days, the simple practice of offering students some space and stillness for reflection in order to remember who they are and hopefully, whose they are, is pure gift.

- Thirdly, there is the opportunity given by our schools to expand and deepen their students’ understanding of their place in the world. Most of our schools have a strong commitment to community service as an expression of their “special character” as a Christian-based school. The latest *Spanz* magazine (Autumn 2015 issue) has an article on St Andrew’s College in Christchurch and its impressive community service programme, both local and global.

A number of times now I have heard students from our schools talking about their experience of community service, either within their own city, or on an overseas mission trip. The surprise

Our church schools are uniquely placed to create space to give grief a voice

for the students is how they have gone thinking that they will be giving something from their privileged position to the strangers they will be meeting “over there”, but have discovered that they have received far more in return. Their world-view has been expanded, their perspective and priorities on what is important has been realigned. They have been forever changed by the experience.

The competing priorities, pressures and demands on our schools provide some complexities in regard to how closely the Presbyterian connection is held in today’s environment.

I think, though, that on the whole the schools’ various founders would be very happy to see the way in which their vision of a holistic education within a Christian ethos and Presbyterian/Reformed tradition continues to be honoured and developed in our current context.

References:

The Personal Search Approach to Religious Education, Robert Kirkwood. Dialogue Australasia magazine. Issue Twenty Two, November 2009. P1-3. Kirkwood uses the terms ‘educating into/about/from religion’ in this article.

Presbyterians in Aotearoa 1840-1990, Presbyterian Church of New Zealand 1990

A Brief History of Church Schools in NZ. Paper written by Rev Dr Carolyn Kelly, 2012

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Experiences of a Church School Chaplain

David Jackson, Wellington Presbytery

Most would agree they have spent more than enough time at school. Yet some of us inexplicably return. I am one such person. I have been involved in schools as a youth worker, teacher aid and mentor, eventually taking the plunge into teaching and as part of a college chaplaincy team.

Since the Education Act 1877 declaring that schools be “free, compulsory and secular,” New Zealand has developed an entrenched attitude separating religion and education. This attitude gets carried even into Church schools. Those entering a church expect to hear about God in unapologetic terms. The school chaplain, on the other hand, can be greeted with hostility.

Many chaplains will implement what Colin Gibson calls the chameleon model, adapting numerous times and ways throughout the day - not to meet expectations but rather to respond to them in appropriate ways. In my own experience it is not uncommon to celebrate events such as Rosh Hashanah with Jewish students and staff in the morning and then, at the request of Muslim students, denounce the evils of IS and defend orthodox Islam in the afternoon. This is not because as a chaplain I am swapping faiths to please others, but rather, these acts are ways of empathising and supporting people within our community.

There is a parallel to hospital chaplaincy as George Handzo notes:

“In addition to knowing what we ourselves believe, we need to know how these questions [of faith] are dealt with in theological systems other than our own... the chaplain must be able to deal within that patient’s particular framework.”

To celebrate with Jewish students and stand up for Muslim students is to empathise, recognise and honour the story at the core of their being. The same agape love the chaplain shares with people of other faiths, needs to be shared with those who believe religion and school to be incompatible. This may be manifest as a willingness to discuss matters of faith, without any expectation of understanding from the other. Or more importantly, an openness to accepting and valuing the other without passing judgement, even though their attitude could be taken as a personal insult.

Although it may be tempting to judge different opinions, it is not for the chaplain (or anyone) to do so. Although some may judge religion as incompatible with education, and cite the Education Act 1877 as proof, it is not up to the chaplain to offer a counter judgment, but rather to love this person no matter their opinion.

The nature of working with young people also poses a challenge. There is some truth to clinical psychologist Nigel Latta’s infamous comment “[teenagers] are not right in the head”. Young people do not think like adults do, and an adult chaplain would be wise to remember that how an adult thinks is not how a teenager sees a situation. Remembering our own adolescence, we know that the discovery of a new band can blow one’s mind, or the sheer disbelief that the sun did in fact rise the day after a relationship break up! This amplified emotional state is the world young people live in.

Take for example a teacher moving on to another career. Colleagues will see this as a natural step, and even though there may be sadness, ultimately a leaving party is a positive affair. On the contrary, when a teacher who has made a positive impact on young people’s lives leaves the school, students can be wounded and left wondering, “what have I done to cause him [or her] to leave?”

Likewise a chaplain supporting a student following the death of a loved one needs to be mindful that this may be their first experience of such a loss. The young person has no experience of things returning to normality. It may be the first time they have ever experienced Kübler-Ross’s five stages of grief. Each stage can seem terrifying and unending. Comments such as “be happy” and “keep smiling” can cause more harm than good. A chaplain must be careful not to trivialise any loss, although it may seem inconsequential to an adult.

