

# Candour



Presbyterian Church  
of Aotearoa New Zealand

NEWS AND VIEWS FOR MINISTERS

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## Growth or death?



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## Contributions

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

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## Cover image

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# Who are we here for?

Amanda Wells

**This *Candour* is a record 32 pages (if my memory is correct). What magic factor has made 13 people write contributions when it can be a struggle to get six? I thought it might be even more difficult than usual, given the topic's sensitivities. But contributions flooded in, right up to the deadline. Even unsolicited essays, which are rare.**

It's a truism that without growth, any organisation will die. If your dwindling congregation keeps doing things in the same way, your result is guaranteed. Lately I've heard more than a couple of people say that they would like their congregation to change/welcome families/hold less-traditional services, but that there is a determined minority/majority who are quite happy with the status quo. They may even recognise that the church will die in two/five/10 years time but that doesn't shift their point of view one inch. The church is for them, not for anyone else.

Perhaps like me you find the previous paragraph deeply depressing. Where do you start in constructing an argument against a mindset wrong on so many levels? If you can't convince these people, what can you do? Work around them; develop new congregations; grow new centres of influence. These answers are all difficult, time consuming and energy sapping.

But the volume of contributions this issue suggests our ministers aren't giving up. Nor are they ignoring the negative statistics and their implications, though as Margaret Galt helpfully illustrates these are not as clear cut as you might think. Other contributors in this issue talk about what is and isn't working in their corners of the world, and most retain a perhaps unexpected level of optimism. This isn't the doom and gloom issue.

I loved Rhys Pearson's "mystery shopper" stories from his recent travels. He emphasises how many churches fail at the first hurdle by not considering their work from a stranger's viewpoint. How can you come to church if you don't know what time it is or where the front door is? The quality of your worship or theology never gets the chance to matter. Only if a church can see itself and its facilities through a potential visitor's eyes, does it have enough awareness to provide those people with a genuine welcome. It's worth paying close attention to his observations.

For me one of the key facets of successful organisational planning is that as soon as you think "everything's going really well", the alarm bells ring for change. The seductive belief that your organisation's present success predicts the future presages failure. You always need to be bringing in new people, fresh ideas, and be open to constructive critiques.

From my perspective, a generational shift in our attitude towards church is about to occur. This has nothing to do with how many younger people are going to church; it's about our attitude to our particular local institution. The articles in this issue of *Candour*, and some recent conversations, suggest to me that current older generations can have an extreme degree of attachment to their church. They are willing to soldier on, resisting change, because of a certain loyalty and immutable commitment to the local institution. Many believe, consciously or unconsciously, that newcomers should fit their mould and adapt to their existing worship style. It's easy to sympathise with the sense of threat these people feel when faced with change.

However, I'd suggest the context in which it was created no longer exists. Younger Christians have been part of many churches, shifting around more than previous generations because of study or work, and feeling relatively free to "church shop" when dissatisfaction arises. They are Christians first, local church members second, and denominationalists a distant third. Those who have survived the massive drop-out rate of their peer group have a commitment to Christianity different from our predecessors, who grew up in a dutiful church-going environment. It's hard to see my generation suggesting that a local church should die rather than change to embrace younger newcomers. We don't "own" a local church in the same way.

Yes, this is an individualistic and selfish point of view, but it also results partially from seeing church as a function rather than a place or institution. It's the function and the outcomes that need to be maintained. We are both more idealistic and more pragmatic than our parents and grandparents; user-pays continues to have more sweeping effects than its progenitors ever imagined.

The next issue of *Candour* will have the theme "Volunteerism vs being paid" and a deadline of 30 July. Contributions are welcome and can be emailed to [candour@presbyterian.org.nz](mailto:candour@presbyterian.org.nz)

# Would the last person turn out the lights?

*Kevin Ward, Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership*

**A**lmost 10 years ago, I wrote an article titled 'Towards 2015: The future of mainline Protestantism in New Zealand.' At the time I was not part of the mainline church and it was based on my research into the findings of the first two New Zealand Church Life Surveys, carried out in 1997 and 2001, which indicated that the average age for this group of churches (Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist and Cooperating parishes) was over 60 and increasing. If this was so, then if nothing changed, by 2015 it would be the equivalent of 75, except that a good number would by then be no longer members of the visible church. This trajectory being so, I suggested the future of many local churches within these groups would obviously by that date be unsustainable and many would have ceased to exist.

Not long after that I became Presbyterian and my concern became personal as I became involved in the development of leaders for this particular church and worked to help local churches, congregations, parishes toward a positive and viable future. Visits to these churches, as well as to presbyteries, in the course of my work have simply put human faces to the data. I do need though to add one caveat to these generalisations, which is that the figures for Pacific Island and Asian congregations are considerably different. This means that, firstly, the issue I am addressing here applies mainly to congregations that consist predominantly of European New Zealanders and, secondly, that if we take out of the figures Pacific and Asian data, the picture for those congregations is likely to be even worse.

The challenge we face is that for many of these churches, the system that gave them birth and sustained them for years no longer exists and so, despite the hopes of some of the remaining remnant for revival or renewal, their ongoing existence is no longer viable. They were begun in a time when a significant proportion of the population were churchgoers, about 20 percent weekly and 40 percent monthly, and of those Presbyterians were the second largest group. In this world, when many people did not have a car and walked to church (as well as other activities), the parish system thrived. It was made up of the people in the local community who belonged to the local church, and so as children were born in that community they were baptised into the church and grew up through Sunday school and youth group to become adult church members.

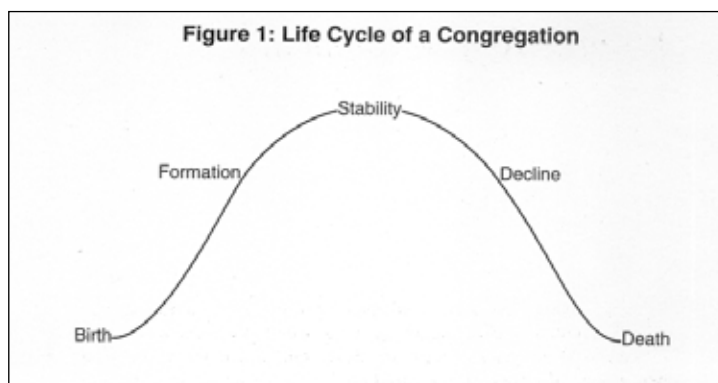
**M**any have since closed and the reality is that many more will over the next few years

However, from the 1960s on, all that has changed. The percentage of the population attending church has halved (about 10 percent weekly and 20 percent monthly) and the proportion of these who are Presbyterian has fallen considerably; in the under-40 age group quite drastically. Young people no longer stayed to live their lives in the communities in which they were born but moved off elsewhere, particularly from rural communities. Almost everybody got a car, or second and third cars, and so were no longer constrained to shop locally. All of these changes meant that many, many local parish churches, particularly in declining and aging communities where the younger people had moved out and there were not significant numbers of young families moving in, began a slow and relentless decline. Many have since closed and the reality is that many more will over the next few years. These are churches that are now beyond the reproductive cycle, which is the main means by which churches have sustained themselves or grown. In addition, because churches were located within walking distance, many of these communities have too many of them in an age of greater mobility and declining church attendance. The questions we now face for many are



not whether this will happen or not, but how can we do it well? How do we decide which should be closed? How do we ensure a healthy grieving process for those who will have a great sense of loss and pain as this happens? How can we do it in such a way that the resources they do have are carried over to the wider Church to be used in its ongoing mission and life?

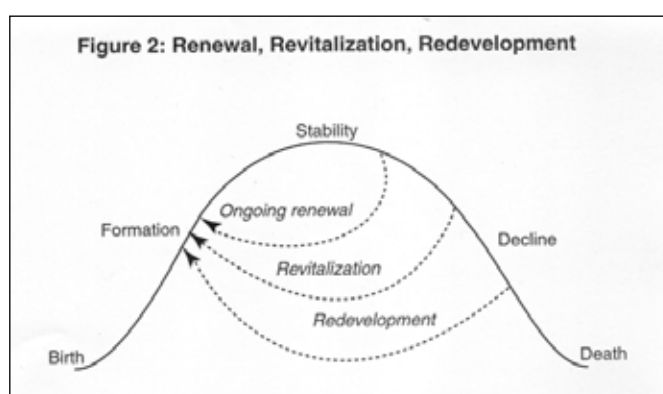
One helpful way of understanding churches is through the application of life-cycle theory from organisational studies to churches. This recognises that organisations go through a life cycle, similar in some ways to the human life cycle, from birth to death. It seems that if they continue doing business as usual this process is inevitable; that peak



performance does not continue forever. New life and energy needs to be introduced by doing something new or different, to continue the vitality of the organisation. It is also recognised that the best time to do this is when the organisation is at the top of the curve and the further down the decline side the more difficult it is to do so. The greater the energy that is required and the more significant the degree of change that needs to be introduced.

Now while it is important to remember that the church is not just another human organisation, nevertheless it is that, and there is much that we can learn from looking at some of the findings from this area. I have found the life-cycle material tremendously helpful in understanding church life. A major challenge that we face is that many of our churches have continued well down the decline side, continuing business as usual, often hoping for some miraculous salvation, either through a divine visitation or an omniscient new young minister.

Alice Mann in a very helpful book, *Can Our Church Live?* applies the concept in looking at the options for congregations in decline. She suggests there are three different options for these congregations depending where they are on the curve. Notice the chart points back to the formation stage from three different points in the life cycle. This is the stage when the identity and beliefs of the church are formed, answering the question "what are we called to do?".



*Ongoing renewal.* By looking at its fundamental questions of faith and practice again. In the evangelical tradition, periodic revivals served this purpose to some extent. In the church growth or health movements, it is done through strategic planning.

*Revitalisation.* In the early stages of decline a church might be able to look hard at the facts, avoid blaming and engage in new learning that leads to some different ways of doing ministry. Revitalisation implies there is still substantial vitality present that can be refreshed and refocused. A dangerous assumption that can exist at this stage though is that a new minister will accomplish this work automatically. If the minister has the skills and understanding to raise the critical questions needing answers with the church, a new era of vitality might occur, but more often the forces driving decline continue to be ignored. In that case the new minister will experience (or often collude with) the church's two most destructive illusions: the fantasy that growth can occur without change and that change can occur without conflict.

*Redevelopment.* The further you slip down the decline side of the curve, the more capital it takes – spiritually, financially and politically – to create the possibility of a turn around. It is usually

underestimated how much of these resources it takes and often the reality is that the community does not have sufficient.

Many mainline protestant parishes are at the point where redevelopment is the only realistic option for them, or death will follow. They are too far down the decline cycle for revitalisation or renewal to help ("If we keep on doing what we are already doing, we will get what we already have"). My concern in this article is not with those first two options, but rather this third option, as well as those which are even beyond the point where redevelopment is feasible and death is certain. Most of the material on change deals with the first two options, and the reality is that, in effect, much of the helpful missional church material is really talking about this third option.

Mann says that redevelopment involves:

- Recognising the death of the congregation's previous identity and purpose.
- Reallocating the bulk of the congregation's resources to discovering and living out a new identity and purpose.
- Finding and empowering leaders who can start a new congregation, maybe on an existing site if that will serve the new purpose and identity, or if necessary elsewhere.
- Caring for the remaining members of the previous congregation, sometimes by providing in effect a chaplaincy service, for as long as needed.

