

# Candour



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NEWS AND VIEWS FOR MINISTERS

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## New ways of being church



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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:

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

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# Risk arithmetic

Amanda Wells

**If what you're doing isn't working, you think about trying something new. Or you should. Perhaps it's more honest to admit that churches tend to seek new results by repeating what they've always done. But even then, there will come a desperation point at which something new is mooted.**

The new thing usually runs in tandem with the old thing, which will have its staunch supporters. They don't want to risk losing what works well for them. But if failure isn't a possibility, are you aiming high enough? To entertain the possibility of failure is to put a value on the chance of success, rather than the guarantee of success. I wouldn't describe myself as a risk taker but I've come to understand that I most value achievements when success is far from certain.

Last month I went on a weekend tramp in the Ruahines (northeast of Palmerston North). The route looked reasonable on paper, and a local DOC person had confirmed to my companion that a section of bush-bashing should be doable. But we were taking a risk: our destination hut was deep in the ranges and offered two routes out: one dangerous in high winds, the other impassable with heavy rain. I have to admit that we weren't focused on the possibility of failure. Sometimes the more you think about risks, the larger and more detailed they grow.

The first half day went smoothly enough (despite the fact that our other friend, feeling unwell, had decided to sit out the weekend in a Taihape motel). After lunch we had to head up a river to reach the start of our bush bash. The short river section was easy to discount on the map, where your eye is naturally drawn to greater obstacles later on. But it was deeper and faster than expected, and soon we were passing points of no return, given even the minimal rain forecast. But we didn't talk about turning back. Even though retreating wasn't part of our plan, to know you can't go back the same way creates unease. We came to an obviously risky crossing but, after some thought, climbed the river's steep bank, sidling through scrub till we could scramble down past the danger point.

That day went on for 12 hours, with rampant bush lawyer<sup>1</sup> slowing our "doable" bush bash to a blood-letting crawl. It was cold, raining and we both doubted we would make it to the hut. But we didn't need to talk about it: if it got too dark to continue safely, we could camp. Sometimes discussing the possibility of failure makes it more of a reality. We were navigating off compass bearings, and despite GPS assistance managed at one point to spend 20 minutes tracing a small circle. When we finally made it onto the marked track at the top of the ridge, the sun was setting. A fast hour and a half along, then down, then across a river saw us hit the hut just as darkness fell.

But that wasn't the risky part of the trip. Sometimes, even often, what you perceive as the greatest risk going into a project is sidelined by something out of the blue. Next morning we were tired, cut up and aching, before the riskiest day had even begun. Even down here in the valley, we could hear and feel the wind; though at least it hadn't rained for 12 hours.

So up onto a ridge, in the snow, being blown over; we had to decide against our preferred (exposed) route. It's psychologically difficult to descend and climb again when already on a ridge leading to safety. But safety is always illusory in cold, snowy, windy conditions. I like to have more than one mistake between myself and death. So down, down, down, then an easy navigation of the heavy-rain risk section. We will make it out today; as we have lunch in a hut, relief sinks in. Up, up, up into more snow. Then along and down again... to our friend, the car and normal life.

You think a lot about risk when you're tramping. Also about the difference between challenging and impossible, or envelope-pushing and dangerous. "Rainy-day" emergency gear often sees use. You realise how little risk we tolerate in our everyday lives. Our culture's fears sees few children walking to school, little engagement with strangers, and many churches becoming service clubs.

If we're really serious about Jesus' call, why aren't we prepared to take greater risks to achieve what matters most? Are we able to try new things and admit the possibility of failure, without focusing on it? Aren't the potential rewards worth it?

This is the final issue of *Candour* for 2010. The next issue is February 2011, with a deadline of 28 January. The theme will be "Christian spiritual disciplines"; contributions are very welcome and can be emailed to [candour@presbyterian.org.nz](mailto:candour@presbyterian.org.nz)

<sup>1</sup> Not a rogue legal professional but tātarāmoa, a vine with viciously sharp, hooked thorns.

# Cooperation needs to be about mission, not unity

*Peter MacKenzie\**

**I have often heard the comment that we are living in a post-modern, post-denominational, post-colonial world. I understand the analysis and the argument; I just object to the timing. We are not there yet and only history will really inform us of when we do make it. We are living in the cusp of this major change and, in many ways, we are having to live in two different societies. There continue to be many people who are living with a modern, denominational, colonial world view. There are many who don't have a computer, email or cell phone. Of significance is the fact that they are often key people in the life of the Church.**

When the Church Union movement was in full swing and Cooperative Ventures started to be formed around the country, there was a clear mandate for a cohesive Christian witness. The most cited verse was John 17:20-21 ("that they may all be one"), suggesting that the unity of the Church was paramount. The efforts of many Union and Cooperating parishes were primarily focused on breaking down the denominational divisions and building a unified congregation. For some local churches, this meant living with a diversity of traditions; for others it meant creating their own unified tradition (which melded diversity into one local expression of church).

