

Candour



Presbyterian Church
of Aotearoa New Zealand

NEWS AND VIEWS FOR MINISTERS

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How do we communicate?



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Contents

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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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How do we communicate?

Amanda Wells

I'm tempted to answer "badly". No matter how good we think we are at writing or talking, so often our message is scrambled in transit. Multiply this from a personal level, to a local or national level, and it can be very difficult to be certain that what you say is what your audience remembers.

People prefer to take in information in different ways, and won't necessarily pay attention to their less preferred modes of delivery. You can develop sets of instructions till you're blue in the face but many people will pay them little heed. After a carefully composed 30-minute sermon, all one listener might remember is the colour of your shoes.

But the intrinsic barriers to total communication don't mean we should give up. Instead, we need to consider using more than one vehicle for our message. Perhaps I might tell you that we're running a special planning meeting on Saturday, then I might send you an email and a Facebook invite, and perhaps a final text reminder. There are ways in which you can easily automate all of these processes.

Each time you communicate, you risk annoying someone; but you also send the message that that person is important to you or your group. People might need to be approached or reminded several times before they commit to helping out at an event or being part of a study group; we have become used to repetitive advertising in our society and to tuning things out.

We also have many more modes of communication beaming out at us. Television, radio and newspapers have less dominance, with the Internet and social media huge information sources. Imagine life without a mobile phone and the ability to text; it's easy to assume that volume of phone calls has diminished with the exponential rise of the text message.

Filtering information becomes more difficult. The blogs on news sites such as Stuff are well read, with popular bloggers attracting hundreds of reader comments every day. How many of these readers draw a clear distinction between the comments of others, the original post, and the news stories appearing on the same website? The barriers around news and opinion have become far more diffuse.

One of Stuff's blog writers recently made the comment, "if I wanted to be judged, I'd go to church". Her column wasn't about anything remotely religious; this was just an illustration she used to explain her point, which came across all too clearly. It's safe to assume that's what many people think about church: that it's a closed club in which the main activity is toeing the line. In this perspective, newcomers are viewed with subtle suspicion and everyone is poised to critique misbehaviour.

Hopefully you feel your church is the exact opposite of this characterisation (if you don't, that's another issue of *Candour*...). And hopefully you feel a boiling sense of frustration at these misperceptions, as well as the desire to pose a number of questions. Why do people communicate this kind of message? Where does it come from? What can we do about it?

These are questions we often wrestle with at a national level, as we seek to improve the profile of the Church. If our culture accepts and disseminates a certain truth, such as being a non-drinker is socially awkward or your worth is reflected by your salary or church is for perfect people, to argue an opposing message is a challenging uphill battle. Often it's easier to tackle these perceptions sideways rather than head on. Using the message "everyone is welcome here" will have zero effect on someone convinced a church is there to judge them. But promoting your community programmes or study groups (the actions flowing from your welcoming intentions) is much more likely to make some inroads.

We can only continue trying to communicate all the good that we do, while maintaining an intelligent awareness of people's barriers to hearing our message. It might seem like a lot of work to think about all the different ways you could be communicating and to put this into practice – and it is (Howard's comments in this issue have given me new resolve to find time for the Church's Facebook page). But to ignore these opportunities is to refuse to engage with contemporary society.

The next issue of *Candour* will have the theme "How do our structures serve mission?" and a deadline of 31 May. Contributions, and responses to this issue, are welcome and can be emailed to candour@presbyterian.org.nz.

Electronic communication and congregations

*Lynne Baab, Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership, Dunedin**

I recently finished writing a book on friendship in the Facebook age. I sent out emails to lots of friends, asking them for their thoughts. Along with the fascinating personal reflections I got back, I also received a steady stream of links to articles about Facebook, Twitter and other forms of online connection. I was fascinated by the pattern I observed in the articles.

A few articles were cautionary, written by people who have found themselves overusing electronic communication. A good number of other articles were optimistic, describing the ways people have connected or reconnected with old friends and family members. About half of the articles were extremely negative about online connections, using words like “faux” or “imitation” to describe relationships with a strong online component. Many of the authors of those articles don’t use online social networking websites themselves. I found myself becoming frustrated by people who are condemning something they haven’t experienced.

My interviews for my friendship book, along with my own observations of the way individuals and groups are using Facebook and other forms of online connection, tell me that many people today make a seamless transition between various forms of communication. People connect with each other face-to-face and by telephone, cell phone, email, Facebook, Skype, Twitter, websites, blogs, online photo sharing, and other forms of Internet connection, with any one person using only a few of those ways to connect. Some form of electronic of communication is embedded in everyday life for most people today, but the forms vary from one person to the next.

In this world of so many diverse ways of communicating, a congregation that wants to get news out has to rely on a variety of means to do that. Congregations and Christian leaders are increasingly giving careful thought to strategic use of electronic communication to nurture congregational life. Several of my Facebook friends are ministers of congregations, and I love to watch the ways they use Facebook to post Scriptures, prayers, quotations from Christian books, and links to interesting faith-related articles available online. I have signed up as a member of numerous congregational groups and pages on Facebook and Twitter, just to watch the way congregations are using these new ways of connecting with their members.

Congregations are using Facebook and Twitter to announce congregational events, sermon topics, Scriptures for the Sunday service, the arrival of overseas visitors, birthdays of congregation members, prayer requests, and significant happenings in the wider community. In addition, Facebook and Twitter are often used to post links to new material on the church website or the minister’s blog, as well as links to interesting articles on other websites and blogs. Many congregations are using Facebook’s internal email to send messages to the people who have signed up as members of the congregation’s page or group.

I’ll illustrate how this works by imagining a congregation that has just begun to host a neighborhood foodbank on its premises. The minister has written a blog post about the foodbank, and photos of the new foodbank have been posted on the church’s website. Facebook and Twitter posts provide links to the minister’s latest blog post and to the photos. The church website also has a link to the blog, and the blog post has a link to the photos on the website. An email is sent using traditional email as well as Facebook email to say that the photos of the foodbank have been posted on the website, and that the minister’s new blog post this week focuses on the foodbank. The email provides a link to the photos and to the blog.

The next week the minister writes another blog post about the foodbank, this time reflecting on generosity as a fundamental Christian virtue. The minister has found two wonderful articles online about the way acts of generosity enable Christians to grow into the likeness of Christ. The blog post provides links to the two articles. Posts on Facebook and Twitter provide links to the articles as well, encouraging the members of the congregation to read the articles and reflect on the role of generosity in their own lives.

In the next few weeks, the minister also preaches a sermon about generosity and writes an article for the printed church newsletter about generosity. The traditional means of church communication

— such as sermons and newsletters — are not neglected but they are amplified through online communication. The sermon is posted on the website (either in written or audio form), and the article is posted on the website as well. Links to the sermon and article are sent out through Twitter and Facebook as well.

Notice two things about the scenario I have just sketched. First, the minister and the people in charge of congregational communication understand that a congregational event — the opening of a foodbank — is also a teaching moment. Everything a congregation does has the potential to shape the spiritual development of congregation members and the life of the community of faith. Often this is forgotten, and the events are viewed as an end in themselves. Feeding people in need is a good thing, and in that sense it could be viewed as an end in itself. However, that would be a waste of a good opportunity to reflect on the nature of generosity in the life of faith. Other topics that could be stressed in connection with this event include God's call to care for the poor, God's invitation to engage in acts of social justice, or the connection between evangelism and acts of mercy. Leaders of congregations must always remember that congregation members usually need to have events interpreted; the significance of everyday acts of obedience to God in the larger scheme of faith formation needs to be explained.

Secondly, notice the way that online communication these days is interwoven and interconnected. Increasingly, Twitter, Facebook and email are being used to post links to other information: blog posts, helpful articles, and new information on organisational websites. Increasingly people are realising it's not enough to post new photos or announcements on websites. People need to be alerted to the fact that new material has been added to the website, and different people will pay attention to different forms of being alerted. Multiple means of communication are increasingly necessary.