While this is an option in some situations, for others there is insufficient capital, spiritual, financial and political, for this to be possible and the death of the church is certain. How do we decide if this is the case and so work toward a healthy ending rather than just letting it end messily and painfully as the remaining human resources dribble away? A few years ago I went to an Alban Institute seminar on change led by Gilbert Rendle, a long time consultant with the institute and author of another very helpful book *Leading Congregational Change*. He talked about churches that were below the threshold of survival, and identified the following signs

- Where the age profile was excessively old or indeed these were the only people.
- Where there was either no anxiety (people were unaware of the precariousness of their situation) or extremely high anxiety and fear that paralysed any constructive discussion.
- Where the financial situation was such that there was not enough money available to do anything but survive and no way of getting it.
- Looking at the margin of life for people. How much discretionary life (time, money, energy) do the people have after they have taken care of work and family? We need to be reminded that socially speaking, church is a voluntary organisation and so where people do not have enough human resources to offer, its survival is doomed.
- Where the system is dominated by positional people (those who hold to a set position on issues and are unwilling to change or compromise) and there are extreme disagreements on these among members.

What it is important to recognise in both of these cases is that a death is taking place – in one case, of a long-held identity and form of community and, in the second, of an actual community itself. Both this identity and the community have played a very significant part in the lives of perhaps many of those who remain and so the ending provokes a deep sense of loss. Since a death is occurring, it is important to recognise that for those involved this is a very painful process and we can expect all the normal feelings and processes of grief to occur in many of the people. We simply cannot come to a decision that this place needs to close, even if what has been is to be replaced by something new to which they are invited to belong, and expect those who are part of that group to immediately, or even quickly, agree it is clear this needs to be done and so let's get on with it.

One of the leading writers on change, Ronald Heifetz, says:

*The aphorism that is commonly bandied about is "people resist change" or "change frightens people". I think that is wrong... change is hard when it represents the possibility of loss. It's the possibility of loss, and the apprehension, fear and anxiety associated with that possibility of loss that generates resistance. Those of us doing work on leadership and change frequently don't appreciate sufficiently the sources of resistance. We frequently fail to have enough respect for the pain of the change that we're asking people to sustain; we speak in fairly disrespectful terms about the resistor's parochialism, narrowness, or short-sighted selfish political interests. That is one way to describe some human motives. But everyone is, within his own frame of mind and within her own life, trying to hold on to what is conceived as precious. And who amongst us does not resist having something we consider precious taken out of our hands.*

Part of the problem is that we who are leaders are often ideas people, and we put our energies into trying to get people to understand the ideas we are coming up with about why we need to close down one form and put our energies into developing new forms. The trouble often is that the people we are trying to sell our ideas to are feeling so much pain and grief over what they are losing that they cannot hear the ideas we are endeavouring to communicate.

It is so important in this process of significant change and realignment of resources that we must go through that we give adequate attention to the feelings people are coping with (which means sitting with and listening) and journey with them. Otherwise the fear and anxiety about these losses will lead to resistance and a paralysing inability to face the issues and changes.

In another very helpful book on change in the church, Ken McFayden, in *Strategic Leadership for a Change*, uses the significant work of John Bowlby in "attachment theory" and applies it the church. This theory outlines how people develop significant attachments in life, to people, places and things that are meaningful to them and define them, and the more significant those attachments are, the greater our degree of grief at the loss of them. Life is a process of making attachments and losing. For many people, especially those who have been attached to a particular church for a long time, with the people they have journeyed through life with, the place where significant events have occurred in their family, and where certain traditions and rituals have been important parts of their identity, the possible loss of these is alarming. We also need to remember that this is happening at a time when these people have often lost, or are in the process of losing, other significant people, places, things they have been attached to.

It is only as we as leaders are able to help people name these, to understand with them the sense of loss they evoke, to empathise and pastor them through this inevitable stage, that they may be able to move beyond the protest, despair and detachment that inevitably comes and begin to imagine and talk about a new alternative future. As we do this, and understand with them what it is they actually fear losing, we may be able to talk with them about how we can so shape this new future with them that possibly they will not lose as much as they fear. Perhaps they can take some of the people and things they are attached to into this new future, and some of that old identity can be carried with them on the journey.

There is an increasing amount of helpful literature that is now available about the personal and emotional processes that people need to work through in the journey of change, particularly where this involves significant loss and change. I have highlighted some of these here. It is only as we as leaders understand these and are able to help the people involved in the journey that we will enable them to see that within the Christian tradition death is not the end; we always live in the hope of resurrection, and with that in mind enable them to hope for and participate in the new beginning that might lie on the other side of the end of a current identity as church and recreation of a new identity as God's people in this community.

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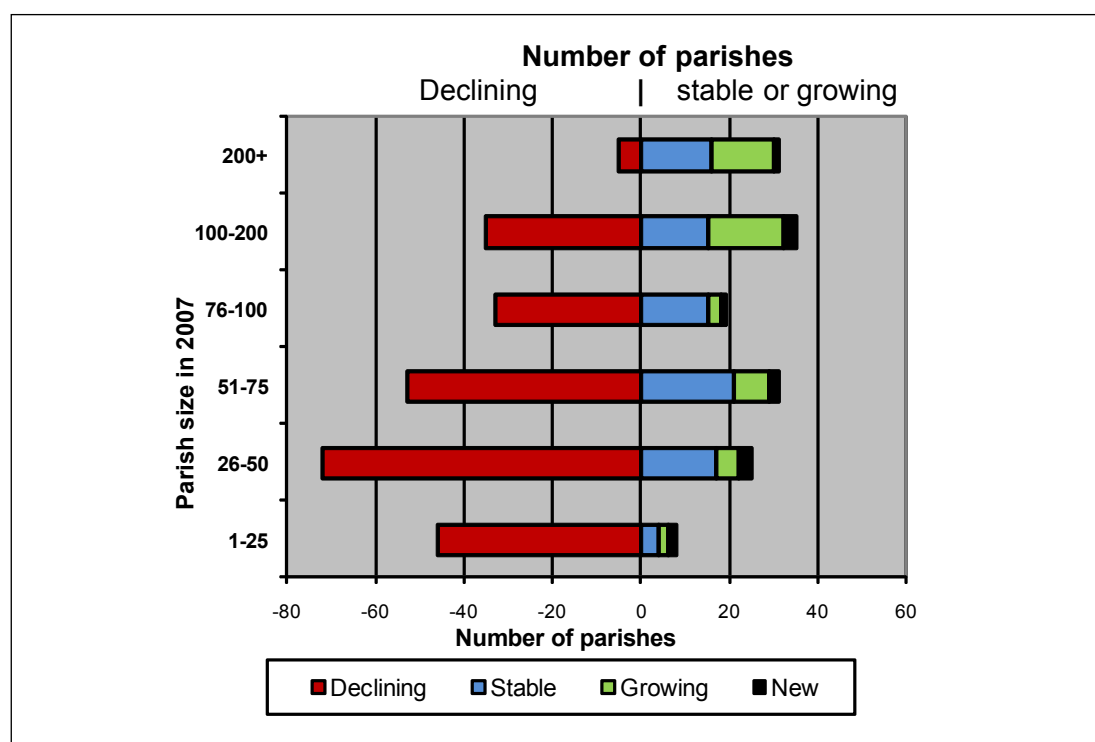
Contact the Rev Dr Sarah Mitchell ASAP at (03) 477-0229 or email: [minister@knoxchurch.net](mailto:minister@knoxchurch.net)

# What really has been happening to our parishes?

Margaret Galt\*

**T**here is a dangerous condition that can come over groups of people, often called “group-think”. It happens when people think they know what the facts of the situation are and so no one actually checks to see if these “commonly held beliefs” are true or not. Within our discussions as a Church, we tend to assume we know what is happening in our parishes, but often this is characterised by two rather depressing “facts” which take the form of: “the Presbyterian Church is in decline – all our parishes will continue to shrink until there is no Church left” or alternatively, “the parishes that have declined are the little ones – so the little parishes that remain have no future”.

But are these assumptions true? This article looks at what happened to the 383 parishes that provided attendance figures in both 1997 and 2007<sup>1</sup>. Since we often soften the blow of effective closures by calling them “amalgamations”, these statistics assume that if services stop being held at the buildings then that parish was closed, but if services continue to be offered then the later figures are compared to the combined statistics of the two previous parishes. Growth is defined as an increase of more than 20 percent in those attending services, while decline is a drop of more than 20 percent. Between these two, a parish is designated as “stable”.

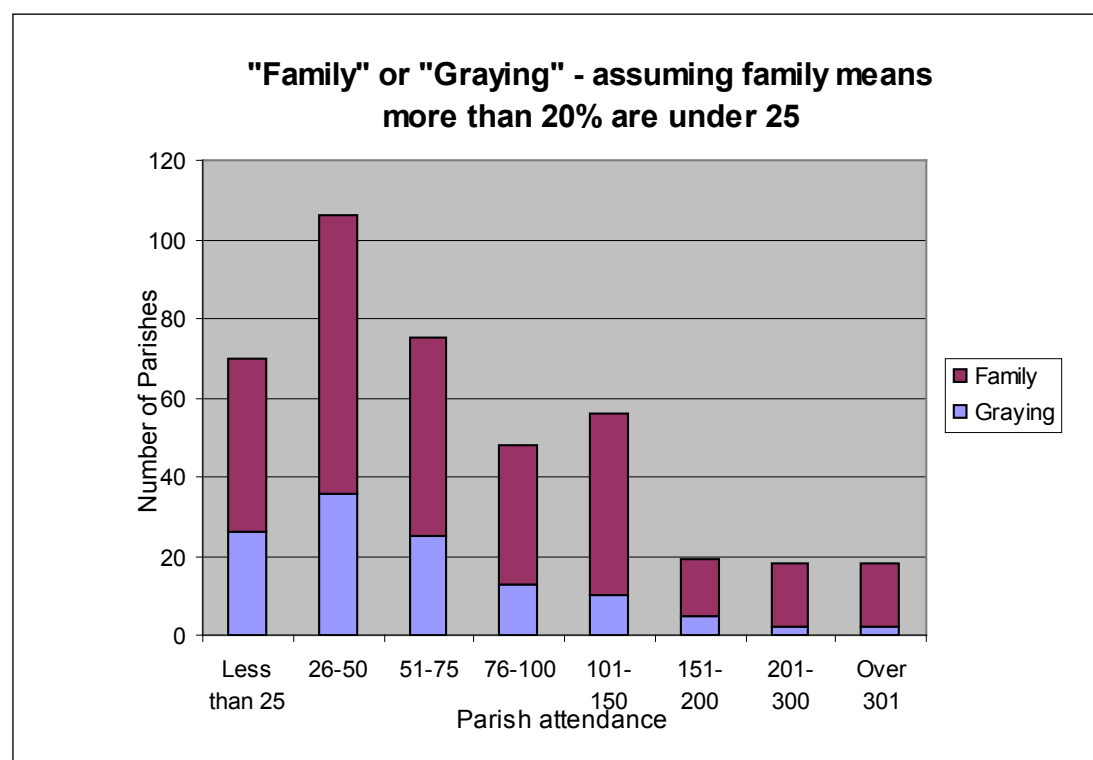


First, is it true that all our parishes are declining? The answer is no, but between 1997 and 2007 there were more declining parishes than stable or growing ones. Most of the largest parishes were either stable or growing, but even in that category a few did decline. In the parishes with 100-200 attending services, which we tend to think of as reasonably flourishing, the number declining roughly equaled the numbers that were stable or growing. However, the statistics do show that the smallest parishes were the most likely to decline. Only about a quarter of the parishes with attendance of less than 50 were stable or growing, and once a parish has less than 25 attending services its chances of revival are dismal indeed.