Experience has shown that the uniting of congregations has generally focused attention internally onto the organisational aspects of parish life, rather than on turning out to the community. Discussions were about buildings, liturgies, equity and oversight – and they have largely missed the missional imperative of taking the Gospel into the community. It may seem a bit radical (especially given my current role) but the quest for a united Church has actually had detrimental effects on the mission of the Church. It has turned our eyes upon a Jesus who stands in the traditions of the Church, rather than the Jesus who stands in the marketplace.

**I**t may seem a bit radical but the quest for a united Church has actually had detrimental effects on the mission of the Church

This is not to say that Cooperative Ventures have not worked nor that they should not be an option for the future. In fact, I believe that they are a viable alternative for many areas. But... it is important that the motivations for cooperating are clear. When churches come together with a mission imperative, they can achieve great things – and unity is a by-product. It is simple organisational psychology to note that a common goal (or enemy) is a uniting factor for building a team.

The unity of the Body of Christ is not seen in us all being the same. Paul describes the body in 1 Corinthians 12 – ears and eyes, hands and feet, all working differently as parts of the body. Here unity and diversity sit side by side. One body – many parts. I sometimes think that the hardest part of being church is to accept that others are also part of the Church. We invest so much into our faith, our theology and our practice that it is difficult to include other expressions of church into the Body of Christ.

A Cooperative Venture in its broadest sense would occur when two or more groups come together for a project (a venture) and operate as a team (cooperatively). They affirm a common goal, build on the unique characteristics each brings to the task, and commit themselves to the work that needs to be done. It is not so much a commitment to unite, but to unite to undertake a task.

So what does this mean for finding different approaches to our changing context? I want to affirm a Cooperative Venture approach – which is not in itself new, but with a different focus. There are opportunities for local church groups to work together to develop mission goals, to utilise the



resources available and to focus on taking the Body of Christ into the marketplace. It should be an approach that sees a need, identifies the resources required, and builds relationships that make things happen. The focus is not on unity, but on mission - with unity being an outcome, not a goal.

Such a model is not only relevant for inter-denominational co-operation, I believe it is also relevant for multi-congregational churches and inter-cultural or inter-generational relationships. To accept another part of the Church as a valid expression of faith is an important step, and then to be willing to use combined resources for the mission of God. It lets feet be feet and do the walking, while ears are doing the hearing. It affirms that Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, Assemblies of God, Catholics and Presbyterians are all part of the Body of Christ, and we each have a part to play. It assures us that ancient hymns, choruses, Hill Songs and modern hymns are all valid expressions of faith and are appropriate for the congregations that enjoy that style of music. It reminds us that Maori, Samoan, Tongan, Cook Island, Scottish, English and Kiwi cultures all exist within the Body of Christ and offer diversity of praise. The Body of Christ is not a bland amalgamation of all things to all people, but a vibrant expression of diversity.

Working in a Cooperative Venture also needs some clear expectations, responsibilities and timelines. A covenant (or similar type of document) should outline the nature of the partnership and affirm the presence of the participants as partners. Such a cooperative venture may link with another church, the young people, a cultural congregation, or a community organisation. It is no longer about church union between denominations but unity within the Body of Christ that is affirming and active. It suggests that we should not be thinking about doing mission, but rather participating in mission.

As we move through this cusp of history from the modern age to what comes after, we set ourselves the task of finding new ways of being church. We need to develop a clear understanding of the diversity of the Body of Christ and a willingness to accept others into the house of God. Not an easy task, but one that may give longevity to this institution we call Church.

*\*Peter is the Executive Officer for Uniting Congregations of Aotearoa New Zealand.*



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# What is Fresh Expressions?

*Mark Johnston, Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership, Auckland*

**F**or some time now, Fresh Expressions UK has been getting people's attention, as snippets of what the Church of England and other mainline denominations are doing in the United Kingdom reaches our shores. In July this year, Bishop Graham Cray, the leader of the Fresh Expressions movement in the UK, was in New Zealand at the invitation of a couple of Anglican dioceses, and several of us Presbyterians, Methodists and Baptists jumped on board.

Fresh Expressions is best summed up as a movement in church planting that has taken off since the publication of a Church of England report in 2004 called "Mission Shaped Church"<sup>1</sup>. It's not often that a CofE report releases energy and momentum in the Church; but this one did. It initially was written to sum up the state of the Church of England in its mission context and clarify its thinking about church planting as a strategy of parish mission. However, it became a document that captured something of the challenge to re-think the parish principle, and put forward theological and missiological reasons for endorsing and resourcing a whole host of experiments in church life and the forming of new communities of faith. These experiments might have previously fallen outside the inherited ecclesial and economic unit definitions of a "church". Mission Shaped Church reclaimed them as real expressions of church; genuine attempts to embody the life of Christ in new and changing cultural circumstances.