Overwhelmed by communication challenges

Many ministers and congregational leaders feel overwhelmed by the numerous communication options that need to be considered today. Who has time, they wonder, to search online for resources, to continually post things on Twitter and Facebook and to keep up a blog? Very few people do, and that's where communication today needs to be a team effort.

Every congregation will have a few people who love the online environment and enjoy spending hours on the internet. Those people can be recruited to set up a Twitter account and a Facebook group or page for the congregation. When something new is posted on the church website, these individuals may be willing to receive a brief notice by email so they can post a link on Twitter and Facebook.

For ministers and congregational leaders who are unfamiliar with Facebook or Twitter, ask someone to show you how they work. They have similarities, but each offers something different. Two years ago, I knew nothing about either one. I got some younger people to describe to me how they use them. I assimilated that information, then I got some more young people to show me how they worked. I then forced myself to sign up for both of them so I could learn about them. To my total surprise, I enjoy Facebook a lot and frequently use it to connect with my friends. And I have been increasingly impressed with the strategic use of both Facebook and Twitter by congregations and by Christian leaders.

People who love to be online can also be asked to research topics that are relevant for the congregation's priorities and to pass on to the minister or other leaders links to articles. Those articles can be evaluated, and if appropriate, links to those articles can be posted on the congregational website, the minister's blog, and Facebook and Twitter.

Someone — the church secretary or a person who enjoys online communication — needs to be charged with the task of keeping up an email list of everyone who wants to be on it. Emails shouldn't be sent to everyone in the congregation more than once or twice a week, but those emails can be very helpful, pointing members to information on the website and highlighting issues and events.

All of this presupposes that the congregation has a website, which is an increasingly strategic tool for congregational communication. One of my sons, who is 30, calls websites "our new front door," and he says most people in his generation would never consider visiting a place they haven't read about online. Money spent on website design and maintenance is well spent.

Blogs are free, and I believe every minister should consider having a blog. Posting once a week is enough, and posts should be brief (200-300 words). A post might be a short review of a book, a link to an article, a thought that has come to mind during the preparation of a sermon, a story of something significant that happened, an alert about an upcoming event. Good blog posts are informal and conversational, an excellent opportunity for a minister to engage personally with significant topics and express his or her priorities to the congregation.

Blogs can also be used by ministries within a congregation. For example, a children's ministries programme could set up a blog with a handful of contributors who might post brief biographies of new volunteers, information about upcoming lessons, and links to articles about ministry to children.

Nothing can replace a church website as a place for presenting comprehensive information about who a congregation is.

An effective church website requires careful design and time, as well as money. Website hosting costs money, and good website design and upkeep can also involve costs. Blogs, photo-sharing and social networking websites are free. It may be tempting to believe that a website can be dispensed with in the light of all these other free online tools.

At this time, nothing can replace a church website as a place for presenting comprehensive information about who a congregation is and what it values. Blogs, Facebook and Twitter posts, as well as emails, can highlight current issues and events and provide links and snippets of interesting information, but the pattern of posting makes a difference: information is posted or sent, then disappears behind later posts. Websites are like anchors, holding information in place, while the other forms of communication have a more ephemeral quality to them because previous posts are not easily visible. Posts on blogs, Facebook and Twitter can send people to the website for deeper material that is posted there. Websites, at their best, provide a systematic, well-organised presentation of the congregation's priorities and values.

Because of the many communication options that are available now, ministers and church leaders will necessarily need to spend more time thinking about communication strategies, and they need to take the time and energy to engage in multiple forms of communication, because different people pay attention to different forms. Communication, however, is never an end in itself. Good communication always focuses on what can be accomplished through it.

Friendship

What about the implications of all these means of electronic communication on friendship? After interviewing dozens of people, ranging in age from 12 to 85, about friendship today, I can tell you that friendship is alive and well in the Facebook age. I asked my interviewees to give me definitions of a friend, and the characteristics they mentioned — loyalty, care, willingness to listen, coming alongside in crises — are the remarkably similar to descriptions that date back as far as ancient Greece and Rome.

Here's one of the most significant findings from all my interviews. The people my age, in their 50s, talked to me about their concern about people in their 20s and 30s, wondering if they'll be able to sustain marriage and parenting relationships because they're so used to communicating using technology. My two sons, in their late 20s and early 30s, as well as others their age who I interviewed, are confident of their own ability to nurture intimate friendships, but some of them expressed concern about teenagers. With the proliferation of such brief messages on text messages and online posts, will they be able to sustain deep conversations?

The dozen or so teenagers I interviewed, ranging in age from 15 to 19, were also quite confident of their own ability to nurture friendships. They said they see very clearly that a person can become so focused on online communication and texting that they lose the ability to communicate in person. All of my teenaged interviewees were confident they knew how to handle that challenge. But several of them were worried about 12 year olds getting cell phones and joining social networking websites. These older teens worried that younger teens don't have the wisdom to know how to deal with the impersonal nature of electronic communication, which they said is evidenced by the amount of cell phone and online bullying that goes on among younger teens.

Based on my interviews, and based on the many articles I've read in recent years about personal relationships in a technological age, just about everyone focuses their concern on other people's use of technology in nurturing friendships. "I know how to cope with it all," they seem to be saying. "But I don't think others do."

With respect to friendship, I believe the most helpful thing ministers, elders and youth leaders can do is to emphasise the characteristics of Christian love that make friendships work well. Those characteristics, described in 1 Corinthians 13 and elsewhere in the Bible, dovetail almost exactly with the friendship values that my interviewees expressed. Sometimes we'll show love through a text message, a Facebook comment, an email, or by posting the photos from a recent trip or event. Sometimes a more appropriate way to show love is to do a kind act or listen in a face-to-face or phone conversation.

The notion that because a friendship has a significant electronic component, it must be "faux" or "imitation", is simply not borne out by the many interviews I conducted. People of all ages use a variety of means to stay in touch with their friends, and most people understand that face-to-face communication is the richest and most satisfying.

In the same way that electronic communication for a congregation must serve the goals of the congregation, we need to encourage people to use electronic communication wisely in their friendships to meet the goal of love. God's love, and our love for each other, is the key to healthy congregational life and healthy relationships, online or face-to-face.

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The power of a story

Jill Kayser, Kids Friendly Coach, Auckland

A minister invited me to speak to his congregation recently on the topic of emerging leadership and mentoring young people. He said: "Please share any research you have on this topic." My immediate thought was "I'd better prioritise surfing the net and reading articles on leadership and young people." Actually I've done lots of research on this topic in the past when I was developing the "Transformers – Raising up Young Leaders" initiative, but of course I can't remember the facts. Luckily my common sense prevailed before the panic set in, as I reminded myself that all the "research" I need is in the stories I can tell.

One of the greatest privileges of my role is that I get to hear and share the wonderful success stories of ways are churches are ministering with children.

Early on I realised the crucial role the capturing and retelling of these stories have in changing our churches' culture. A good story (and storyteller) invites listeners into a process of change. In sharing success stories, I can exemplify the values and promote best practices of a "Kids Friendly" Christian community.

Despite massive advances in information technology, there still is no greater form of communication than a story. It's a universally shared and loved mode of communication. Storytelling is pervasive (we start learning to tell and listen to stories from birth) and it's something everyone knows how to do, but few are aware of its power.

Purposeful storytelling that goes straight to the heart of an audience brings about much more effective change than any laborious elaboration of evidence and research. When I present to churches I invite them to "catch the vision" of what it means to be a Kids Friendly church. This vision is shared through stories woven around pertinent facts and statistics.

"Stories stick in the brain in a holistic way, much better than charts, numbers or concepts," says change management guru John Kotter. Think back to those conferences you've attended with myriads of renowned eminent speakers. I guarantee the only presentations you remember are the personal stories told by passionate storytellers.