<sup>1</sup> Most of the analysis in this article was done in 2008 and so only includes statistics up to 2007. However as it deals with long-term trends it is still relevant even though the latest two years of statistics have not been included.



The statistics for these smallest parishes show, however, that there were two quite different types of parish. While there are parishes that have mainly elderly members, there are many others, even amongst our smallest parishes, that have a cross-section of ages – like a true family. These parishes may be limited by a sparsely settled catchment area or some other defining characteristic.<sup>2</sup> The “graying” congregations will not survive unless they widen their appeal. The “family type” parishes, however, are far more likely to be stable or growing in the future even though they are small, because they are attracting replacement generations. Unfortunately being a “graying” church is not solely confined to our smallest churches. Even some of our middle-sized congregations (and in fact even one or two of our largest congregations) do not show a healthy mix of young and old.



Finally, but very importantly, the statistics do not support the idea that once a parish is growing that its future is secure, nor that once a parish is declining all is lost. When we looked at the parishes that grew between 1981 and 1995, only 40 percent of them were stable or continued to grow in the next decade. A full 60 percent of these previously successful churches went into decline. On the other hand, only about 44 percent of parishes that had been declining continued to shrink, and over half of them (56 percent) either stabilised or grew over the next decade.

### What lessons can we learn from all of these statistics?

I would have thought the key messages were:

- You cannot foretell the future of a parish from its history over the past decade. The opportunities and threats need to be assessed by what is happening within and around it now.
- Vigilance is needed to ensure the ongoing growth of our growing parishes, as there is no guarantee that growth begets growth over the longer term.
- We should not assume that all our small parishes are the same. Many of them could be stable family-type congregations that could continue for a long time.
- Finally we should not assume our small or shrinking parishes are meeting their potential. Some may have the capacity to grow given the right encouragement.

*\*Dr Margaret Galt is an elder at Wellington's St John's in the City. While she is a Church Property Trustee, she points out that this article is written in a personal capacity.*

<sup>2</sup> One statistic that often surprises is that on average the smallest parishes actually have the same proportion of children in church as all but the very largest parishes.

# A grass-roots view

Rosie Staite\*

**“The Church is dead! Long live the Church!” Ten years ago this was the title of an article in the “Inside Out” Journal of the Council for World Mission<sup>1</sup>, investigating whether the Church in Aotearoa New Zealand had a future in a secular society. At that time, the South Canterbury Presbytery had received a grant of \$30,000 towards my work as a part-time lay facilitator, trying to fathom answers for two small rural churches. Those parishes were quite horrified to think they might be a mission field! Mission was about overseas, wasn’t it? Not in the mind of the CWM visitors who came from London to see what was happening.**

Earlier I had worked in city churches - suburbs where good ministry grew churches and kept them healthy. Effective leaders of groups, and churches, disciplined young leaders – male and female. Good music made a difference. Understanding the shift to a more visual learning style was implemented in places with new technology – the OHP at first! There was God and prayer and laughter – people with faith, encouraging one another, and a range of styles within denominations to provide for worship preferences.

## A rural story

Ten years ago it was a brave move on the part of the Anglican Diocese and the South Canterbury Presbytery to allow some space for two rural parishes to find new answers. A ministry cluster with Waimate had been explored but did not receive “buy-in” from all. There was a strong ecumenical climate still, and some real problems of decline in the churches. The move to dairy was just beginning in Canterbury. Depopulation of the land-owners, who had supported the church, along with a dairy industry with working hours that did not adjust for Sunday morning worship, were new factors in the equation. The people moving in were not finding the church relevant, and did not easily connect.

Growth happened in the few years that followed. Why? Because the faithful people realised that THEY were the church, not the building. The minister was not there, “doing it for them”. It was a “go” culture now, not a “come” tradition, and when people did tip-toe inside to bring their children into church, we needed to be welcoming, hopeful and helpful in our message, relevant to real life, with God’s grace spilling over into community lives all week. People discovered their giftings, unwrapped them and worked together. Churches built on their strengths, Callahan style<sup>2</sup>. New life happened.

An excellent holiday programme began in Pareora. Families struggled a bit there. Someone commented that it was rare for anyone to do anything for people in Pareora. Later those children were invited to monthly family services, designed for the needs of their families. Relationships were built. Mission was primarily relational, coupled with some strategic decisions.

The parish sold a surplus piece of land in Pareora, and paid for fire alarms to be put into every home in Pareora by the local fire-brigade. Integrity was built up; faith was seen as practical, and seeds were sown. Local teens were invited to help at the holiday programme, in return for letters of commendation for their CVs. Win-win solutions met the needs of the community while telling, and living, God’s good news story.

In Waihao Parish, the parishioners were the Bible in Schools teachers. They still are! Through those relationships a youth group was begun at Glenavy. There’s not a lot of choice for kids on Friday nights in Glenavy, and when I visited recently, it was still a great place to be! There were 27 young people there last week, new faces from the ones I had known, with four dedicated leaders, loving the task. Young and old were learning, and having fun together. One key leader has ministered to young people in that district for all those 10 years, and is still there, smiling. The programme I attended was an international night, honouring some of the families who have moved into the district. A chance to hear new stories, taste new foods, have a study, enjoy games and learn respect for other cultures. Two hours being the church, with high energy! Not Sunday morning, but still church – pews moved back, still songs and prayers, an evening with Kids of the Cross.

<sup>1</sup> Journal of Council for World Mission, “Inside Out”, 2000 Issue 18

<sup>2</sup> “Twelve Keys to an Effective Church” and “Small, Strong Congregations”, both by Kennon L. Callahan

One of those two original parishes moved into Local Shared Ministry. The other chose part-time ministry. The original questions have returned, for new answers. God's stories are on-going.

## A town story

In the last six years I have worked in a small parish in a town context: 26 churches in a town with 27,000 people - some questions inherent in that statement, especially with three or four of each mainline denomination.

I arrived with around 25 regular parishioners at worship on a good day, and one grandchild. They were a little tired and despondent. They were faithful people, not many under 60, more women than men. There were five in employment. Some of their neighbouring churches suggested they "shut up shop". While they looked at possible ministry models, we began to do Sunday church a bit differently.

Drama unlocked some issues. Why were they there? Habit? Fellowship? A call from God? There was a little more prayer, and training. There were some very good preachers among them. There was a little more life and energy there on Sunday mornings. They realised they were in ministry, in every community group or hobby they belonged to, Monday to Saturday. Evangelism was not their word. These were "heart, salt, doing people" rather than Bible articulators.

Newcomers began to arrive. People from the dance group. People who had come to a Remembrance service. Children were expected and planned for, and over morning tea every week, conversations helped new, young and old become community. Two children visited with a parishioner, and asked to come back. The whole family began to come. People started asking for Baptism for their children, who were part of the church. (There hadn't been a baptism for seven years.) People told me they had been about to leave the church, and now wouldn't miss a Sunday. We ran out of song books - no data projector here! The attendances rose each year, in a small congregation that had a warm heart. The men came back. Women intentionally stood back for various "Blokes Days", where men only led the worship. Their voices were important.

We received an offer to buy their whole church complex - the child care group using the hall wanted to sell their business, and the whole plant! Could God's hand be in this? There were a lot of questions to answer, but again the people learnt the church was not the building. THEY were St David's. I was amazed that the vote to sell was unanimous! People who had been there for all 55 years, still agreed sadly that it was the right thing to do. So a growing congregation had to be relocated. They explored options, and accepted the offer of a Methodist Church to share their building. They have begun an Arty Crafty group for school holidays, teaching children new skills. Life there continues, as God has moved among them. Their Calendar Project, and Cambodia Project have been written up as Kids Friendly exemplars in mission.

## Reflection

Over the last 10 years, I have studied practical courses of Enabling and Transitional Ministry, learnt a lot on the ground, and reflected. I share some personal, informal conclusions for today. I'm still learning, as God dances on ahead of us.

The Church belongs to God. We have inherited it, but the Spirit moving through us enables it to grow and live in new ways. It exists not for us, but for those who do not yet belong. So what we do - all seven days of the week by clergy and laity in that community, must reflect that.

Perhaps there is a point of critical mass. The church of 25 regular worshippers in town doubled in about three years. The rural church of 12 regular worshippers at the beginning, didn't. They did amazing ministry in their community, but the load was carried by fewer.

For a church to grow, as well as focusing on the Gospel and relationship with our Lord Jesus, in my experience, the leadership also needs energy to focus on:

- strategic growth decisions from prayer and discernment;
- providing quality worship - relevant, hopeful and helpful;
- being able to meet the needs of different ages, inclusive and warm;
- skilled people for crisis pastoral care.
- Parish events/parties with fun and joy that provide doorways for visitors.

Rural areas have larger geographical distances and are strongly bound by seasonal farming demands. Time is very precious. Town family life is pressured and busy, with employed parents having not enough hours in the day. All the churches I have been in have moved from a focus on the building, to BEING the church. Sharing the good news is about conversations, trust, relationship, under the Spirit of God. The team needs to be big enough.

There is also a point of gate-keeping, where some parishes are not willing to share power, to “let go and let God”. In some places, community families “own” their churches – which begs the question of defining the church’s purpose and function. Where congregations are not willing to allow change, they limit their life-span. I reiterate the church exists for those who have not yet arrived.

The age of Fresh Expressions church planting is now more clearly defined. Methodist and Anglican Churches in the UK have led the teaching on this. Reading their material on pioneer ministry affirmed my personal exploration into new ways of being church. I was working primarily among the dechurched. I suspect the unchurched in NZ would not easily make sense of traditional denominational practices – established liturgy often uses concepts and language that would feel foreign to busy, everyday Kiwi workers, used to more relaxed styles. Also, the teaching about the basics of Gospel, personal belief, and God’s love are not always easy to find for searchers on Sunday morning. What works for one group will not work for all. The “go” part of mission within NZ means that forms of church will be established, with the understanding that they will never be assimilated into Sunday morning territory. We have got to a “both/and” situation.

As churches have declined, the ecumenical ethos of the last century has been replaced by more denominational branding. The end of a joint publication between Presbyterian and Methodists probably defined that moment for many on the ground. However, I think the strategy and growth of the more Pentecostal churches, who have targeted the 18 – 30 generation – as outlined by Stan Stewart and others in the April issue of Candour - were also reaping their harvest about that time. Denomination does not have the response that it did.

### **Is the denominational Church dead and buried?**

Call me an incurable optimist, but I believe it is still “Long live the Church!” though not necessarily as it has been. Those who know the Good News, and have tested it in the gritty realities of life and found it strong; those who have received the love of God in their own lives, still have a faith story to share. I have been open-mouthed at times when I’ve invited parishioners to share a time when God’s presence has helped them. The amazing stories have warmed and encouraged all of us present, with new respect for God’s greatness.

I believe God puts us in the places, and with the people we are asked to work with. Being a private, faithful Sunday Christian may not grow the church. Whether people come to God, searching or believing, having read the Bible or The Shack, wanting peace or praise, wisdom or worship, acceptance or forgiveness – I believe that God will still call.