In a system dominated by talk of quantifiable results such as a school's, one can feel the need to answer the question, "What are the measurable outcomes of chaplaincy?" Boards that convert fees into teaching hours and other services can question what students are *getting* from chaplaincy. As the chaplain offers no NCEA assessment; it is natural to question what gain is being made or ask the questions all teachers ask of themselves "How do we know there is learning?"

It can be tempting to reduce chaplaincy to a numbers game by counting the number of students in counselling, or the number of chapel services held per week. The real work of chaplaincy is the intangible things that don't fit on a job description or a professional goals form.

For us the examination isn't in November and students won't be seated in a hall. It may be in thirty years when as CEO they opt to implement a living wage, rather than take a bonus. It may be that they choose to stay faithful to their spouse and children rather than follow selfish desire. It maybe that even after resisting anything divine as a student, as adult they experience God and are able to recognise grace.

Here is one glimpse of a seed taking root that I saw on a school trip: when students spotted a man sleeping rough under a footbridge we needed to cross, their reaction wasn't to stop and stare, but rather, "we should give him that left over breakfast".

How can one work amongst the wealthy and elite when Christ calls the rich to "sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor"?

There are many ways God forms legacies in young people's lives. It is difficult to attribute these to the work of the chaplain. It could be the result of kind-hearted students or upbringing and parenting. When setting goals it is better for chaplains to see their role in the light of 1 Corinthians 3:6 "So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth." At times we may be the planter or the waterer, but it is always God who brings the growth.

For church school chaplains there is an internal tug-of-war. How can one work amongst the wealthy and elite when Christ calls the rich to "sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor," (Luke 18:22). Ironically it is only wealthy institutions which can afford chaplaincy! It wasn't until I was reminded of the story of Philip and the Ethiopian Official (Acts 8:26-40) that I began to deal with this conflict. There are three aspects to this encounter that have shaped the way I view chaplaincy in private schools.

Firstly it is difficult to find the type of people that Jesus ministered to in multi-million dollar facilities. Poor and meek are not the best descriptions of students who carry the newest smartphone. I was struck in Acts 8 by the fact that God specifically sent Philip to meet with a rich and powerful man. This enforces the notion that God's love is for all. There should be no one – not even the rich and powerful – who misses out on this.

Secondly, there is a strong sense of divine appointment in both the journeys of the Ethiopian and our students. The passage about the Ethiopian is preceded by the story of Philip in Samaria and followed by Saul's Damascus road conversion in chapter 9. Both of these are stories of God's mighty works. The story of the Ethiopian seems dull by comparison, as it is just two people talking. However, to the original readers of Acts, Ethiopia was seen as literally the end of the world. The story of the Ethiopian is worth recording because it is a fulfilment commandment "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..." (Matthew 28:19).

The same agape love the Chaplain shares with people of other faiths, needs to be shared with those who believe religion and school to be incompatible.

In our ever-shrinking world, the ends of the earth may not be as far as they once were. Perhaps now the ends of the earth may be people we see as too different, rather than those who are far away. In some ways it is the rich and powerful who are the ends of our earth, as they may be considered furthest from the Church. Neil Holm could be describing Philip when he writes, "presence is a freely given gift of oneself that occurs as the participants engage in mutual reciprocal dialog and intimacy within the chaplain - other person relationship". If God has sent us to give a gift, who is the chaplain to withhold it.

Finally this story is about recognising the God moments around us. Although Acts is primarily about the spread of the gospel to far-flung places, it is also about what is here and now. Just as Philip recognised the need to go as he was called, so to the chaplain must be always listening and looking for God. This thought can be summed up in the words of chaplaincy blogger Kate Bradford, "listening and active reflection are the substance of chaplaincy practice but the wisdom of Jesus is the essence. As the chaplain prayerfully listens, they respond depending on the wisdom of Jesus and exercise the discernment of which he spoke".

The variety of beliefs and attitudes toward chaplaincy in schools and the emotional divide between young people and adults, provide the Chaplain with many challenges. At times the challenge to wear many hats and support many people – all of whom have different expectations – can become overwhelming. In my own experience, as the day-to-day seems to crowd out God, it has been important to hold to my personal faith. Acts 8 and 1 Corinthians 3 have reminded me that school chaplaincy is primarily God's work. My supporting role is a series of acts of love for all, regardless of personal differences. As with the whole law being summarised as "to love God and to love your neighbour as yourself", so too can the whole of chaplaincy be summarised as "to love".



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When a system is capable of evil

Andrew Norton, Moderator, Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

I've been giving a lot of thought about the systems and processes of the Church. I was spurred on by Pope Francis who questioned the systems of the Church. When the systems of the Church are unable to be questioned they are capable of evil.

Who questions our processes and how is it done?

The problem: The very process of questioning has to be done from within the system; what turkey would ever want to vote for Thanksgiving? The system, by virtue of its nature, is self-preserving and self-propagating.