Of course, technology is not to be dismissed entirely in the storytelling arena. The Internet invites us to share the stories of a global community. I have over 100 podcast stories on my iPod waiting to be heard as I write. But there's still nothing like a story from one of our own church family.

I have found that great stories inspire others, giving hope and direction for new ways of being. Calvin Church in Gore inspired Knox Church in Morrinsville to facilitate friendships between its elders and young people.

Inspirational stories also often result in new friendships as the listener seeks out the original storyteller. Flagstaff Church in Dunedin invited First Church Papakura youth to lead a holiday programme with them, after hearing the story of the great work Warrick Baty does with young people.

And while PowerPoint is rubbished by the more purist storyteller, I think that if it is used to enhance the story through more pictures and less bullet points, it can be a great aid to the listener experiencing the story.

A friend of mine, Rich Melheim from Faith Inkubators (an inveterate storyteller), tells a story of how when he was the president of his university's student council, he got to meet a famous author. Overcome with awe he asked the author "how can I become a great writer?" To which the author replied: "Write!" So too in my Kids Friendly storytelling workshop, I tell participants if you want to be a great storyteller, tell stories. We start out life as storytellers, but soon lose the ability as we progress through "education" and advance our technological skills.

But more and more people are realising that the humble story does not only have a social function but can be used for serious purposes to get results fast.

"Key to effective leadership is storytelling" says Harvard Professor Howard Gardner. The World Bank now uses storytelling for information sharing and NASA has a publication called ASK that tells its employees' stories.

I have a reputation for nagging everyone who tells me a good story to jot it down and send it to me. But it's paying off because more and more people now email me with their stories unprompted. Receiving these stories is like sunshine on a gloomy wet Auckland winter's day. I tell them in "Hands On", our Kids Friendly newsletter, and as I travel the country to inspire, encourage and equip others.

Benita Barton, one of our most passionate and experienced children's ministers, sent this from her church St Mark's in Pinehill:

Jill, I thought you might like this little story from the weekend. Liam had his fifth birthday party in the church hall. I called in and was surprised to see a group of older girls nine to 11 years old at this little boy's party. The girls, who come to church without their families, were walking past the church when Liam spotted them from the doorway and said, "Come in. There's plenty of food and a bouncy castle!" So the girls came in. The next day the scripture was on the call of the first four disciples: "bring the outsiders/ uninvited in, there is room for all and plenty to eat". I think Liam, at five, is getting it right."



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For more information, contact Juliette Bowater, Juliette@presbyterian.org.nz or (04) 801-6000.

Face to face and Facebook to Facebook

Howard Carter, StudentSoul, Auckland

I am what people call an immigrant in the digital age. I am part of the Gutenberg generation and the Google generation. I plough through several books a week. I will buy a book that I want to read, not an e-book. If I want to find out about something, the first place I go to is the web; I Google it. I like print on page but, more and more, text on screen is where I am at. I like commentaries rather than Biblical software, but when I preach I use PowerPoint to provide a visual and digital element to the message.

I go to church and someone hands me a hymn book and a printed order of service and I go, "OK, this is quaint, but if it is important then why isn't it projected onto a screen?" I read my Bible, but more and more I augment that by getting Bible readings and daily devotions delivered via email and Facebook. I really enjoy catching up and having a coffee with friends, but I keep current with friends both near and far online... via Facebook. It is indeed a great tool to communicate and connect with people both personally and as a church.

StudentSoul Auckland is all about building a face-to-face community but our chief tool for communication outside of that is Facebook. If we want to advertise something, then we send it out online not on paper.¹ We may text and email as a reminder. When you come to StudentSoul, we will befriend you and "friend" you, build a relationship with you and connect with you via Facebook. When we reflect on Scripture, we use multimedia, and so you can access it for later reflection, we put some of it on our Facebook page and we get "likes" and comments from people who were unable to be there and people who don't come to StudentSoul but are fans (note that Facebook has recently changed from the idea of fans to people simply "liking" your page). We post links to articles that will help those who want to go deeper...and it is free. Free: doesn't that warm the cockles of your Scottish Presbyterian hearts, even if you do not have Scottish roots.

Facebook gets its name from the books of photos and names that US universities give students to help them get to know other people. It was started in February 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg and co-founders Dustin Moskovitz, Chris Hughes and Eduardo Saverin, launched from their Harvard dorm room specifically for Harvard students. It was quickly expanded to other Ivy League universities, then to high schools and now anyone over the age of 13 can have a Facebook page. Adults, not teenagers, are its prime audience. Over 400 million people worldwide have a Facebook page.

So what is so good about Facebook?

Firstly a Facebook page gives you and your church a free, easy to use and potentially high impact presence in cyber space. Websites are still an important part of building the profile of your church. For people in my generation and younger, they are still our first port of call: not the front door but what Leonard Sweet calls the "new front porch". However, once people connect, then Facebook is a more immediate way of letting people know what's going on and coming up. If you put something on Facebook, then it will go to the home pages of the people who have joined your Facebook group or who you have "friended". When you invite someone to an event or service, they can invite their own friends. I am amazed at the wonderful things I get invited to.

Secondly, it can provide people with a further connection point to make them feel they are becoming part of your church community. It's also a place where you can get a certain degree of feedback and comments about things that have been going on. It also allows you to keep in contact with visitors from around the world and the people who were part of your church community but move on, for example young people who move when they go to university or relocate for work.

Thirdly, it's a great place for sharing photos and videos of the events and programmes you run, quickly and directly. It increases their visibility. Two of my children go to youth programmes at Greyfriars and we often get to see what youth group is like and the fun they are having in images and feedback comes through the Facebook pages of these groups. One of my children went to Easter camp and within a few days of the camp I got to see highlight videos of the camp online

¹ We do have printed info and invites for StudentSoul Auckland and Worship on Wednesday

- and I know that next year if my daughter wants to invite her friends, she can show them what went on as well as tell them. In fact, Auckland's Easter camps this year were a good example of the pervasiveness of Facebook, with the registration forms for the camps set out like a Facebook page.

Fourthly, it has the potential to multiply various aspects of your church ministry. One of the reasons I know that StudentSoul Auckland is supported in the wider Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand is the fact that on our Facebook page we have a growing number of fans; fans who I hope will keep us in their prayers and thoughts. In fact at times when I have been feeling rather low about this church-planting endeavour, I have received encouragement via those Facebook fans. It doesn't equate to institutional backing but in a world where networking is becoming the norm for the way we connect, I value the support.

Possibly the best example of the impact Facebook can have on a ministry comes from Mark Brown, who until recently was chief executive of the Bible Society in New Zealand. About a year ago, Mark started a Facebook page called "the Bible". He thought it would be a low-cost way (did I mention it is free?!) to help people to get into reading the Bible by once or twice a day sending out a Scripture reading to their Facebook homepages. He had thought that if 1000 people joined this would be a great achievement. About the middle of last year, "the Bible" was one of the fastest growing Facebook pages and just last month it reached the two-million-people mark. There have been times when the Bible readings have spoken in a timely manner to me, as I check Facebook about three times a day (obsessive I hear you say!). They give me a chance to simply have a break and reflect on Scripture.

Springing from that, Mark started a page called "praying people", where people could post prayers and prayer requests and hopefully others would pray. There are now more than 100,000 signed up to that page, and a quick glimpse will show you the depth of those prayers and the response. Mark has a group of well over 50 people around the world, who he has never met in person, who help to mediate and administer the site. One of the downsides of such pages is that because they are public forums, you get people who want to voice their opposition and hurl abuse at Christians – so these contributions are quietly deleted. Mark also sends out a short daily devotion called "Journey deeper into God's word"; basically this is a blog that is sent out to people via Facebook and email.² I use this as part of my daily devotional routine. While the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand has a Facebook page (I know become I am a fan) it doesn't take full advantage of it yet.