Many younger people do not join or commit for a long haul – they choose their “right now” needs. However, while they don’t have commitment for a church institution, I believe they do have commitment to Jesus. A companion, a Saviour, a task flowing from love and faith in God’s grace – that is compelling stuff.

I think that God’s new people might continue to search for a community with:

- warm, relational, skilled, Godly leadership – with some joy, prayer and laughter lurking.
- people they can trust, church people with integrity, walking the talk
- good teaching and/or good music and/or good groups – all grounded on the Bible
- and focusing on the Gospel of Good News.
- people who have realised that they have gifts to use, get on with the job, and invite others to join them

If the denominational church can provide these things, people will come. It will have LIFE. (And especially when we think we know the answers, God will surprise us!)

*\*Rosie Staite has worked in stipendiary lay ministry for over 20 years and has recently begun a new position as Ministry Developer with the Anglican Diocese of Christchurch, with Under 40s Ministry in Mid and South Canterbury.*

# A theological reflection

*Malcolm Gordon, St Paul's Katikati, Kaimai*

**You can't get away from it. At a recent gathering of the Kaimai Presbytery, the statistics were presented showing the continued and undeniable decline of almost every aspect of our churches' life (except cash reserves, but that's a rant for another day!). The situation is serious, there's no denying it.**

Yet I couldn't get rid of this uneasy feeling about the title of this edition of *Candour*, which seems to be an accurate reflection of a prevailing attitude within our Church: we must reverse the cultural shift away from mainline, institutional churches or we will die. My question is, when did death become our enemy? As followers of Jesus, death is actually part of our journey as we are drafted into God's story. When we are baptised, we go down into the water to symbolise what? Sharing in Jesus' death. Paul writes in *Philippians*, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead."

Death is an unavoidable part of the story of Jesus. It is his embracing of death, and his obedience unto death that leads to his ultimate victory over it when God raises him by the power of the Spirit. Now I'm not telling you anything you don't know, but this is not just the story of Christians, this is the story we are ushered into together as God's Church. Does our ecclesiology have room for death? If it doesn't, how can we learn to anticipate and make room for resurrection? Unfortunately for us, the two are inseparable!

Perhaps our struggle to grow is linked to our struggle to embrace death, choosing instead to limp along: half alive, half dead

Dietrich Bonhoeffer famously wrote in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die". Later he continues, "In fact every command of Jesus is a call to die, with all our affections and lusts. But we do not want to die, and therefore Jesus Christ and his call are necessarily our death and our life." Elsewhere he states that this death is not an accident or avoidable, rather it is essential in order to follow Jesus.

What does it mean for us to embrace death as part of our ecclesiology? Quite simply I don't know. I'm certain it doesn't mean we roll over and give up. It doesn't mean we rush to meet death or try to hurry it along as some of the early Christians did when they went out of their way to needlessly become martyrs. But it must mean that we don't fear death, for it is the gateway to resurrection life. It must mean that we hold this form of life we share together lightly, knowing we needn't be fearful of what might come if it fails. It must mean we are willing to let things end, confident that God will fill that void with new life, purpose and vision. The survival of the Church is firmly in God's hands, and let's be honest, it's probably safest there.

Does this mean we don't seek to grow our congregations? No, of course not. I'm not suggesting helplessness in the face of institutional decline and possible death. I'm actually insisting on hopefulness in the face of these challenges. In fact, perhaps the concepts of "growth" or "death" aren't opposites at all. Perhaps we need to explore "growth and death", faithfully following Jesus' lead as we let go of those things which have given us security, but have crowded out God's Spirit. Perhaps our struggle to grow is linked to our struggle to embrace death, choosing instead to limp along: half alive, half dead. In Christ, God has turned the world upside down; the new order is death then life. We must remember this, and think carefully about what it is we are fighting to preserve. May God lead us into the resurrection life of Jesus, so that when it seems like our Church has one foot in the grave, we remember we are actually one step closer to the empty tomb.



# Admitting the illness is terminal

*Susan Jones, Timaru Presbyterian Parish, South Canterbury*

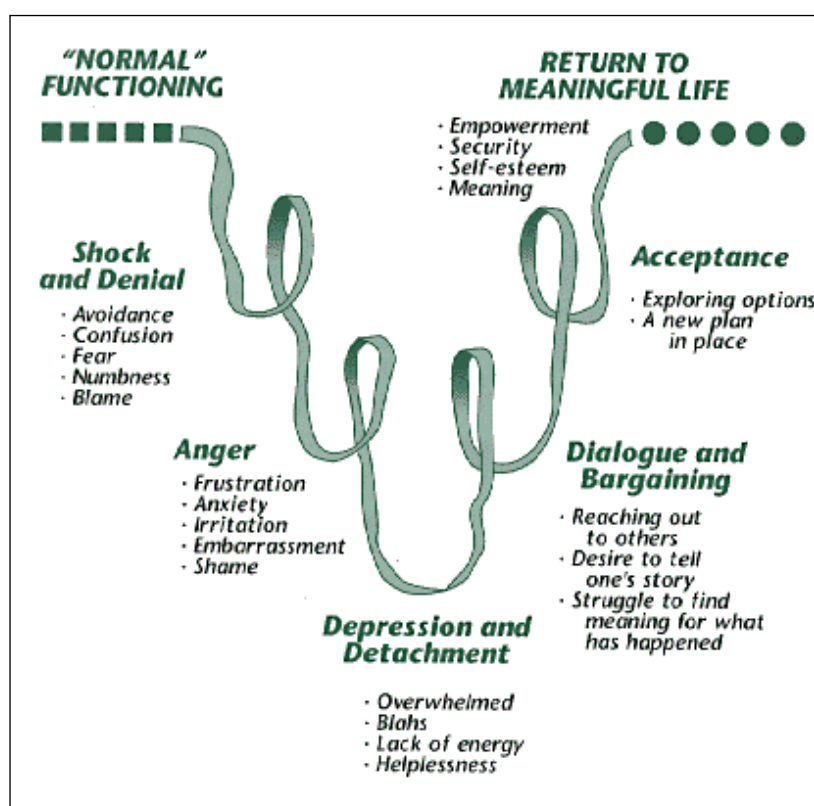
**O**ur theology about church is often unexamined when it comes to longevity. Somehow, it seems, if God is eternal, so must my little church be also. If a pioneer has planted the congregation here, it is thought to be dishonouring to that pioneering group to allow a church to be closed – their memory should persist forever, whatever it costs a dwindling elderly congregation.

Often others outside a church can see the writing on the wall, but not those within it. I have written before about Blueskin Union Church, which was closed by the Dunedin Presbytery, through Knox Church. Even though only three active church members remained, none of those three wanted to let go of the faith community they knew and loved. They actually had the money to pay for a preacher once a month and get a boy to mow the lawns, they could even pay Assembly Assessment. Financially they were, in some senses, viable.

I have been pondering how the people in the church can be brought to realise the reality of their own impending death. In some ways they know it, because they have lived with it for years before any authority tells them they are in a terminal condition. Like my mother, however, they do not always admit this is the case but continue hoping all is still well. Though it might seem obvious to outsiders, it may still be a shock when they are told their church needs to close. When closure is an unwelcome change, church members enter a grief process with many stages, none of which promise a smooth passage to closure for the person facilitating the move. These stages are seen in the diagram below!

At first, in shock, denying the probability of closure, the people who need to be convinced may avoid those trying to convince them. They are afraid of what life will be like without the church they know. They blame those performing the reality check and can be in such shock that they feel numb.

This numbness can pass and suddenly we are confronted with anger, a mixture of anxiety and frustration. People are irritable and even ashamed that they have not been able to keep their church full and thriving. They may be embarrassed that their faith community has come to this.



The person blazing at you at one meeting might be absent from the next, detaching themselves from the arena of pain and emotions. They may move into depression, energy levels dropping and they feel helpless to stem the tide of change. It is important to keep in touch with people at this stage. Regular attenders can stay away from church for six months or more, while they catch up

internally with what is being asked of them. It is important that someone involved in the change process, or one of their friends, keeps in touch, however; important that they are quietly kept up to date with developments and that any questions are answered unemotionally and helpfully.

If opportunity is given in these contacts, the grieving church member may be able to begin to tell their story – about what this group has meant to them, of their baptism or marriage in that church, of the events which happened under those rafters and changed their life. In this less angry space, people can “hear”, perhaps for the first time, what will replace their worship place and they can be offered ways in which they can bring part of their past into their future. They may also begin to realise closure is not all their fault, but partly caused by rural depopulation or postmodernism or the economy. They may regain a sense of agency.

If people can be “held” by the faith community at this stage, they can often begin to enter into the new plans again. They may even come to the point where they find the new situation is warmer, more comfortable, more invigorating; something they wouldn’t have wanted to miss.

It can be tempting to respond out of our own frustration when faced with denial, with anger or with detachment when we have been charged with bringing about the closure of a church. Being gentle and firm is a combination that can meet people where they are and carry them through the very real stages of grief to acceptance and new life.

Don’t we Christians have a theology that out of death comes new life when God is involved? Where is our faith that the death of a particular church is never a complete ending, but may also actively make room for resurrection to take place, if not here, somewhere else? We need to hold this faith and hope before those who grieve losing the life they have known and point them towards the God who was with God’s people in Egypt, the Wilderness and the Exile. We need to remind them that God faced death at Calvary so that new life would be possible. Who are we to doubt that this Calvary might allow the stone to be rolled away?

## Facing the fear in small corners

*Silvia Purdie, licentiate, Manawatu Wanganui*

**I’m about to be ordained (after too many years of training!) and inducted into the Foxton-Shannon Co-operating Parish. I’ve been working in the parish for almost a year already on an interim basis. It’s been great, very supportive, and great to finally be in parish ministry. There are four small congregations: Foxton, Foxton Beach, Shannon and Himatangi Beach. “Surely not?!” I hear you asking. “Why on earth continue with these separate churches?”**

A couple of years ago the parish went through the big argument of “let’s all combine on the one site” versus “no, let’s keep all our congregations going”. It wasn’t pretty, apparently. Good people left. They lost their children’s ministry. A dangerous moment, because retreating into small corners isn’t in theory a wise move, and isn’t likely to open a church to the blowing of the Spirit. But then again, combining in response to decline hasn’t worked for many churches either.

And we are still in the grip of decline; two out of the four congregations are becoming so small as to be hardly viable. But these are hardy old folk, determined to be a witness in their towns. They long for the wind of the Spirit to blow free and strong again. They’re looking to me for the way ahead, which is scary. Not because I lack ideas or enthusiasm – I have plenty of those – but because, well, I’m afraid that our best efforts won’t be enough. I’m afraid that these special little churches will die.

I discovered something this week. Do you know what the most often repeated words are in Luke’s Gospel? “Don’t be afraid.” Through angels and Jesus, God again and again commands us to feel the fear and do it anyway. And so we seek the Spirit to heal and renew. We plan for outreach and mission.

I've been thinking about fences. "Inside and outside the fences ..." Declining, dying churches live inside their little fence, knowing little of the blast of fresh air in their faces. Growing churches catch the wind of the Spirit, and are part of what God is doing, within them and around them. And so this is how I understand the work that God has given me to do at this time, in this place.

**Building warm relationships.** The work has to start inside the fence, with the people you have. Ministry begins with caring for the flock. "Speak gently to them, love them", God said to me. My aim is for every person associated with this church to know that they matter – to the others, to God, to me. So I've visited them, prayed with them. I've anointed the leaders, we've had social events and healing services. And God has been good to us, people feel more positive about our churches, more aware of the presence of the Spirit, more optimistic.