**F**resh Expressions has welcomed diversity in approach, form and, to a certain extent, theological colour

Fresh Expressions emerged out of the coalescing of various interest and energies identified both by the research and writing that went into the report and a desire to work the report's practical suggestions to the CofE into something tangible on the ground. When Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, made the report a centrepiece of his episcopal leadership, official energies, resources and permission-giving became available to sustain a movement of common interest. It is noteworthy, however, those leaders in the movement found themselves less propelled by the official endorsement than a sense of the Spirit of God doing something serendipitously that they were caught up in. Fresh Expressions seemed to emerge and evolve from a collaborative intent and joining of hands, rather than being driven by top-down policy or a strategic plan of any kind. The subsequent addition of Methodist, URC, Congregational and Baptist partners indicated there was more to this movement than one Church's re-thinking of local mission.

What makes Fresh Expressions interesting and more durable than a single Church growth strategy or method is its umbrella-like nature. Rather than prescribing a particular approach, it has welcomed diversity in approach, form and, to a certain extent, theological colour. For instance, there are tales of planting an Anglo-Catholic expression in a city supermarket, the formation of new social justice communities, new rural faith communities, "goth" church, a church that makes bread, as well as more conventional congregational plants. But this is not without being held together by a central idea and some key theological reference points. The big idea that defines Fresh Expressions is "establishing a form of church for our changing cultures, established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church".

It is church planting in a broad sense. Fresh Expressions defines church planting as "the process by which the seed of the life and message of Jesus embodied by a community of Christians is immersed for mission reasons in a particular cultural or geographic context"<sup>2</sup>. It includes the efforts of inherited congregations to plant a new expression alongside the old; one that is intended to engage different cultures, generations and sub-cultures, in other words people "not like them". It

<sup>1</sup> *Mission Shaped Church*. Church House Publishing, London, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> *Mission Shaped Church*. 2004. P32.

affirms pioneer individuals or teams who feel called to start from scratch and establish a new form of witness in marginalised areas of cities often left behind by middle class churches. It provides support for new cultural expressions of church amongst 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation immigrants who are seeking to find culturally appropriate ways of engaging “third culture” peers and friends, who can shun both traditional immigrant churches and the “white” churches. It also encourages the emerging attempts at new monastic and lifestyle communities to embody Christ in the midst of culture.

Missiologically, “Fresh Expressions” arises out of the recognition that the attractional mode in which the church operates is flawed and now contributes to a major disconnection between churches and huge sections of society. Society has changed and the Church is finding itself stranded. This is exacerbated by operational theologies that make mission a tack-on church activity or duty rather than a gift of participating in the mission of God in Christ towards the world. “It is not the Church of God that has a mission in the world, but the God of mission who has a Church in the world”<sup>3</sup>. If the Church belongs to the mission of God, then the Church is no longer the centre of mission and has no reason to draw energy towards itself and its own preservation. This frees the Church for a more light-footed and responsive form of existence; to become sent, to cross boundaries into new spaces, to be expressed in new shapes and forms suited to the context.

### Church planting with a theological underpinning

However, “Fresh Expressions” is not interested in reducing church planting to strategy. It is a theological intention after the pattern of Christ. Authentic church planting is shaped by the incarnation. The incarnational principle calls the Church to identify with and enter the world as it is; to give up its own power, preferences and likes in order that Christ might be embodied in contexts where people no longer relate to our expressions of Church. The issue is not relevance, it is incarnation. Irrelevance is a symptom of churches that have become non-incarnational. The incarnational principle expresses itself as church dies to self (John 12:24) and gives up its preferences and privileges for the sake of being Christ to the other (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). It is not church or worship or community as we would like it. It is not cloning. It is discovering what church could be for and with others who may not be like us. This is difficult DNA for us Presbyterians, since our origins as a colonial settler Church were seldom sourced in this way. Fresh Expressions is recalling the church to its core DNA.

**T**he incarnational principle calls the Church to identify with and enter the world as it is

Fresh Expressions are not immune to the criticism that this call to contextualised mission can lead to a loss of distinctiveness, with the message and form of the Gospel so accommodated to the language and forms of the hearers that it loses its content and edge. It recognises that planting in the pattern of Christ is also the pattern of the cross, there is a world to counter. There is always a tension between adapting and identifying with context and becoming colonised by that culture. That is the tightrope walked both by inherited forms of church and fresh expressions. Church planting from the incarnational principle begins in a journey of cross-shaped sacrifice, and planting with this DNA will determine how a fresh expression wrestles with syncretistic temptations in the future.