There are downsides to Facebook. It can consume time. Businesses are now asking people not to Facebook at work as it decreases productivity. People do use it to play games and do quizzes and other such things, and I do not think that it is a secret that there are a number of Presbyterian ministers who game on Facebook. I used the results of Facebook quizzes to introduce myself as the keynote speaker at the Presbyterian Church's youth leader conference, Connect, last year. But I try to avoid these kinds of distractions. They can become addictive.

Secondly, privacy is an issue. While Facebook is public domain and you can control who you allow to view your profile, there are possibilities for voyeurism and what is called "spying" on people. Facebook is in the process of implementing a new application allowing you to see who has been viewing your details to combat this.

Thirdly, there is the possibility of confusing virtual Facebook connectedness and intimacy with real time face to face connection. In a recent NZ Herald article, English marriage councillors commented on the huge increase in marriages being ruined by people hooking up with other people via Facebook. People in relationships were finding more immediacy with old friends and flames than they were investing into their own marriages. The same issue can happen with connecting Facebook-to-Facebook for a church; it can seem to be a good alternative to meeting face to face. However, all virtual communication media must be seen as an augmentation of our ability to communicate with people in our faith communities in real time, amidst the real things of real life.

All churches should get a Facebook page (did I tell you it's free) and learn to use it as a good communication tool. It can extend your profile beyond your walls and augment or be your website. It is a great hub for helping develop community. It can be a place where you can advertise and invite people to services, activities and events and gives people a chance to feedback on those things. But it will never replace the communication and connectedness that can only be built as we travel through life together.

² Mark also preaches to upwards of 700 people each week at the "Second Life Anglican Cathedral", a virtual cathedral and church community in the virtual world of online game "Second Life".

Communication: Another perspective

Dennis Flett, Knox Waitara, Taranaki

Wikipedia confirmed my suspicion that a large percentage of the human brain is given over to communication, which encompasses speech, auditory experiences, and socialisation. It figures that when God designed us, social interaction was high on his agenda. Consider also that unruly prison inmates are put in isolation as a form of punishment, and you start to figure communication is like the lubricant in the engine of human experience. No communication and relationships seize.

One of the big advances in our age has been the increase in the speed and diversity of communication. The popularity of letter writing in the 19th century has given way in the 21st century to texting and social networking websites like Facebook and Twitter. Human-to-human communication is vital for personal well being, but is there more? Is there another dimension to human interaction that we find our gadgets never quite satisfy? Are we operating in two dimensions when we were built for three? What about human to other communication? Yes, I am talking about communication with God. Are we looking at someone bungy jumping on the two dimensions of a TV screen when we could be engaged in a three-dimensional experience of being there, at the end of a bungy cord?

While preparing for a Sunday service I was jolted by Jesus' words: "People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4 NLT). I had read this many times before, but I realised Jesus was claiming that to live required more than apprehending just the physical (bread alone). What? What then is being fed "by every word from the mouth of God"? Intrigued, I looked up the Greek, and discovered that a word from the mouth of God is a rhema, a God-breathed word. In other words, we are not living unless God is breathing his word into our inner beings. No gadget will ever supplant heart-to-heart communication with the creator. We were uniquely designed to be in touch with God. It seems human and divine interaction is even an enigma to angels (1 Peter 1:12).

Why do we choose to live in worlds that are impoverished of our true potential to communicate with the maker of the universe? Are we living as the spiritual equivalent of couch potatoes? Communication with God and the analogy to food makes sense. Eating is normal, enjoyable, necessary for survival, and frequent. God breathing his Word into our souls is normal, enjoyable, necessary for survival, and frequent. It is worth thinking about; do we need to be in communication with the creator to live, really live? "My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life" (John 10:10). God in communication with us: maybe this is the neglected ingredient in the elixir for the life Jesus talks about.



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Communicating with the media

Angela Singer, Senior Communications Advisor, Assembly Office

Interviewing ministers for *Spanz*, our own “very friendly to Presbyterians” national magazine, should in theory be fairly problem free. Well, not always and often the reason is a bit of mistrust; some ministers have been “stung” and “stitched up” in past encounters with the media and no longer trust *any* publication to give them fair and accurate coverage. “I’ve been burnt before,” one minister told me, and, “the radio edited my quotes so I said things I never said”, and “the newspaper printed a photo that their photographer took that made me look like a serial killer, at night time, and it was taken during the day!”

Surely one offs? Not really. Over the past two years I’ve heard over and over how ministers have granted interviews to the local media only to see themselves and their church portrayed unfairly through misquotes, dodgy editing, and even having outright lies printed about them. These ministers have told me that they would rather have *no* coverage of their church than risk bad coverage ever again. But is keeping your church out of the public eye really a good idea? If the only people you communicate to are your congregation, you will only ever reach a very small audience compared to the hundreds of thousands you could reach through regional and national media coverage.

I know that the “burnt” ministers would argue that wide media coverage of a bad story is not helpful, but bear with me; there are ways to get the kind of media coverage that doesn’t make you want to leave the country for a few months. One of those ways is not to go into an interview fearful of a bad outcome; that is, grudgingly and expecting to be “stitched up”. This is likely to antagonise both journalists and photographers. They can smell your fear and tend to react negatively to negativity. Therefore you need to present yourself as friendly, approachable, relaxed and well spoken. How best to do this if you feel quite the opposite? Preparation. If the media contacts you for a quote, find out what they want to ask you about and make a time to call them back. In the mean time, think about the kinds of questions you might be asked and write down some answers. If the reporter throws a curly question, take a breath and don’t get defensive. Politely say that you do not know but that you are willing to answer the question and will get back to them shortly, then research your answer and do get back to them (or the reporter might print that you refused to answer their questions).

The local or community newspaper is often the object of the criticism I referred to earlier. The standard of journalism of some community newspapers could be higher, but please don’t tell them this if you ever want to be interviewed locally again! Yes, they may send you what appears to be a teenage reporter just graduated from a 12-week journalism course but hide your dismay and grab the outstanding opportunity you have been offered - help them to write your story. Better still, have your story or a list of facts pre-written and hand it over on paper and on CD or flash drive – include quotes, information, dates, locations, images, a press release, correct spelling of names, contact details and anything else relevant.

Another way to get your local media onside is by contacting them on a regular basis. Don’t wait for them to come to you, find your story and take it to them. By working cooperatively with a reporter or editor you will over time develop a relationship where you become a trusted source of interesting church related stories and community news. You could supply story ideas about community events even if these events aren’t always connected with your church; it all goes into the goodwill bank.

Don’t make the mistake of thinking that your church news isn’t interesting enough or newsworthy to your community. The media are keen to receive story ideas and tips and some will print a well written press release word for word. This is because every day, week and month editors are faced with blank pages that they need to fill over and over, hard work, especially in a smaller town - they really do want story ideas to come to them! So what might these story ideas be? Well not that you have moved your service from 9.30 to 10am on a Sunday. This is not news; unless, say you moved your service because you were fitting in with an influx of migrant families that now attend your church and you all meet for breakfast prior.

The media loves inspiring stories because people want to read about individuals or groups overcoming adversity through faith. Get into the habit of recognising the newsworthy events and people in your church. Encourage your congregation to share and celebrate their successes not only with their faith family but with the entire community. Newsworthy stories include almost any event that your church is hosting that is open to everyone in your community, such as courses, classes, art and craft exhibitions, guest speakers, food fair, fundraising garage sale, community auction, and so on. If your church isn't involved in any of these, find ways to take part in events that the media is committed to covering. Every year there are national awareness weeks: you could approach one of the organising groups and ask if your church could be a host venue for events associated with, for example, Volunteer week, Victim Support week, VSA Week, Habitat for Humanity Awareness Week, Age Concern Awareness Week, Hospice Awareness Week, Youth Week and so on.