**Repairing the holes.** Coming into a church as a new minister, you hear the grief for those who have left and the horror stories about why they left. I've gone looking for people who used to come but don't any more. Some have been open to a conversation, others haven't.

**Painting the fence.** The first time I went to the Foxton church I couldn't figure out which door to go in. The Shannon church had a battered sign hiding behind a bush. So we've worked on our fences, both literally and symbolically, making new signs, brochures, getting in the newspaper. Thinking about how we look from outside.

**Linking up the fences.** I've been curious about the other churches in our towns, and got to know others in ministry. It's important to me to be part of rebuilding a sense of teamwork and collegiality between churches in our towns.

**Opening the gate.** I make a distinction between "services" that we as churches provide to our communities, and "mission". Hiring the hall to a flower-arranging group is a service but not mission, not unless we are building relationships with people. Outreach projects lead to friendships. They open up doors to God's work of renewal and point in some way to Christ. The playgroups who meet in our buildings – are they part of our church, or just using our buildings? How can we offer these families more than just a cup of tea? What invitations might they respond to? The op shop (and a lovely new op shop it is too!) – is this just to make money for the church, or can it in its own way extend God's kingdom?

I'm currently challenging each of our congregations to initiate a new outreach project this year; maybe a men's breakfast, or a "what not to wear" fashion night for women. Maybe an environmental project in the sand dunes, or a mural project with a local school. We're talking about how to open up our buildings as community centres, inviting mobile nurses and exercise classes. I'm going to be preaching and teaching and writing and talking about mission; about how to catch a breath of God's wind blowing, how to pay attention to the nudges of the Spirit, what this means in practice. I'll be asking a lot of my people, asking them to rethink who they are as churches, and this will involve more than just Sunday mornings. I can't promise them success, or even church growth. There are no guarantees, just the promise that the Spirit of God is alive and well, and will graciously use us, and open gates for us, if we are willing to step out.

It's "face the facts" time; people in our towns are not the least bit interested in our churches. Why should they be? Small churches can have a vibrant and vital role in small towns, but not by staying behind closed doors. My prayer for the Foxton-Shannon church, and for others like it up and down the country, is that we will know the wind of God, both inside our lives as congregations and outside our fences, as we connect with our communities in new ways.

*Lord, Holy Spirit,  
You blow like the wind in a thousand paddocks,  
Inside and outside the fences,  
You blow where you wish to blow.  
(James K. Baxter, 'Song to the Holy Spirit', A NZ Prayer Book, p.157)*

# Our life has its seasons

*Rachel Judge, St David's Ashburton, Ashburton\**

**W**hen you come to think of it, so many of our conversations, issues and pastoral work within ministry have their genesis in issues surrounding change and loss. After a long time of responding individually to these issues on a one-to-one basis, and perceiving also that so often unsettling dynamics within relationships in a church family arise from past traumas and changes bubbling within people's lives, I've been delighted to discover the healing tool of the programme "Seasons for Growth".

This gentle educational group course comes from Australian Catholic material.

There are children's and adults' modules, each using the imagery of the four seasons to work gently through what we used to call "the stages of grief". I was privileged to have the opportunity to train as an adults' and children's companion with REAP in Central Otago, and then later have continued training with Catholic Social Services in Christchurch, under whose direction Seasons for Growth operates within Canterbury. I like the term "companion" for the groups' facilitators as it conveys that gentle sense of journeying alongside people as together we explore our the experiences of our lives, seek meaning in them, and discover tools for living full lives in the present and the future. This is not group therapy but an educational programme, based on life experience, and learning together life-enhancing practices such as forgiveness, dealing with feelings, the power of memories, and being part of support networks.

The children's programme works well within in a school context and fits in well with the role of state school chaplain, part of the Churches Education Commission. It's been a pleasure to see both children and adults become more comfortable in their own skins when they learn some tools for facing the future with hope, and especially as they learn they are not alone in their grief.

This group element is a key component, I think, of this programme's success. In my present context, I lead adult groups, three in this past year, with our parish visitor, and it has been lovely to see friendships and understandings growing within the groups. We now get together as a group about six weeks following our final session to reconnect and see how we're all doing.

The content of the Seasons sessions, four weeks for the adults' programme, and eight weeks for the children's section, is based on the work of William Worden's grief theory. For each session, the material matches a season with one of Worden's four tasks of grieving:

- To accept the reality of the change or loss (autumn)
- To experience the pain of grief (winter)
- To adjust to an environment in which the person/object is no longer present (spring)
- To reinvest emotional energy (summer)

People have mainly chosen to join the group following the experience of bereavement or separation/divorce, but as we share together we become aware of many changes and losses in our lives, that in many cases have enriched us and helped us live with hope and serenity.

The programme has its own integrity and structure, with helpful guidelines and protocols including monitoring the size of groups and requiring regular supervision for group companions.

Within a ministry context I have found this programme a positive link with the local school and our church, and also a way of enlarging the scope of pastoral care in a faith community. It's also a great way of outreach into the community – each group we run has some participants from within our church and some people we haven't met before.

Seasons for Growth is a different approach to group life in our churches. It takes the stuff of our life, and unobtrusively allows us together to find God in those experiences.

Dorothy McRae-McMahon's words in the introduction to her book "Liturgies for the Journey of Life"<sup>1</sup> remind us of the power of community when facing issues that otherwise can isolate us.

"When people come together before their God and each other as an experience of community, we often find that the love and courage and truth which is released goes beyond the sum total of our human hopes."

1 'Liturgies for the journey of Life' by Dorothy Mc Rae-McMahon, SPCK, 2000

A prayer from her “liturgy for hard journeys” contained within this book vocalises and unites our individual yearning and brings them before our God who enters all our experiences.....

*We want to move forward in faith  
but the way seems so dangerous  
and we stand in helpless fear  
before that which is hidden in our past  
and in our future.  
Stand beside us, gentle Christ.  
Walk before us, brave Jesus.  
Call us on into life, Holy Spirit.*

*\*Rachel Judge is in team ministry with her husband Alan at St David’s Union Church, Ashburton, and ministry enabler for the Hinds Local Shared Ministry Unit.*

# An overview of a mission journey

*Nyalle Paris, St Andrew’s Invercargill/ordinand, Southern*

**In 2006 St Andrew’s Invercargill invited a retired minister, the Rev Cecil Kirk of Canada, to provide a transitional ministry for a six-month period. The church was in decline and with an aging congregation. Rev Kirk developed a mission blueprint that identified a number of key issues and opportunities; the main focus being to encourage the older people to build relationships with their grandchildren and great-grand children, and to share God’s love and their faith with them. Long term, the hope and expectancy was to see these young people integrated into St Andrew’s life, and that the parents of these young folk would begin to return to their faith.**

## Five keys to new growth

### The praying remnant

In 2007, the congregation was at a low ebb, with dwindling numbers and aging membership. They voted (by a one-vote majority) not to close the church, but to employ a half-time, mission-focused motivator. I came to the church, and with the mission blueprint as my starting point, mapped out some key strategies –

- Encourage a small group of prayer intercessors to be intentional in their prayers for the revival of the parish and for effective community ministries to be raised up.
- Exhort a number of church members to make a vow of commitment to the Lord and give their time and energy to the life and future of the church.
- Spend 2007 “steadying the ship”, by bringing consistency to services, and building relationships and trust.
- Establish a vibrant men’s discipleship group through the means of inductive Bible study, prayer, and worship (for years, women members had been the backbone of the church and the men had largely abrogated their responsibility).

### Becoming a community-facing church

NB: In the post-Christendom world of the 21st century, St Andrew’s had become increasingly isolated from its surrounding community, at a time when people no longer came to church as of right. St Andrew’s had to become a missional church or perish.



In this context, Jeremiah 29:7, “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare” became St Andrew’s word (Gk: *rhema*) from God.

A group within the Church read “The Externally Focused Church,” by Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson, which gave a number of examples of effective, outward-looking, community ministries.

Early in 2008, the then Moderator of the Church, the Right Rev Pamela Tankersley, visited St Andrew’s and her focus, “Christ-centred, community facing”, resonated with the session. A number from the church also attended the “Standing Out” workshops led by Amanda Wells, which confirmed the importance of the local primary school as being the hub of our local community.

The link to the local school was strengthened through a series of meetings with the principal which over time led to church volunteers running a reading programme for the school, building an award-winning school vegetable garden, and to the appointment of Mrs Teina Marie as a CEC-qualified chaplain in the school (for more details see [www.synod.org.nz](http://www.synod.org.nz)).

### **Youth outreach driven by Golden-oldies, 2008 -2010**

How does a predominately elderly flock build thriving youth work and help heal the natural life-cycle of the church?

St Andrew’s was gifted an ICONZ group, which initially contained half a dozen local children. ICONZ is a ministry of the Boys’ Brigade of NZ and their ICONZ director Stuart Thompson came down in person to assist us in promoting ICONZ at the local school. To their credit BBNZ allowed us to run ICONZ as a co-ed programme.

The older church members volunteered on rosters for ICONZ, assisting with afternoon tea (women), games and building projects (men).

An important key was the hiring of Valoa Valoa-Jack, with the support of Synod, as a part-time youth worker to oversee ICONZ. Valoa brought to the position musical ability, cultural affinity to Maori and Pacific Island youth as well as great behaviour-management skills.

In 2009, the growth of the ICONZ to over 60 students necessitated the establishment of three separate programmes being run on three separate days including:

- Kids bible study on Tuesday afternoons
- Anchor group for year 1-4 students on Wednesday
- Adventure group for year 5-9 on Thursday

### **Building the ministry team, 2008-2010**

The establishment of the St Andrew’s Ministry Team over these years has been another important key to growth because it has enabled us to attend to parish needs, while also engaging in mission outreach, without burning out.

The present ministry team includes myself (KCML intern), Teina Marie (community chaplain), Valoa Valoa-Jack (youth director), Dr Norman MacLean (session clerk), and Roger Harrington (outreach director). The team is not just in name but meets together weekly for prayer and planning. The result is a real synergy where ministry responsibilities are regularly shared out, including the preaching. There is no room for the old one-man-band model of ministry. TEAM stands for: Together Everyone Achieves More

As a result there has been a growth in the quality of ministry of each team-member including Teina Marie, who was trained as a chaplain, but now works part-time at the school, and as a part-time employee of the church; she has also developed a Pacific Island Performing Group in Invercargill, and is involved in the government-funded PI Health Centre. The ripple effect is that there is a growing PI women’s group in the St Andrew’s parish. The Synod of Otago & Southland help underwrite a PI retreat for the region, and this is a place for encouragement, growth and vision-making for Pacific Islander people.

The team has also contributed to two vision statements, which have included a number of strategic goals for ministry within the church, outreach into the community, and the upgrade of the building and facilities.

## The grace of God

The 'green shoots' of growth described in this article are not primarily the result of leadership initiatives, or even the spiritual passion of the church members; they are due to outworking of God's grace to us through Jesus Christ our Lord. As the Apostle Paul reminded the Church in Corinth: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth." (1Cor 3:6 & 7 – NRSV).

A 5pm contemporary service called "Word & Worship" started this year, under the leadership of Valoa Valoa-Jack. This outreach service now attracts approximately 70 worshippers and utilises a praise band that sings a number of contemporary worship songs. A unique feature is the free finger-tea that follows on from the worship service. The hospitality has attracted people of all ages.