I was greatly assisted with this reflection on my recent visit to Waitangi. I've been on a steep learning curve of Maori culture and have come to an appreciation that they could help us in this area.

A marae is governed by two sets of guiding systems: protocols and values.

Protocols tell us what, where, when and how. They are like our Book of Order for the marae. They are the rules that govern what you are to do on a marae, so that everything is done decently and in order.

While learning the protocols of the marae I became confused when these seemed to suddenly change. Just when I thought I knew what was happening, everything changed. To understand, I needed to learn the second system in operation; values. Values protect the "why we are doing what we are doing".

These don't appear written on a values charter on the wall but operate concurrently with the protocols. Here's the key; *values overrule protocols* and at times appear to contradict the protocols.

A simple example of that is who gets to speak in an official welcome. The speakers are determined before the welcome and everyone knows their place. If an unscheduled visitor stands to speak, clearly a protocol has been breached, yet they are invited to continue. Why, because the value of respect for visitors is higher than the prescribed protocols.

Values are always in operation and these values are able to critique and question the protocols. It is the role the kaumātua to provide oversight of the values.

Values are not beliefs, they are intentional actions; "-tanga" is the intention and activity of doing in time and place. It is not enough to talk about being hospitable, rather one must demonstrate hospitality.

As I reflect on this within our own system in the Presbyterian Church, the Book of Order and Standing Orders set our protocols. This is how we structure our lives together and do business. These are our processes. My concern - how can these processes be changed or questioned? It can be done, but only from within. If you want change within the Presbyterian Church, the timeframe is likely to be four to six years. Furthermore, it is highly likely the system will protect itself and defend any possible challenge to the status quo. That is why we are so slow and resistant to change.

My deeper concern is that we do not have values that are able to question and challenge our processes. Too often over the years, in our church courts and assemblies we have been asked to trust the process, while at the same time knowing we are not honouring our biblical values. When this happens and the system takes over, we become blind, and at worse we do harm to one another and the very mission we live for.

An example of this in operation: On the marae, the lone and dissenting voice is given space. Why? Because of a combination of values:

Tapu - each person is sacred whether you agree or disagree with them. This word was deeply influenced by the Christian understanding of sacred or holiness.

Manaakitanga - the active giving of respect, hospitality and kindness towards all people. When respect is shown in diversity and disagreement both sides are afforded greater honour.

Kōrero - relationship is maintained through face-to-face conversation.

If we were to apply just these three values to our debates over the past twenty or so years, I believe we would have a very different church today. Our values would call our process into question.

I would like to believe we are values-based organisation, but I have never heard a “point of order” called appealing to our values. I’m not sure that we have ever articulated what our values are. We claim the Bible is the “supreme rule of life and faith” and yet resort to anything but the Bible.

When the protocols are unable to be questioned we are capable of doing evil.

People of Influence

Wayne Matheson, Assembly Executive Secretary

It is the season of Lent. Maybe it is time to pause and reflect.

Have you ever been to an event where there are ice breakers – get-to-know-you games or questions? Someone thinks it would be good for you to disclose something about yourself to the group. Maybe it is the first time you have met these folk and maybe you won’t ever see them again. Then comes the question... “Tell us something about yourself that most or all of us will not know.” How do you respond?

Maybe it’s just me – maybe I lead quite an uneventful life – but I don’t have much to say to that question. I don’t collect stamps nor am I an active ornithologist; I haven’t gone bungee jumping or broken my leg skiing, or done the coast-to-coast, or shot wild pigs. I am not a member of the surf lifesaving club. When people say these things there are appreciative smiles and nods. Sometimes words are spoken. It tends to be a warm, affirming time. Then it is my turn!

I wonder if I should make something up, but quickly realise I will be found out. Once I replied “I like the music of Bob Dylan”. Silence. No warm looks – rather, puzzled bewilderment or shock. No words spoken – rather the air filled with the unspoken question – “Why?”

His voice was raw and at the edge; his songs told stories; were prophetic and left a lasting impression. He was included in the **Time 100: The Most Important People of the Century** where he was called “master poet, caustic social critic and intrepid, guiding spirit of the counterculture generation”. In 2008, the Pulitzer Prize jury awarded him a special citation for “his profound impact on popular music and American culture, marked by lyrical compositions of extraordinary poetic power”.

In a sense, I was declaring that he made an impact on me. Thinking about that further, words and people do impact us all: words and people can make a huge positive impact – yet the reverse is also true...a negative impact can leave scars and memories that are always painful. I want to dwell on the positive. And words and people can impact us no matter what our age and stage of life.

Catching up recently with folk I have known for over 30 years, we talked about people. People we knew when we first met; people who impacted us and why. We recalled how it was the words spoken by these people, the things they did and their encouragement, that all played an important part in who we were becoming. These people were at different ages and stages of life to us and in many respects we would seem to have little in common.