Even if your church isn't hosting events, you can still gain media coverage; there will be newsworthy things happening in your congregation that your community would want to hear. Has someone achieved something or become an expert in their field, taken on an apprentice during the economic downturn, donated significant time and goods, won an award or scholarship, given a lecture or attended a conference representing an organisation, assisted a charity for a milestone number of years, run for district council, witnessed something significant? Have any older members gone back to university to study alongside their children or grandchildren? Does something significant run in a family such as a career choice or twins or ownership of a business? Does someone have an interesting family tree? Has someone beat the odds and overcome a major illness? Is there a 50th wedding anniversary coming up? Does someone have a much admired beautiful home and garden for sale; is someone a champion breeder of orchids, dogs, parrots? Think creatively about the stories in your congregation that you could share.

No doubt some of you will now be thinking of the many stories in your church that you had never thought of before as "news". How can you get them to the media?

Most reporters prefer initial contact in writing by email or fax, so phone your local newspaper or radio station and ask for the news email address or fax number. Send either a short note on what your story idea is or a full press release of no more than one page. If you send a brief outline of your idea, offer to supply the full written story if required. Also supply details of potential interviewees, quotes and photographs. Make sure you put in the subject line of your email what the story is about and try to make it intriguing and interesting so that the reporter opens the email (depending on the publication, they might get lots of story ideas emailed in each day and you want yours to stand out). For example, if your church is demolishing its old building and erecting a new larger building in its place, your email subject line could read: "Congregation at St Andrew's excited to see church knocked down".

Pre-prepare for when the reporter phones, keeping in mind that you could get a phone call just minutes after you send your email. Think about how you will concisely tell the reporter what your story is about: you need to get to the main points quickly as you will not have much time to "sell" your story. Even at this "just having a chat" stage do not say anything you do not want to see in print or hear on the air.

Another great way to establish a good relationship with your local media is to get your timing right. Phone and find out what the news deadline is for the media you want to approach. If you are supplying a story, you don't want to do this close to deadline as it will probably not get used, and if it is used it may be rushed with there being no time to check facts, arrange interviews, quotes or take photographs. If you are planning an event tell the media about it well before it happens so that you can get both pre-event and post-event coverage – and send the media free tickets to attend. If a reporter gives you a deadline, meet it and never ask them to extend it for you. The editor sets the deadline and the reporter answers to the editor; you will not get far by annoying either. Also do not ask if you can see the final story – you can't! If you think the reporter is having problems with unusual facts, names, dates etc, then ask them to read the information back during the interview. Always be sure to return phone calls and emails from reporters promptly or the space that your story was potentially going in will be filled by someone else's story.

If all this hunting for stories in your church sounds too difficult there, are often relatively easy opportunities for media coverage that churches miss - local media often want local comment on national news stories. For example, if the Presbyterian Church's Moderator is on TVNZ news commenting on the ways NZ society celebrates Easter, you could contact your local media and tell

them what your church is doing for Easter. Local media often prefer to quote and interview local people.

How do reporters find local people to comment on national events? If no one approaches them offering comment, they will do an internet search on your local area's name and the news topic. This is where having a church website, Facebook page, My Space page or Twitter account that is updated regularly can be very useful. It also works well in reverse; you can direct reporters to your online content for potential story ideas – things like your event listings or videos uploaded to YouTube may generate a story.

As the way that we receive news changes, you may find that the best way for you to get your church's stories out there is through interesting, inspiring and uplifting podcasts, photo and video stories. But until new media overthrows old media for good... let's be nice to reporters!

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Communicating across presbytery

Emily Wotton

A few years ago, I returned to part-time study for a post graduate diploma in not-for-profit management. All of the papers are offered in block courses and attract professionals and volunteers from the very diverse not-for-profit sector. Auckland Presbytery is considered a faith-based-non-profit organisation. As the class works through the material and theories presented to us, we need to communicate in group work and assignments from the perspective of our organisation.

I've found it fascinating how many similarities there are amongst the organisations, whether they work on behalf of the arts, sport, health, education, social justice, advocacy, community development, or our faith-based part of the sector. I have condensed for you some of the material and learning that I developed about my work with Auckland Presbytery for the "Stakeholder Communication and Image Management" paper.

I am currently the sole ministry employee working specifically for Auckland Presbytery. I support 55 churches, advising on youth, children and families (YCF) work. My role is funded by annual levies to each church and is unique to our presbytery. When I started four years ago, the role had been vacant for some time and before that hadn't been going so well, with conflict and mixed support for the position. What I initially encountered was that, in addition to typical suburban fragmentation, our churches were also entrenched in their local YCF work and hesitant to engage with anything regional. There had been many years of historical hurts, mistrust, and disappointment. Although traditionally YCF employees or leaders are younger and not aware of this history, presbytery communication was diverted and they were usually maintaining support relationships with their personally established networks.

There is a consistently high turnover of key YCF contacts at churches – this is common in YCF ministries due to a number of regularly identified factors. Although my role is appreciated by those who encounter and engage with it, I continue to come across YCF leaders who aren't effectively connected.

I have identified and implemented various communications strategies over the years and regularly use marketing plans for individual events or new resource launches. In light of the regular introductions, re-introductions, and explanations I'm often making as I meet with various stakeholders, I would love to work on a large scale public relations strategy for this position. I enjoyed exploring PR possibilities and during the process, several gaps were revealed that still need to be addressed. Clarifying management strategies and objectives will increase the effectiveness and success of any ongoing PR strategy.

Profile of a high priority stakeholder – a congregation's YCF employee

YCF employees commonly live near the church that employs them. They can be either:

1. Full time, vocational, highly experienced and/or educated, professional, 30+ year old
2. Full time, vocational, educated, experienced, 25-35 year old
3. 20+ hours, vocational, skilled and/or experienced, 18-22 year old OR 30+, balancing the part-time employment with study, family life, or another job.
4. 0-20 hours, usually skilled but inexperienced with minimal training, often 18-22 years old, balancing with study, family life, or another job. Can be very transient or develop into vocational with increased experience and education

What this stakeholder likes most about our services:

- Committed resourcing and advocacy available
- Encouragement and coaching
- Gathering at a level larger than our local group = liminal experiences, friendships developing, wider perspectives, sharing strengths/ resources
- Up-skilling that is distinctive to our Presbyterian context
- Developing supportive relationships, finding mutuality

- Opportunities to work with other groups on ideas/projects

What this stakeholder likes least about our services:

- When information comes out too late for them to be involved – for example, the term is already planned before event info is out
- When events have a particular theological flavour that they don't agree with or support
- Wasting time/money – if an event/resource was poorly produced, not worthwhile, appropriate, or enjoyed
- When involvement requires action beyond their perceived or current capacity
- When they can't be involved because events are too frequent, conflict with a prior commitment, or are costly

Discussion on this stakeholder

The focus of my role and services in the presbytery is prioritised towards congregations and specifically YCF leaders. Although there are many voluntary YCF leaders, the employed YCF workers are ranked higher in this stakeholder group. Priority is given to their support and engagement due to their local church investing financial and strategic resources. Ultimately, this investment should be worthwhile for both parties. Churches hope to have effective, healthy and balanced YCF work from their employee, and our hope is that the workers have a positive employment experience that increases their interest in long-term ministry.

This support and relationship also enhances the Advisor's role through vital feedback and consistent usage of services. Employed workers are more likely than volunteer leaders to attend and contribute to regional activity. The workers can allocate time in their role and find that the regional activity boosts their work with the local church so they are even more inclined to continue engaging. Networking and sharing of ideas and resources as well as opportunities to work together all add aspects and experiences at a level not often found within local YCF work. YCF work can often be self directed/managed and the teams that workers are facilitating are often younger/less experienced than they are. It can be lonely, overwhelming work on a local level. Regional networking builds collegiality and friendship amongst others who can share your experiences with mutual support or even mentorship if they are a more seasoned worker.