In 2009 the Toi Toi Parish approached St Andrews with the proposal of amalgamation. This is seen as a two-year process, with someone contracted part-time to provide pastoral care in the Tokonui area. There are fortnightly services held on site, some members on the combined session, some buildings have been sold. The question being considered is, "how can the Christian community serve this area?"

The church has added over 10 new members in the last two months and its ethnic mix now includes a number of Maori, Cook Island and Samoans, which is in keeping with the make-up of the wider community.

As the reader can see there is a growing momentum of growth and change at St Andrews. God willing the future of the parish looks promising.

*\*Heather Simpson (KCML Intern and National Mission manager) also assisted in writing this article.*

## A parish reviewer's experiences

*Neil Skene, Wellington*

**I am the presbytery elder at Wadestown, and was a member of the panel in the recent review of the Island Bay Presbyterian Church.**

The panel was made up of Barry Keenan, Claire Lind, John Jones and myself. We divided the work between us and each took responsibility for different aspects of the review, with Barry as convenor.

This was one of the first reviews done by Wellington Presbytery using the new review process so we were all interested to see how it worked.

The new process seeks to measure a parish's progress against the healthy congregations matrix for mission vision, capacity and achievement. General Assembly adopted eight signs of a healthy congregation as a goal in its life and work.

The review document was completed by the parish council and other interested parties. Answers to the review questions were communicated to the panel before our first meeting. We were also provided with copies of the annual report from the parish for the last few years.

This review document has eight sections:

- Healthy relationships with the wider environment;
- A healthy congregation;
- A sense of direction;
- Worship that is true to God;
- A lively faith;
- A strong sense of community among attendees;
- An involving leadership;
- Newcomers and numerical growth.

The parish considered how they see themselves, what they are doing well and what they could do differently for each section. The review questionnaire is a good tool for parish planning, which we have used at Wadestown and I would recommend to all parishes. It. Most will be aware of how you see yourselves; thinking of what you are doing well will also bring to light the opposite, and what you can do differently can show where resources are being wasted as well as new ideas. Sometimes popular activities run their course and need not be continued.

The panel met with the parish council to introduce ourselves and to discuss their responses to the key questions in the review document and the parish's proposed mission goals. This meeting gave us the opportunity to see the enthusiasm of the parish and to get a better understanding of their responses.

Members of the team visited the parish for worship on Sunday 11 November. This was a special service celebrating the 111th birthday of the Parish, with participation by a wide cross-section of the congregation, with members with 50 years' attendance alongside new members making their commitment at the service. There was a shared lunch to follow, which was a really good way to learn the background to the parish and illustrated the strength and depth of the congregation. It also gave us the opportunity to look around the church and related buildings. I returned on the next Sunday to observe a "normal" service and was again impressed. The convenor visited the manse and reported on that visit. John took responsibility for the financial side of the review and the property report.

**T**he review questionnaire is structured in such a way as to make you think outside of normal business

The review process framework analyses the responses of the parish and the observations of the panel and categorises each section at 1) A low level of development, indicating a reasonably unsuccessful parish, or one only just maintaining its life, or one that is unaware of the different ways in which it could be operating 2) An average level of development, the average Presbyterian congregation, which might be running efficiently with a high level of commitment and programmes which may require fine tuning to continue to be effective for the future. 3) An advanced level of development, the parish is intentional about being missional, aware of issues facing the church in the 21st century and have taken deliberate steps to develop how they operate.

Each member of the team aimed to get our sections of the review complete before Christmas, with Barry doing a fantastic job pulling it together. The team's draft report was made available to the parish for consideration at the end of January.

A summarised version of the report was made available to members through the secure pages of the presbytery website, and Island Bay presented the findings of the review to presbytery on 20 May. The Rev Nathan Parry, Island Bay's minister, advised that the eight sections of the review process had appeared daunting in the beginning but that they had soon seen the value of reflecting on their work through this process. He also said that it would be a lot easier to do this second time around as the goals against which they would be measured had now been set. They have set goals for the next two years and intend to go through the process again in two years to review and set new goals.

It was a pleasure to be involved in a review of a strong, healthy parish; our job was made easy by the willing participation of the parish council and congregation. I'm not sure how easy it would have been if this had been a failing parish as much of the process relies on the Assembly review document.

I would recommend Susan Jones' Parish Review Training Manual to all those undergoing a review in the near future.

# Timaru Presbyterians together

*Evan Stenlake, stated supply, Timaru Presbyterian Parish, South Canterbury*

**O**n Sunday 29 November 2009, four Presbyterian Parishes in Timaru (Chalmers, St Paul's, St Stephen's, and Trinity) joined together to become the Timaru Presbyterian Parish with several congregations.

The process began about 10 years ago, with the past five being more intentional. We have sought to become more missional as through prayer, vision, inspiration, and sheer hard work, we have been developing personal and corporate relationships as we discerned God's plan and purpose for us.

In 2005, the four separate parishes found themselves each likely to be without National Ordained Ministry over the next two years. As the result of the appraisal for the St Paul's parish, the presbytery established "the vision process", which commenced from June 2006. The Visioning Team presented a significant document at the beginning of 2008 - "The Blue Book". This recommendation did not get total approval, with one parish being quite concerned with what was presented, and one other mildly supportive.

They did, however, agree to continue the process towards closer cooperation and unity - working through different possibilities. The Vision Team gave way to the Transition Team, with larger representation from each of the four parishes. It was at this stage that Rev Bryan Gilmour (from Australia) was appointed as the transitional minister with the specific purpose of working with all four congregations while particularly associated as stated supply with one of them (St Paul's).

During the second half of 2008, Bryan and the presbytery/parish appointed Transition Team initiated combined study groups working through Rick Warren's The Purpose Driven Church and creating other opportunities for across-parish relationships and understanding. At this time, two of the parishes (St Stephen's and Trinity) joined together under a memorandum of understanding to call two Nationally Ordained Ministers, the Revs Chris and Mary-Jane Konings, to join the team in preparation for the unfolding future. The Rev Evan Stenlake was welcomed (in February 2009) as an interim/intentional minister for the Chalmers Congregation to assist in discerning God's plan and purpose through this process.

With further opportunities for study (Rick Warren's The Purpose Driven Life) and worship together, the four congregations moved towards a Summit Day on 7 March 2009 - producing a recommendation that the four parishes become one parish with several congregations, and that a working group begin to implement the process required. This was passed by all four parishes on 22 March 2009. We were coming to understand more clearly that our future together was primarily concerned with mission to Timaru and district. For the rest of the year, we all worked together to achieve what we believed was God's plan for Timaru Presbyterians. This was not an easy process, but with much prayer, wisdom, good will, and courage, the new parish was established on 29 November - the first Sunday in Advent.

During the later portion of the year, the Chalmers congregation called the Rev Dr Susan Jones to be the next Nationally Ordained member of the Team and Susan was duly inducted in February this year. Bryan and Dorelle returned home to Australia in early January, having fulfilled the ministry to which they were called. Evan and Alicia have since accepted a stated supply position with St Paul's for a short term, while the parish continues to discern the fourth member of the Ordained team. We have been working together now for just over six months. We have been discovering the challenges associated with moving four differing congregational cultures through maintenance experience toward mission celebration.



We are deeply grateful for the long hours of committed service by many of our parish people bringing us to this position in our ministry and mission. This is just the beginning of a more deliberate time of working together side by side, dependent upon God's grace drawing us into this new missional future for Timaru.

# We are alive!

*Mary Petersen, Mercury Bay Co-operating Parish, Kaimai*

**M**ercury Bay Co-operating Parish is very small, in national Presbyterian statistical terms. It currently has an official membership of less than 40 and the average Sunday congregation is 32 although that swells for many special events. Financially the parish struggles - but it is very much alive and growing, with people of lively faith, who are enriched by relevant, inspiring and challenging worship, who have a sense of direction and purpose, and are involved in and reaching out to their community.

Yet it is regarded in numerical and financial terms as a parish that is not “viable” and therefore on death row. So in this issue of *Candour* entitled “Growth or Death?” I want to raise some questions about what we, the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, mean by using the terminology of viability and death.

The signs of a healthy congregation can be very evident in small churches, especially rural ones, that on the basis of numbers, some financially focussed decision-makers would have decreed should be closed long ago. Surely quality of life is what matters not quantity?

The Presbyterian settler church carved up the country into neat little parcels of land to ensure that every part of this nation was included in a parish. “The good conscience of the settlers fused religion and land together.” [Peter Matheson, “The Settler Church 1840 - 1870” in *Presbyterians in Aotearoa 1840 – 1990*, Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, Wellington 1990, p. 25]

What does a settler church do when the population can no longer sustain the minister for a parish? In the past the “solution” determined by presbyteries has often been to move the boundaries or amalgamate congregations in order to “make them viable”. Viability has been determined by whether the congregation can afford to support full-time stipended ministry, maintain their buildings and, of course, pay their denominational levies. Where is any recognition of other options? Where is any notion of mission or community in all this? An outward focus and vision for mission in the community is a sign of a healthy congregation – even a very small one.

Let me share with you the story of the Eastern Coromandel Peninsula: from the perspective of the people who live there. In the late 19th century Whitianga, in the north east of the Coromandel, became a centre for kauri logging. The western side of the Coromandel Peninsula was settled earlier, mainly through the discovery of gold. The Presbyterian Church established congregations at Thames and in Coromandel town about 60 km further north. When Whitianga and other eastern settlements grew, the minister from Coromandel travelled by horse over very difficult tracks, to lead services of worship at Kuaotunu and Whitianga and later also, in the era of motor transport, at Whenuakite, Tairua and Pauanui. Those difficult tracks are now mostly sealed roads although they are still some of the worst roads in all New Zealand – but they travel through amazing scenery.

St Andrew’s Presbyterian Church in Coromandel was opened in 1873. In 1898 St James’ Presbyterian Church was built in Thames. In the same year the people of Whitianga built a community church which was used by all denominations. In fact for 102 years it was called the “Undenominational Church”. Most of the community went to all the services, no matter which denomination was officially in charge for the day. Ministers from different denominations, or local lay readers, preached on different Sundays. The ministers all travelled over the mountain pass on horseback from Coromandel. The people of Whitianga were pioneer people, used to isolation and having to fend for themselves.

In 1982 Coromandel Parish sold its manse and the minister came to live in Whitianga, where a manse was purchased through the efforts of the Ladies Guild, who raised money by establishing an op shop and other fundraising activities. The parish was renamed Coromandel-Whitianga and until 1996 Coromandel, Whitianga, Whenuakite, Tairua and Pauanui formed the Coromandel-Whitianga Presbyterian Parish. Pauanui had previously been part of Thames parish.

Then decisions were made by presbyteries and synods about what might be viable parishes. The Tairua and Pauanui Presbyterian congregations were cut off from Whitianga and added to the mostly Methodist congregation in Whangamata, to form Trinity United Parish.

Whangamata had also built a community church for all denominations but by 1996 only Anglicans, Methodists and Presbyterians were using it. The Methodist congregation had previously been



served by the minister from Waihi. Now that congregation was to look north not south for its partner congregations and a manse was purchased in Whangamata, which made the Tairua and Pauanui congregations focus south rather than north. It takes 30 minutes to travel on winding roads that still flood regularly between Pauanui and Tairua and closer to 40 minutes to travel from either of them, again on winding roads, to Whangamata. Tairua and Pauanui people generally went to Thames for all the medical, legal and shopping facilities they needed, not Whangamata. It was not a natural partnership but they tried really hard to make it work. This new parish, created to establish “viability”, was never able to pay a minister full-time and by 2001 the minister who had been paid 50 percent stipend left. Trinity United Parish decided to go into Local Shared Ministry. There was willingness and determination, commitment and openness to what God might be calling them to do.