It may have been that these people noticed; they were on the lookout for others, their pace of life was such that there was room for others – not just the friends they had – but for the new and the strangers. Maybe they showed a spacious love – to use the term of our Moderator, Andrew.

Maybe you met such a person you are now married to. Sometimes these folk can be part of our family/whanau – grandparents, aunts or uncles. Outside of parents, the words and actions of those who teach us often leave lasting impressions.

At a breakfast meeting I attended recently, a person spoke about their schooling. They talked about the impact it had had on them. They spoke about the life decisions they made and how they ended up teaching. They experienced this from both sides of the school desk, so to speak. They knew that what they experienced – both positive and negative – had influenced the sort of teacher they ended up becoming. Love for a subject can be taught by a passionate teacher who, with understanding and enthusiasm, opens the world to the learner.

And teachers may not just be in formal classroom settings... maybe you – like me, can recall teachers/significant adults who impacted you? Maybe a Sunday school/children's ministry leader, youth group leader or a leader of a small group?

As we are all life-long learners it could also be that for those of us that are a little older – it is a child or a teenager that is impacting us these days; maybe a son or daughter or grandchild. Some of those words will be spoken. Others may form a letter, a card, an email, and the list goes on.

Words and people. I will continue to listen to Bob Dylan, and U2 for that matter! I will remember "The times they are a changing...". I will find time to pause and reflect on those who have and are impacting my life. I will also be aware of the lives of others that I have the opportunity to impact.

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http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palmerston,_New_Zealand

Adventure of Ascent: Field Notes from a Lifelong Journey

Reviewed by Mike Crowl, Southern Presbytery

While reading this book I made note of a number of things I wanted to keep in mind. This was fortunate, as the overall impression of the book is that it's loosely arranged. At times it's like a diary. At other times the chronology shifts under the reader's feet, and leaves you not sure of where you are in the run of things.

Shaw's main focus is on age and ageing – she's 84 and doing fairly well – but being a writer she also looks at creativity, and whether what creative people do has any value beyond this life. Ambition and criticism also turn up as themes, as well as doubt and faith. All these areas resonated strongly with me.

The book shows that Shaw is still learning; like other older saints, she finds that faith, trust, hope, and the like, are things that need to be continually renewed. We build on what's gone before, certainly, but we can't live on what's gone before, any more than the Israelites could live on yesterday's manna.

Now that I've read the book through, I can come back to it more casually, dip into it and find wisdom (especially about getting old). A straight reading from cover to cover leaves you feeling the thing is a bit "scattershot", which isn't actually the case.

Luci Shaw, *Adventure of Ascent: Field Notes from a Lifelong Journey* (Downers Grove: IVP Books 2014). ISBN: 978-0-8308-4310-7. 176pp.

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Finding the Forgotten God: Credible Faith for a Secular Age

Reviewed by Rob Yule, Central Presbytery

Our secular culture, says Ron Hay, suffers from spiritual amnesia: it has forgotten God. But like a dementia sufferer, it is in danger of forgetting that it has forgotten.

This book is a masterly attempt to explain to secular Kiwis what they are missing. It deals in a very thoughtful way with hints of transcendence in nature and history and gathers a great deal of convincing evidence for the existence and reality of the God our society has forgotten.

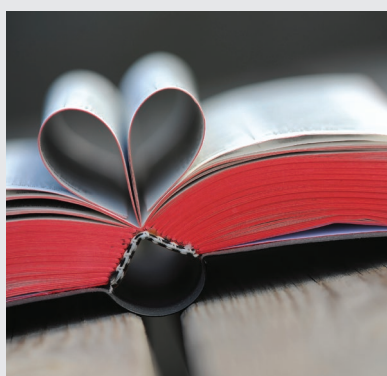
The author, a keen tramper and former English teacher, was vicar of Sumner-Redcliffe Anglican church in Christchurch for fifteen years. *Finding the Forgotten God* is enriched by his love of nature and of literature, his experience as a teacher and a pastor, and his engagement with a wider public through his articles in Christchurch's daily paper, *The Press*.

Finding the Forgotten God deals with common objections to Christian faith – the claim that God is indifferent to suffering; that science has dispensed with God; that the Bible is unhistorical; and that the diversity of the world's religions undermines Christianity's uniqueness.

A gently persuasive concluding section is enriched by stories of secular New Zealanders who have become followers of Jesus. Ron Hay presents a winsome, well-argued case for Christianity, equal to anything by overseas authors, but skilfully written with the concerns of secular Kiwis in mind.

This would be a great addition to your personal library. But even better, buy it for a friend or seeker, and use it as a discussion starter!

Ron Hay, *Finding the Forgotten God: Credible Faith for a Secular Age* (DayStar Books, 2014), ISBN: 9780994103925. 238pp.



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