There are several key issues that affect the flow of communication:

- belated notice or no notice of employee's appointment
- other staff/church members acting as presbytery contact but not passing on info
- Church or minister not supportive or allowing of involvement with regional activity
- failure to update contact details on database (email/mail going to unused address)
- employee receiving mail at church address but not checking it often
- guilt – sheepish about prior limited involvement
- unaware of benefits - lack of knowledge about what regional activity offers
- not full time – small amount of time allocated to expected tasks, so not available for anything "extra" *or* balancing the work with other things so it's a squeeze
- Previous negative experience a put off
- Competition for attention
- Overloaded at work
- Not wanting to step outside what is comfortable/known from existing activity
- Pastoral care crisis
- Less/un- responsive to group mail/email

I have consulted with this stakeholder group about ideal communications channels and strategies. They advised for all communications to be available as early as possible, come through multiple channels (mail, email, website), and that personalised consistent reminders (especially by text) are helpful. They also remarked that while they appreciated the professionalism of our existing resourcing and information, they also would like the vehicles and media used to be fun, friendly and personalised if possible. They really would like to contribute and be included in material development, event management, consultations etc - but the ideal route for this would be for it to be fully facilitated. All in all, they genuinely want to be involved but time is precious and even with best intentions, there are many factors competing for their attention.

Image management

When I introduce myself to the various individuals I encounter as an employee of the presbytery, the person's response varies wildly depending on who I'm talking to and the level of their awareness and understanding about the presbytery. Most of the time, it feels like I am the only physical emanation they've tangibly encountered of a holographic organisation. Whether or not the individual's opinion or understanding is accurate, it does represent a current perspective or impression that stakeholders have of the organisation. It is important to analyse these images and work out where they come from as an organisation develops their optimal and ideal image they are hoping to achieve with current and future communication. Here are some of the generic reactions I've had from actual people:

- Don't know what presbytery actually is or does. Unfamiliar with our structure, concept, purpose and the vocabulary
- **OR** familiar with presbytery, but feel it's undefined, with an unclear structure and purpose
- It exists on paper/in concept – but doesn't actually **DO** anything as an organisation.
- A boring meeting the minister and an elder from a church are supposed to go to (or avoid) monthly. A compulsory waste of time.
- The church's governance: The Book of Order and lots of committees
- Prescriptive: always trying to tell us what we can and can't do, controlling
- Old: the people who go are old, the way it works is old fashioned, and it takes so long to hear about what's happening, by the time the news comes out it's also old!
- Stuck: holding on and constricting the future
- Not important to our local church's existence: we have different ideas and just get on with things anyway – that's what everyone else is doing too right?

I like to have optimal conversations with people about what the presbytery could be like. Here are some of their responses as to what they wish the presbytery's image was:

- We are a Reformed Church that is still *reforming*
- Changes are no longer looming, they are actively here now.
- Let go and be part of the innovation
- Shift priorities and value to life giving/growing strategies
- Engaging/releasing young people, lay ministry
- Encouraging and life giving/celebrating community

One fascinating exercise we were asked to complete during a block course was to sketch a visual interpretation of these responses and single out key words or phrases. My current image included the words: entrenched and sinking, overwhelmed by structure, huddled, forced together and restrictive. My optimal image included the words: seeing the way, people moving forward, embraced together, resourced for the future, impacting communities, mobile, responsive and out there. What completely different messages!

For the assignment, I went on to develop a clip-art collage of this exercise. I also put Auckland Presbytery's YCF ministry through a "brand features matrix". This looks at key features of the organisation, how we work, and what we believe by asking what the phrases, form of words, and alternative expressions are that describe the attribute for each area. I was required to submit a full public relations plan based on the strategic overview.. The detailed communication plan included goals, strategies, responsible people identified, timeframes, and measurements for success.

Influences from outside the course readings:

Debbie Mayo Smith. "Marketing in Today's Wired World". 2008, Penguin Books

Michael D. Clemen. "New Zealand Case Studies in Strategic Marketing". 2002, Dunmore Press

Alyse Boaz. "Marketing in New Zealand". 2001, Pearson Education

Tymson and Lazar. "The New Australian and New Zealand Public Relations Manual". 2002, Tymson Communications

Phil Stone. "Develop a Winning Marketing Plan". 2001, How to Books

To read an extended version of this essay, including diagrams, please contact Emily at ycfministry@xtra.co.nz

On Church schools

Ray Coats, Chaplain, Rathkeale College

As a chaplain in a Church school, I feel that I cannot let Stan Stewart's article in the April issue of *Candour* pass without comment. However, I believe that the question that no one wants to face is not one to do with poaching. Rather it is about determining just what sort of elephant we have in the room. The questions that I believe we should be asking are:

"Why have Church schools?"

"What are they there to do?"

"Are they now of any relevance to their denominations?"

Because no-one seems to be asking these questions, we have well-meaning presbytery, synod and vestry members dutifully turning up to meetings to protect the "interest of the denominations", but possessing little or no knowledge of what that interest is. We are long past the days of special schools existing to nurture young Presbyterians, Anglicans or members of any other mainstream denomination. As chaplains will readily attest, 10 percent of our charges (if we are lucky) will have some church background and that background will be across a wide range of denominational experiences. Regrettably, an even smaller percentage will be regular church attenders when they are at home.

Research in Australia has shown that a similar state of affairs exists in Church schools in that country and that it is experienced across most of the denominations, including Baptist. For some evidence of how New Zealand Church schools and their boards view their priorities, visit their web-sites and see how much emphasis is given to their Christian, let alone denominational, character.

The animal that has been created is one that I would label "exclusivity".

Because the Church schools have been made "special", they have attracted parents who can afford to pay, or are prepared to make sacrifices, to enable their child to be educated in, for instance, smaller sized classes, and receive all the educational and social benefits that accrue from the high decile ratings that these schools enjoy. So the better the reputation of the school in the results stakes that are now part of the educational landscape in this country, the more desirable it is to have your child attend those schools. Additionally, as most Church schools offer boarding facilities, this can be an even easier way to shop around the country.

Because the Church schools have been made "special", they have attracted parents who can afford to pay.

The fact that there is a compulsory element to Chapel and Religious Education is just another price for these parents to pay and can even be an opportunity to assuage the conscience in relation to the promises made at Christening time. And we all know of cases where parents have joined or rejoined a particular church in order to get preferential entry to a Church school for their child. In other words, most parents have little interest in the denominational basis of the school and that is reflected by their children. Oh, that they did have an interest. How much easier it would be.

So, for me, given that most of my charges have no background, no knowledge of the stories and little experience of worship, my job is to gently lead them as best I can into an exploration of what this being we call God is about. I encourage their questions and sometimes am astounded by their insights.

I explore religions so that they might better understand what motivates other people. I try to get them into the habit of worship including the opportunity to experience stillness and quiet. I encourage them to seek these experiences when they are not at school. Eventually they leave school

and my hope is that some of the seeds that have been sown will grow.

One thing I do know is that the boys that I talk to have no interest in denominations, full stop. If anything, they see denominations as dysfunctional and not representative of the inclusive and loving God that they hear about in their religious experiences at school and, I hope, are trying to find for themselves.

I cannot believe that any chaplain would actively try to turn a young person away from their home church, particularly as so few of them have one, but, seen through their eyes, they often have a very powerful point to make about the relevance of what they find when they do attend. As churches, we have a lot to answer for. As we continue to draw away from each other into our own bastions of faith, we cannot make a blinkered assumption that we will carry the youth of today with us into our denominational castles.

When our students leave us, they go into a world where choice rests with them. Hopefully, we have prepared them for what that means. University, work or whatever their choice is far from childhood and far from the cloistered confines of a Church school. If that choice involves an ongoing exploration of a relationship with God wherever and however it is relevant for them, then I rejoice, and, I believe, so should we all.