Eight years on from the commissioning of the first Local Shared Ministry Team for Trinity United Parish, there have been several changes in personnel, there have been some difficult challenges and yet many individuals have grown tremendously through gaining confidence in doing tasks they never imagined they could do. This was a different option for ministry, mission and parish development but a very positive one.

Meanwhile at the same time as the southern end of the Coromandel–Whitianga parish was lopped off, Thames was struggling with “viability” so boundaries were shifted there too and in 1996 Coromandel was added to Thames. Whitianga Presbyterian Church was left on its own as a parish but it was still in the centre of a large geographical region characterised by farming, forestry and many small coastal settlements. The Methodist people in the area had worshipped with the Presbyterians for some time when the Mercury Bay Co-operating Parish was officially established in 1999.

For many years, the parish leadership had talked and dreamed about extending the kauri church building to create a multi-use space that would be welcoming to the community. While the building still belonged to the Undenominational Church Trust the parish could not do this. The Trust agreed to hand over the building to the Presbyterian Church in 2000.

When the new building was opened in September 2002, it not only changed the space available but gave the parish the opportunity to reassess their mission. Within a year they had clearly identified that their reason for being was to be involved in mission in the community – and – that what they needed in leadership was not a traditional minister but someone who would lead them in community mission. They could only afford 50 percent stipend but they believed there were exciting possibilities ahead.

I would not have responded to their call if Mercury Bay had just wanted their minister to preach, visit, and take funerals and weddings. They did need that but they also wanted me out there in the community – and it is a tremendous privilege to be involved with a variety of projects, groups and individuals.

In 2007 the parish decided to move from paying 50% stipend to 75%. They can’t afford this but they live by faith. It means that there is no security in ministry here – no guarantee that there will be any stipend next year BUT it is an exciting adventure; it is life, it is certainly not death.

The small number of official members in this congregation does not tell the whole story. It looks like a story of death but it is actually a story of growth in all kinds of ways. In the 21st century people’s commitment to something or feeling that they belong or identification with some venture does not naturally result in joining in a traditional sense.

Scores of people who have not joined as members of this co-operating parish nevertheless are very involved in its mission. There are more than 30 volunteers at the op shop; a team of eight helps to run Mainly Music for about 40 pre-schoolers and their families every week; 55 teen leaders and about the same number of adults help run an adventure camp with a Christian focus for 300 children every April; two Upright and Active exercise groups for the elderly happen each week; a drop in centre in the church lounge on Friday afternoons provides food, table tennis, games and friendly conversation for international students and their Kiwi friends; an afterschool Good News Club will begin next term offering primary children fun and Christian Education; a Film and Friendship Club offers entertainment and friendship for a variety of lonely people including rest home residents; Soul Food Café last week, which offered an opportunity to discuss one’s own spirituality after watching amazing pictures of the universe and thinking about the awe and wonder

of it all, attracted twice as many “community contacts” as church “members”; a study group on Exploring Christian Faith earlier this year drew a mixed group of former strangers to talk about faith together.

What does this mean? It indicates that people do not want to join but they still want to belong and to feel involved in their community. They want opportunities to serve and to think, to be challenged and inspired, but they are not able to commit financially though they will willingly give their time.

Actually most of the wonderful mission volunteers are living on a benefit or low wages. If you drive around this area it looks like an affluent community with new expensive houses, but look closer and you understand that many of those houses are empty except for occasional weekends and holidays. This is a retirement area and a holiday place. The young families who move here often come to work in trades associated with building but struggle to pay the high rents artificially inflated by the huge numbers of absentee owners.

So where does all this connect with growth and death? The review team from the JRC who recently visited this parish wrote in their report: “It was a pleasure to visit this parish, which we found to be a hard working, friendly, dedicated small group of people with a clear mission of taking the love of God into the wider community.” Yes, this parish is serious about telling the whole community that God loves them. The parish is growing in very many ways, but not the conventional ones of membership and finance.

On 27 March this year Whitianga hosted the first Coromandel-Hauraki “regional resourcing group” of the new Kaimai Presbytery. People came from Paeroa, Thames, Whangamata and Pauanui to tell their stories, share their dreams and think about how they could best help and resource each other for mission. This mission-focussed cluster of parishes found themselves discussing future possibilities – including maybe one regional parish for the Coromandel area? All these parishes are Methodist-Presbyterian Co-operating; two of them are already Local Shared Ministry units.

So what are the options for growth in rural areas like this with declining populations? Local Shared Ministry is one alternative to the one parish, one minister model but it is not a replacement for a minister: it is a different kind of ministry and needs to be supported by an enabler (the term used by Anglicans and Methodists and agreed to by all partner churches of the Uniting Congregations of Aotearoa New Zealand including Presbyterian), who is a mentor, advisor, companion, resource and guide.

Transition ministry is a very positive way for parishes to take time to think about their identity and to consider the most effective options for mission and ministry in the future.

The Presbyterian Church has always been concerned to provide well-educated ministers. Now recognition has been given to the need for practical and experiential skills as well as academic knowledge. How we use our resource of well-educated ministers with their wealth of life experience, skills and knowledge is critical for growth.

Of course there is still a place for one minister, one parish in appropriate places. There is also a significant development of ministry teams for larger churches and some of what are being described as regional churches. But what about resourcing the rest of New Zealand beyond the cities?

Creative and dynamic ways of using our “ministry” resource is crucial for growth. Southland is providing a wonderful example of creative ministry resourcing with its two regional resource ministers supporting and resourcing nine parishes between them. Is that a model that would be effective elsewhere?

How we use our resource of ministers is critical. We need new creative patterns that respond to the needs of the local people. We need to take some risks but use resources wisely – if we want real growth. And that applies to financial resources too. Where are the risk takers in parishes that have more money than they need? Could a wealthy parish connect with a financially struggling rural one to support them to have full-time ministry if their mission needs that?

One size does not fit all - but come on ministers and leaders of Presbyterian Church, where is our faith and our willingness to step out and let God lead us to share resources for ministry and mission in creative ways that inspire growth and not death?

# Never be surprised by what can grow from the germ of an idea

*Heather Kennedy, First Church Invercargill, Southern*

**In recent years there has been little interest from Nationally Ordained Ministers in moving to Southland to fill the many vacancies in the region. Settlement boards struggle to fill these roles and interim moderators have been holding the reigns for longer and longer periods. In the meantime, however, members of congregations, elders and guest preachers continue to hold weekly worship, maintain mission outreach activities and connect with the presbytery. More and more people were being identified as leaders in their congregations.**

With the introduction of the ministry streams that allowed for Local Ordained Ministry and Local Ministry Teams, these options for filling a vacancy were seen as viable for many of these Southland congregations. There has now been the ordination of four Locally Ordained Ministers; some full-time, some part-time and the establishment of five Local Ministry Teams. One Co-operating church was served for three years by lay supply who became a LOM in another parish. Some of the churches in the presbytery are served by visiting preachers, others by part-time lay employees.

An idea that emerged, due to the difficulty of filling vacancies, even in city churches that were financially able to call a minister, was to group many of the churches with Lay Supply and/or Local Ministry Teams, into a collective that could be served by a full-time minister. This would also meet the requirement for ministry teams to have a resource minister and supervision for their roles.

This idea grew to the point that 12 parishes were identified as fitting the ministry stream that required this resourcing and supervision. The role was advertised with no response. The need, however, increased as more ministry teams were established and no resource ministers were identified.

Then two of the Locally Ordained Ministers put their heads together and came up with a scheme that would allow them to maintain their current (part-time) employment in their respective parishes, but also allow them to add a further part-time role that would be devoted to the Southland Regional Resource Ministry (as it has become known). Funding was obtained from the Synod of Otago and Southland, the Presbytery of Southland and the nine (of the possible 12) parishes who committed to this ministry.

While this ministry is in essence mostly rural, stretching from Mossburn to Stewart Island, there are some parishes that are situated in Invercargill, or very near to. The two ministers were duly inducted into their role in February 2010, under the oversight of the current moderator of the presbytery acting as chair of the SRRM, along with representative members of the nine parishes. It is envisaged that regular resource workshops will be held and that at those times a meeting of the ministry will be held. The first workshop held was on pastoral visiting and the second on the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion (particularly for those who are or are to become baptism or communion Elders), funerals, and personality types.

The RRM ministers maintain contact with the nine parishes by; leading worship, attending session or parish council meetings, attending special events in parishes and are available for a variety of other situations, such as weddings, funerals and presbytery functions. For example; the parish on Stewart Island was able to access the pastoral visiting workshop by having it held over two nights in Oban, when one of the ministers was visiting; leading worship on the Sunday morning as well.

The collective is still open to having other parishes join in and is open to suggestions for workshops, sharing resources, mentoring church councils and assisting leadership in parishes. As issues arise concerning the future of some small rural parishes, pastoral support is provided in these situations.

As this model of ministry is still very much in its infancy, we are still learning as we go, adapting where necessary and which ever way growth occurs could still surprise us.

# 'I was a stranger and you welcomed me'

*Rhys Pearson, Minister emeritus,*

**E**xploring our way around the South Island for four months recently has given an opportunity to experience the church in a variety of places. Below is a summary of our experiences both good and bad, and some conclusions.

When we found a church, we looked for the time of a Sunday service, or at the very least a number we could ring. All too often this was nowhere to be seen. Sometimes by wandering around the building we found an A4 sheet of paper taped inside the glass. Not once did we worship where we could not find the time.

When you put the time up, make sure it is accurate. In one town we arrived at the stated time to find the sermon half way through. At the Cooperating Venture down the road we were told, "We are not sure what time the service is today. It might be 9-30 or 10-00 or 10-30. The Bishop is coming." That week we enjoyed a vibrant Salvation Army service.

In another town we waited outside at the advertised time. No one turned up. That week we worshipped with the Baptists.

## Welcome

On Easter Sunday morning we were hungry for a resurrection celebration. A large modern church in a provincial town looked promising. The chap on the door did not even look at us but continued his conversation with a friend. We four stood in the foyer while people drifted past. Eventually, without speaking or smiling, a lady handed us two hymnbooks with a piece of paper protruding. After a few minutes we put the hymnbooks on a chair and walked out.

Down the road, at a "City Impact Church" the reception could hardly have been more different. Teenagers stood on the street with umbrellas to escort us down the path to the door. The greeting included a "welcome pack" with a glossy magazine of the church's activities and programmes, a DVD of the same, a pen and chocolate bar, with a visitor card to be filled in. We explained that, as we were passing through and not likely to return, they should keep the packs for prospective members. Smiling faces encouraged us to keep the pack. Several different people came and spoke to us. We were welcomed in the service. After the "very much alive" service three different types of good coffee were offered. A week after our visit we received a card from the pastor thanking us for visiting and expressing good wishes for our holiday. When next we are in that town, that is the church we will visit.

## Professionalism

While acknowledging that in a number of places services were led by lay people, we still need to be much better prepared. In one place the leader (not an amateur) said:

"What will we do now? Do the notices. No, take up the offering. Oh you are not ready. We will do the notices. Offering? Notices? OK it's notices. Sally you were going to give us one about the APW." Sally mumbled something from the back.