There is ambiguity in the page

John Howell, St Paul's Union, Taupo

Recently I read again Ruth Page's inaugural lecture in the Theological Hall newsletter of March 1979. She has some pertinent criticism of Barth's use of Scripture, showing the inadequacy of his account of revelation. The same kind of difficulty, I suggest, appears for Calvin and inspiration. Let me quote from her lecture:

Theologians like Barth were confirmed in their exclusive, revelation alone, area for theology by the appearance of the so-called 'German Christians' in the years before and during the second World War, for here were people prepared to endorse Hitler's views on race, folk and fatherland in the name of Christ. So, while, Barth in his old age was prepared to talk of the Humanity of God (a warm emphasis lacking from his early writings) and of God's partnership with mankind, he never changed his mind on the fact that nothing but the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures gives this partnership, and he quarrelled violently with his erstwhile colleague Brunner who held that there must be something in man that would at least give a point of contact for that revelation.

Neo-orthodoxy on the other hand was much nearer to the other pole [than the Liberals were] (in fact I am not sure that Barth would agree that there are two poles to work between). The only function of the world in their theologies was the negative one of demonstrating sin and the impossibility of finding God outside his own revelation. That is a splendid and forceful theological position, but to maintain it the Neo-orthodox had to find their way round legitimate critical questions concerning Scripture, such as how the canon, the selection of books that are actually in the Bible, came into existence, or the part played by the infant church in the formation of the Gospels as we have them. The point is that however revelation is to be understood, the medium through which it comes to be Scripture is the words and writings of men, and that takes us right back to the area of the finite and the fallible. Therefore, as neo-orthodoxy allowed no locus of revelation but the Word, when critical questions were raised about Scripture they were particularly bereft, and it is not surprising that it was disillusioned Barthians who proclaimed the Death of God in the 1960's.

There are still a few lingering neo-orthodox type theologians left. But the mood of utter pessimism concerning the status of the world and mankind which characterised the two World Wars and the time between has passed, and latter day Barthians are trying to find more connection between revelation and the world than Barth would have allowed. Yet we cannot go back to what seems now the naive optimism of the Liberals, who so drastically underestimated the evil man is capable of. Their God appears too comfortable and uncritically at home in the world, helping it along, while the neo-Orthodox God had no home in the world at all, and, especially in their earlier writings was so transcendent, so remote as to be unknowable, unrelated in positive ongoing way with his creation.

Now I suggest that Ruth Page's telling criticism of Barth has some relevance to Calvin's view articulated by Murray Rae. As I find it difficult to ascertain what is Calvin from what Murray Rae endorses, I shall call it:

Murray Rae's advocacy of Calvin (Candour Oct 2009)*

I take the argument to be:

1. The Scriptural text is the revealed Word of God.
2. It is self-authenticating.
3. The Church's selection of the canon is subordinate to the authority of Scripture.
4. The testimony of the Spirit is superior to all reason, and it recognises what is the Word of God.
5. The testimony of the Spirit is tested both privately and publicly. The public test is against the common consent and polity of the Church. God will make us of one mind, and unites us together in the unity of faith.
6. The content of Scripture can be understood only under the guidance of the Spirit.
7. The true meaning of Scripture is the natural and simple one. This plain sense is not a naïve literal meaning.
8. Inspiration by the Spirit does not entail the Scripture's truth is conveyed in a single linguistic or semantic mode. Metaphor and other figures of speech are used. Calvin was against the tradition of allegorical reading.
9. In order to understand the plain sense of Scripture, the reader needs to know the broad scope of God's creative and redemptive purpose for the world. Calvin's Institutes are a systematic exposition of that, to prepare and qualify students of theology for a reading of the divine words.
10. The rule of faith is drawn from Scripture itself, and this does involve circularity. This circularity is defended by reading the intent of the whole.
11. The individual texts (parts) are to be read in the light of the whole.
12. We are to read the Scriptures with the express design of finding Christ in them. For Calvin, this includes the Old Testament, as "the Jews knew Christ as Mediator"; Israel knew Christ ahead of time. The classic example is from Deutero Isaiah, where Isaiah preached the gospel about Jesus in advance.
13. We should read the text with the desire of being transformed.

Now the difficulty with a circularity is this: in the process of seeking a common mind, or the meaning of what is inspired or illuminated by the Spirit, or what is the plain meaning, we turn to Scripture to seek guidance. I may find an answer, and I can then subject it to both a private and public test. Let's call the result of my private test "answer A". The public test can be a divided one, as within the Church, or Churches, various positions emerge. In practice, the Church may decide on an issue, but not have a common or one mind. So I turn to a systematic theological exposition to get an overall broad scope. Which theologian should I read? As an informed reader, I may have read quite a number, for there are schools of theological thought. I may, under the guidance of the Spirit, prefer Brunner to Barth, or perhaps I may have a mix of ideas from Augustine, Aquinas, Tillich and Kung? From this I find a theological match with "answer A".

To put this another way, the same difficulty for Barthians of who decides and how ("what is a revelation?") applies to Murray Rae's advocacy of Calvin's view of inspiration. I have to decide what is an inspiration, or I have to agree or not agree with a particular Church decision as to whether it is inspired or not.

There is, however, a deeper and more concerning issue. It is one thing to say:

1. Read Deutero Isaiah in the light of the Gospels in which Jesus Christ is known, and you will see that the figure of the servant can be understood in the light of Christ,

and another and different proposition

2. that the writer of Deutero Isaiah really intended the person of Christ in the figure of the servant.

The more concerning issue is that (2) gives no weight to the writings of Deutero Isaiah in their own right as an authentic revelation from God at that time. It is reading into the text what I want it to say. The moral risk of this is anti-Semitism, and Martin Luther is an example of such moral bigotry.

So how I read the text does have moral consequences. The results of a hermeneutic circularity can only be defended by comparison with and engagement with other disciplines, including moral arguments. Otherwise we will live in an exclusive self-justifying world that may or may not be in touch with both reality and God. Another moral hazard lies in the exemption in the Human Rights Act given to religion, in allowing discrimination against women.

The problem of inspiration in discussion of moral issues

Richard Hays, in his book: "The Moral Vision of the NT" (1966), argues against both love and liberation as insufficient as a rule or guide for interpretation. Instead he offers the three images of community, cross and new creation. Although he does acknowledge that Protestantism has an emphasis on love as the centre of the Christian message (p370), nevertheless, he argues that "love is not a unifying theme for NT ethics". "Nowhere in Mark's Gospel does Jesus teach or command his disciples to love; discipleship is defined not by love but by taking up the cross and following Jesus. If Mark were the only Gospel in the NT canon, it would be very difficult to make a case for love as a major motif in Christian ethics" (p200). Mark 12:28-34 is discounted as an isolated event, even though the command to love is found in other Gospels, such as John 13:31-5.

Hays goes on to apply his method to some case studies. In the case of abortion, he acknowledges that the Bible contains no texts on abortion (p446), the canon is silent and consequently the three focal images (community, cross and new creation) do not come into play. (p449) Further his pastoral advice, he admits, is impractical (p453). This is a "shoot yourself in the foot" case study.

Now the reference to Hays is instructive, because my disagreement with him is on the reasons why he rejects the first and second commandments in Mark 12, and secondly that his rules or images for interpretation do not (on his own admission) work in one of the case studies he chooses. However, I am not likely to resolve my disagreement with him by appealing to "my view is that love has the priority" on the basis that I am more inspired than he. I would have thought that the Spirit of God is found in the process of discussion, in which we work through why I think his arguments and interpretation are weak.

The kind of discussion we would need is the opposite of the yelling matches we had at some recent Assemblies. But even with mature listening and engagement, I suspect it is unlikely we will reach Calvin's one mind, for there are schools of thought both within the NT and certainly within the history of the Church. These schools of thought can legitimately claim to be inspired. So trying to achieve one mind is unrealistic, and may dumb down the inspiration of God's Spirit working in diverse ways within the communities of faith. One could further argue that a theological education that fails to recognise this is not nurturing the gifts of the Spirit.

Ruth Page talked in her address of ambiguity. She argued, "all experience is ambiguous...there is ambiguity of meaning, of being, or morality or function: a condition which of itself is neither good nor bad, but just is. It's a very obvious facet of the world and I find it theologically important... Ambiguity is so omnipresent, so built in that it seems to me to be God given, and I want to call it a quality of creation...I want to argue further that God is present in the ambiguity."

An ambiguous statement has more than one meaning, and in propositions can be confusing or misleading. Religious language however is more akin to poetry and story than the language of propositions found in the creeds. "The Kingdom of God is like..." is one of the more frequent phrases of the synoptic Gospels. Or consider the metaphor of light, for example, used in the first chapter of John. The power of poetry, especially metaphor, is that it creates new meanings, which cannot be reduced to proposition without reducing it in meaning. Music, art, poetry and drama in worship can evoke our imagination in a variety of ways. I would call this process inspiring, leading to a wide diversity of interpretation. In that regard, Calvin's plain meaning, or seeking one mind, is conforming not inspiring. If love is the central theme of the Gospel, it can embrace and encourage these differences. That would mean less dogmatism about creeds, and more emphasis on religious story. As the creeds are secondary, I think even Calvin might agree with that.

**The Rev Dr Murray Rae will respond to John's article in the next issue of Candour*

The increase among people of the love of God and neighbour

Alan Quigley, Minister Emeritus, North Shore

At the time of my ordination in 1959 I read a small book by Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and its Ministry* (Harpers NY 1956). I gained a great deal from it then, and recently re-read it with profit. (Of course, it is dated in some ways, particularly in language that would now seem sexist).

Niebuhr wrote this as convener of a group set up to examine the nature and purpose of theological education in the United States and Canada. It was a time of cultural change, post war, and many questions were being raised. There was a huge diversity of theological schools, and they defined their roles in equally diverse ways, largely dependent on the way their parent Churches understood their purpose. He considers various ways of defining the Church, with material on community and institution that still seems to me important. In the light of this survey, he offers a definition of the purpose of both Church and ministry in strikingly simple terms: “the increase among men of the love of God and neighbour”, and suggests that “the simple language of Jesus Christ himself furnishes to most Christians the most intelligible key to his own purpose and to that of the community gathered about him” (p31).

There are some consequences of this definition that seem to me to remain significant. First, the focus of attention lies beyond the Church. The Church does not exist to promote itself (or, in a particularly objectionable phrase, to “promote the Presbyterian brand”!). The focus lies on human beings, both within and outside the Church, and their development toward the fulfilment of their being. In practice, this presupposes attention to both the parish and the congregation. (I am told that the General Assembly has decided that parishes no longer exist; but we are not required to believe the Assembly to be infallible.)

Secondly, love is central. I wonder if our Church has put more emphasis on belief than love; remember the line of the hymn, “Only believe and thou shalt see...”. It is as though in practice we agree with St Paul that there abide faith, hope and love, but in fact then say that the greatest of these is faith. Perhaps this is tied up with our confessional history and our desire to have “statements of faith”.

Thirdly, Niebuhr’s definition assumes that it is possible meaningfully to speak of God, and even of God being capable of loving and of being loved. This is the most basic theological issue we face. We are much more hesitant in speaking of God, certainly of “defining” God; does this invalidate what Niebuhr suggests, or more importantly, the purpose of the Church?

Fourth, love of God and neighbour is not two things but one. “The interrelations of self, companion and God are so intricate that no member of this triad exists in his true nature without the others, nor can he be known or loved without the others” (p34). Niebuhr gives a definition of “love” that includes the words “rejoicing”, “gratitude”, “reverence” and “loyalty”.

Fifth, the neighbour is both near and far, both in space and time. Significantly, especially for time in which he wrote, and for ours, he wrote, “he is Augustine... and Socrates... and the Russian people, and the unborn generations who will bear the consequences of our failures, future persons for whom we are administering the entrusted wealth of nature and other greater common gifts” (p38).

Sixth, there seems to me a sense in which his definition of the purpose of Church and ministry could also be shared by people of other faiths, specifically Jews and Muslims, and this recognition of a shared purpose could be very valuable. The “love of God and neighbour” is not the private property of Christians.

Finally, Niebuhr went on to propose with some depth a concept of ministry as “pastoral director”. And among the bewildering variety of concepts of theological education that existed in contemporary America, he has some very important material about the function of a “theological school”, defining it most basically as the “intellectual centre of the church’s life” (p107), and warns that “institutions possessing the external appearance of such schools but devoid of reflective life have quickly revealed themselves as training establishments for the habituation of apprentices in a clerical trade rather than as theological schools” (p108). With the loss of the Theological Hall, is that a danger against which we must guard?

What are we remembering?

Martin Baker

Every two years, my son's school, Wellington College, arranges for a significant proportion of its year 12 students to travel to Gallipoli and the Western Front. It is a remarkable pilgrimage that traces the histories of the young men from the school who were part of New Zealand's expeditionary forces.

Some of these young men fought and died at Gallipoli as part of the Wellington Battalion's defence of Chunuck Bair. After Turkey, the College boys continue their rather sober trip to France and Belgium via one of Germany's WWII extermination camps. The trip concludes with the nightly commemoration service at Menin Gate in Ypres and then at the New Zealand memorial in London. Along the way, the boys read from their schoolboy ancestors' diaries, and at particular memorials perform a haka acknowledging and honouring the sacrifice and loss.

Two of my son's great grandfathers fought on the Western Front; one was badly injured on the Somme and the other involved in the liberation of the French town Le Quesnoy near the end of the war. A grandfather was a WWII submarine officer and a great uncle was a major involved in directing the artillery bombardment at Monte Casino. This "war whakapapa" is shared to some degree by Maori and Pakeha. When we remember that a startling near 2 percent of New Zealand's population was killed in WWI, and many more injured, with around 10 percent of the population on active service, perhaps we should not be surprised about the burgeoning support of our ANZAC day services. Combat soldiers were often grouped according to their home regions. In some cases, a single bombardment killed almost all the young men from a single rural New Zealand town. Our church's memorial boards, memorial halls, windows, bridges, statues, columns and cenotaphs all act as a kind of headstone for the graves of those bodies that would never be returned nor surrounded with the traditional funeral rites of grief, mourning and wake.

When I was minister of First Church in Dunedin, every Sunday I would be reminded of the devastation of WWI by the large, stained-glass memorial window, which was paid for by a very generous subscription from the people of the church and the Dunedin community in the 1920s.

Did we ever recover from World War I? Was there some kind of profound wave of national grief that washed over the country for which we had no words or rituals to engage with? What did the ministers say? How did they interpret what had happened to the families and communities who faced such loss? Take, for example, Kaikorai Presbyterian Church: 65 members left to serve overseas and 22 died. Of the Rev Robert Fairmaid of South Dunedin, it was written,

There are probably 100 homes on 'the Flat' to which he carried news of death or disaster, and his own boys were in the thick of it. What all that meant cannot be reckoned. It meant very much to the people but he always pointed them to the source of all comfort and consolation. To himself, it was a valley of weeping, and no one can go through such a valley without leaving a part of his life.

What role does the theme of martyrdom or even Eucharist play in our Church's engagement with such loss? Was the young soldier's blood "given for you"? Did the language of war loss and Christology intersect – did they die like Christ, that we "might have life in all its fullness"?

While there was a huge New Zealand loss of life in WWI, proportionate to the size of the population, possibly an even greater number of people (mostly Maori) may have died in the land wars that ended a generation previously. We do not seem to reflect on this loss on our own soil in the same way.

My own naive experience of war is limited to time spent on a Kibbutz bordering the Israeli Lebanon boarder in the early 80s. As the troops prepared for the invasion of southern Lebanon and we came under regular rocket attack, there was, among the volunteers anyway, an overwhelming sense of excitement, fascination and living-for-the-moment intensity. Values, behavioural norms and language change in these contexts.

As we consider the most appropriate ways for us to engage with the Anzac story, I wonder what stories and feeling will impact on our ability to discern "what the Spirit is saying". Under the memorial window at First, we were reminded of Isaiah's vision: "hammering their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks". Let us pray for wisdom when we have the opportunity to speak to a nation's sense of hope, identity and grief.