"Oh it's Betty." Betty shook her head. "Come on Betty, come and give it."

Betty reluctantly climbed out of her seat, meandered to the front, spent a good minute finding her glasses and the piece of paper to read from, and then slowly read what was printed in the notice sheet.

At this point I wanted to slide under the seat with embarrassment. If this is the best we can offer to Almighty God in worship then heaven help us. No wonder our young people don't want to come.

There is no excuse for not doing the preparation. No excuse for having the wrong verses on the data projector, with the choir singing one verse and the congregation looking at another. No excuse for not having the words at all, or lines missing, or the words for a hymn that does not fit the tune.



If, by the end of the second line it is painfully obvious that no one knows the tune, can it and do something else. Don't drag everyone painfully through five verses.

There is no excuse for not having run through the service beforehand to check that everything is working. Sure things go wrong for the best prepared, but for the leader to mess about for five minutes trying to make a microphone work until someone remembers the batteries went flat last week and have to send down to the local supermarket for more is simply not acceptable.

## Technology

We have available technology that will allow live video feeds all over the world. In one service, the congregation spoke with and listened to the missionary family they were supporting in Africa. We experienced their excitement, heard of the difficulties and prayed for them – live. Well done! We felt linked to that family. Sadly that was the exception. Too often the technology intruded.

It should not be necessary for the preacher to have to ask for the next slide. Nor should he/she have to look around to check on what is projected. Microphones do not have to be blown into or tapped to check if they are working. The sound desk people should be awake enough to turn microphones off before they are “dropped” on the floor. The list of minor faults, which cumulatively destroyed a sense of worship, could go on and on.

There were places where we experienced vibrant, well lead worship; place full of all ages, young and old praising God together. It was uplifting and encouraging. But far too often lack of preparation led us to come away believing that those in charge were not offering their best to God – and we would not willingly return there to worship. The numbers present in those services indicated that others felt the same.

If we want our church to be the dynamic, life giving, body of Christ, then we have to lift our game. The simple things I have listed are not that hard, and would make a huge difference to how welcome visitors and enquirers felt about coming back.



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# A perspective on dealing with congregations in crisis

Anne Thomson, First Church Dunedin, Southern

*Changing the Conversation: A third way for congregations* by Anthony B Robinson (Eerdmans: 2008)

**T**ony Robinson, a minister of the United Church of Christ, has written extensively on the challenges of change within mainline Protestant congregations in North America. His latest book, *Changing the Conversation*, invites church members and leaders into 10 conversations that aim to change their congregation's culture and to respond more faithfully and effectively to postmodern culture.

The focus is on recognising the "adaptive challenges" that face congregations when the problem-solving techniques that worked in the past are no longer effective, and on developing a deeper response grounded in faith and the Gospel, building leadership capacity, and identifying and articulating vision and purpose.

The ninth conversation in the book is called "Death and Resurrection". He begins by saying

*Some congregations need to die... This chapter is about dead and dying congregations where dying may be the very best – at least the most courageous – step forward into God's future.... Death precedes a resurrection because, on the other side of death, God is still God.... At certain times trust in God allows us to know what death is and to face it; and in some situations it is only by facing and naming a death that resurrection becomes possible. Only by dying to what is no longer alive in our lives and in our congregations can we allow God to call us forth from our tombs to new life. (pp.171-2)*

Robinson provides three case studies. The first concerns a prominent church in Seattle, in an area that had become racially and culturally diverse and where the dwindling congregation had opened their buildings to seven very diverse congregations. In consultation with a neighbouring congregation and the regional oversight body, it was decided to close the old church for a period of time, and then to plant a new church with new name, new purpose and new pastoral leadership at the same location.

**I**n some situations it is only by facing and naming a death that resurrection becomes possible

A second case study describes a "work-in-progress" to establish an ecumenical parish, building on ecumenical partnerships in community-service ministries involving six denominations. The vision is to sell existing property and centre the parish on redeveloped buildings, which include a large sanctuary for combined gathered worship and smaller chapels for each tradition. Robinson sees that two keys to the success of the venture will be a new purpose and vision for a new identity, and leadership that can take the risks of doing things in new ways.

The third case study is more of a vision for a "moveable feast" where a congregation no longer owns its own buildings but uses a variety of rented space for worship, small groups and administration. In this case, death includes letting go of the identification with a particular worship space or location to make for resurrection as a church not defined by buildings or fixed location.

Tony Robinson's perspective is unashamedly North American. And I think that New Zealand churches have often moved further down the path of grappling with the "adaptive challenges" presented by postmodern culture. But he invites us to talk about the change that faces us, to acknowledge the pain of loss and grief that are part of the journey of change, and to recognise those times when death is part of life and necessarily precedes resurrection in God's time.

# Resources for those experiencing infertility

Margaret Dewse\*

*Be Fertile With your Infertility.* Christine Bannan & Winnie Duggan (Bateson Publishing: rrp \$29.99)

**S**ubtitled “Creative ways to acknowledge the infertility journey using ceremony and ritual”, this book has been written by women who have experienced the disappointment and pain of infertility.

Although this issue is faced by an increasing number of couples today, it is not often discussed with such honesty in our present society. Infertility affects the extended family and friends of these couples and this volume sensitively tells the stories of many who have been involved, offering ritual and ceremony as ways towards healing on the many steps along the way.

The authors’ desire was to “develop a resource for people to create their own ceremony and ritual as a way to greater freedom and acceptance that life can be rich, full and creative with or without children”. They have achieved this by including the personal stories of several courageous and beautiful people. These cover many facets of the journey through infertility and share various ceremonies and rituals that helped them on the way. Suggested forms of ceremony are included at each point.

The latter part of this book is devoted to the creation of ritual. It contains a wealth of resources to help those who wish to develop their own personal observance. Many of these are unashamedly Christian but others would be acceptable to those who cannot acknowledge the place of God in their pain. It also includes a chapter entitled “After the Ceremony” and one for health professionals, counsellors, clergy, celebrants and others who seek to help in this area.

I have had little direct, personal experience with infertility and found this book insightful, informative and engaging. I have no doubt that it would be a comfort and guide to those charting the waters of their infertility and a valuable resource to all who would accompany them on this journey.

For further information contact Christine Bannan, email: [christine.bannan@extra.co.nz](mailto:christine.bannan@extra.co.nz).

\*Margaret Dewse is a spiritual director and an elder at St Columba, Botany

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# Grappling with mission and ministry in New Zealand

*Martin Baker, Assembly Executive Secretary, Wellington*

*Engagement 21: A wake-up call to the 21st Century Church in Mission.* Richard Randerson

**B**ishop Richard Randerson's spiral bound book *Engagement 21: A wake-up call to the 21st Century Church in Mission* provides a highly accessible and practical guide for church ministers, elders, church members and all those interested in engaging with the challenges of mission and ministry within New Zealand.

The first chapters of the book reflect a particular focus on the state of the Anglican Church in New Zealand and report on the result of a survey within the Anglican Church contracted by Bishop Randerson following his retirement as Dean of Auckland in 2007. While the data and survey results might have a familiar ring to those familiar with what is happening for the Presbyterian Church, the three Biblical study guides in Chapter 4 would be helpful for Christians from any denomination who are seeking ways to reflect on the missional challenges within Scripture.

Chapter 5 provides the most encouraging news and insights into the great diversity and creativity shown by congregations, groups and organisations across the church spectrum who are seeking to engage in mission. Here Randerson provides details of 126 such endeavours, ranging from Mainly Music to training institutions to a diversity of chaplaincies and examples of how many quite different congregations have sought creative ways to engage with mission and outreach. For those interested, it would not be difficult to contact any one of these groups or churches to find out more about they were doing.

Engagement 21 is available from Epworth for \$22 or by contacting Richard directly at randersonjr@paradise.net.nz. Bulk discounts are available.

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# Fear and hope

*Martin Baker*

**E**very so often my work means that I need to head down to Dunedin. It is one of my favourite places, full of memories and a lot of great people. It won't be the same without Carrisbrook, but that's another story.

Last month I was sitting in a middle seat of a plane to Dunedin and heard this great scream. A scream is unnerving at the best of times for me, but when you are 20,000 feet above the Southern Alps it takes on an extra kind of edge. I looked around and saw people struggling to remove themselves from the back seats. A general air of panic had set in. Then one of the stewards fell to his knees. I'm thinking bomb, liquid explosive, hidden devices in shoes. In my mind there is the Stockholm syndrome and images of the plane sitting on some tarmac at an undisclosed airfield while Henry Kissinger works tirelessly on our behalf to meet the hijackers' demands. It is truly amazing how many images and thoughts fly through you mind at this time. I asked the most distraught-looking passenger, now hovering beside my chair and looking anxiously at the floor, "what's wrong?"

The wonderfully indigenous answer was "weta". Somehow, a weta had made its way across Wellington airport (from the workshop?) through check in and on to the ATR for a trip to Dunedin, sitting, eventually, on the back of one of a passenger's seats. There is a lot I could say about weta including the time as a teenager I almost crashed my old Spitfire (a dreadful Mk 2 Triumph soft top, not the plane) when one appeared from nowhere sitting on my steering wheel. I don't have a fondness for the creatures, even though I am sure they are drawn to me, as I recall the numerous, peculiar and troubling ways that weta and I have encountered one another over the years.

I am not so interested here in the weta, but in the fear he generated (yes, shes and hes look different; this was a he, shes have ovipositors). I am no anthropologist, but fear is a strange emotion. It is so dependent on our ability to imagine outcomes. The weta may not be a good example when I think about it, unless most of the fear associated with a weta relate to our anticipation that it might jump on us or attack us with those little nippers it has. But most fear, in my experience anyway, is to do with anticipation. In a pastoral situation it is to do with thoughts of our own, or another's, pain and loss, being alone, powerless or helpless. The Bible takes fear seriously. How many times in Scripture, for example, do we hear the words "do not be afraid" or one of my all time favourite verses, "perfect love casts out fear"?

A few years ago I attended a course that dealt in part with engaging with groups and individuals affected by change in their workplace. I remember that one of the tutors, who works with staff groups facing redundancies, said that she often would open a conversation with the question "what are you afraid of?" Sometimes, a process that allows us to articulate our fears does provide a helpful way of listening to, caring for, and supporting people. It also can provide a way of talking about faith and hope and the things that are most important to us.

I notice that last year our congregations between them received about \$5 million more than they spent. Over the year, our congregations were blessed with about \$1 million of legacies. Such figures represent very little on their own, but when I look at trends, over the past 10 years, our congregations have been enormously successful at accumulating more and more wealth. Between then, tens of millions of dollars. A lot of this has come from the sale of property, the accumulation of offerings once a full-time stipendiary ministry could no longer be sustained, the receipt of legacies and increasing property income. Congregation members have also been wonderfully generous in their giving. Over this time the value of our land and buildings has doubled, to be worth around \$2 billion.

As counter-Gospel as this reality appears to me, that we can accumulate wealth while our shared capacity as a Church to bring the Good News to the poor, blind and imprisoned diminishes, I get the feeling that we really know this already. In many places, change is happening quickly, but this, as the old hymn goes, is the change of decay. Resurrection is another kind of change, but one based most profoundly on hope rather than fear, new creation rather than a diminishing of possibilities. The fear that God has somehow abandoned us, that there is not a future of growth and abundance, is a fear as old as Scripture itself. The prophetic voices outside and within, name the reality, affirm God's forbearance and articulate new and captivating visions of hope.