Lastly the pattern of Christ shapes church planting by the resurrection. There is a world to anticipate and whatever a fresh expression becomes, it is called to become a pointer to God’s future. Fresh Expressions reminds the church that too much attention can be given to the passing on of the inheritance of the past and too little as an anticipation and foretaste of God’s future. What Fresh

<sup>3</sup> *Mission Shaped Church*. 2004. p85.



Expressions celebrate is the possibility of church as hopeful and expressive of what salvation means in the ordinary and everyday realities of many different kinds of context. For dispirited and disbelieving people in those contexts, Fresh Expressions are attempts to offer another kind of lens through which to see God and God's purposes; a foretaste sufficient for people to say, "whatever eternal life means, if it means life like what I see here then ...".

This does not come about by good intentions or churches with creative ideas. Fresh Expressions is a movement that regards mission as a Spirit event. It requires discerning the Spirit of God and allowing God to bring forth the future in fresh and "ready to be surprised" ways. This does not mean the entire abandonment of inherited church, but rather the intention to take incarnationally motivated risks, to corporately practice deep listening to God, context and one another, and to connect this to shapes of common life, activity and obedience. Fresh Expressions challenges the Church to begin with "divine listening" in mission and relativise our dominant default practices of strategic analysis and planning. The Biblical narrative reminds us that God creates new futures in the most inauspicious of places.

**F**resh Expressions are attempts to offer another kind of lens through which to see God and God's purposes

Six years down the track, "Fresh Expressions" has become a large network of support, story sharing and research, intentional collaboration and training spread across the major mainline denominations in England. Individual ventures to form and plant a new expression of church can register with the Fresh Expressions network, and currently about 2000 Church of England and 1000 Methodist Fresh Expressions are on the books. Figures for other denominations are not yet available. Telling and publicising stories of what ordinary people and churches are doing on the ground is an important vehicle for spreading encouragement and vision. Professionally produced DVDs of these stories have been released to spread the word. The website [www.freshexpressions.org](http://www.freshexpressions.org) acts as a hub. Individual denominations make their own decisions about what funding they will make available to their own Fresh Expression projects. Ecumenical cooperation takes place at the training, equipping and support level through regional "FEASTS". Several denominations have now developed ordained pioneer ministry tracks in their theological colleges and selection criteria processes have been modified to take account of and discern "church planting" or pioneer gifting and callings. Resources for church leader and planting teams and short-term courses have been developed. Critiques<sup>4</sup> of and research into Fresh Expressions have continued to be published and this is regarded as healthy addition to a movement that is evolving as a practice-based and learning organisation. Its structures are lightweight, and based on high levels of trust and collaborative working.

### Benefits of Fresh Expressions in our own situation

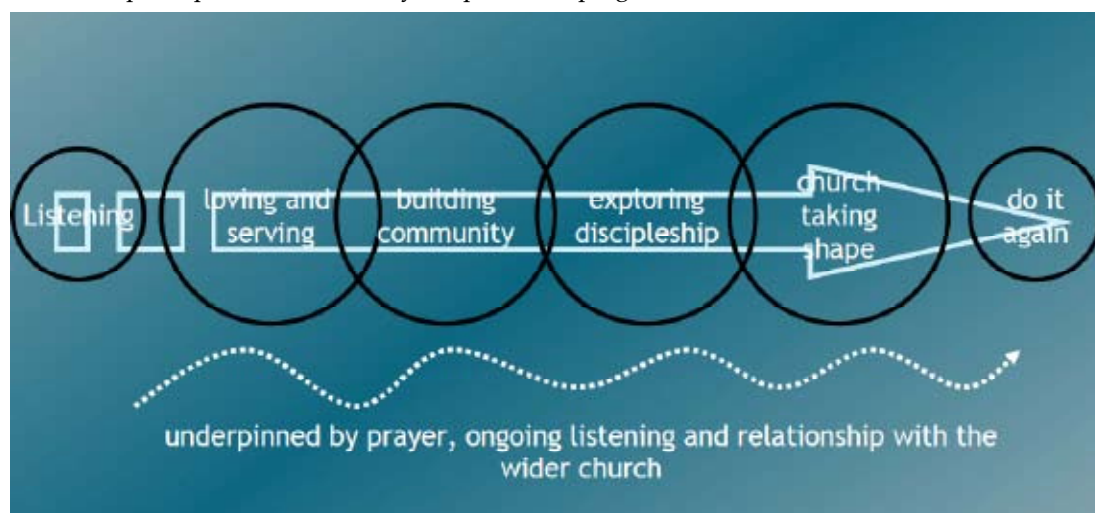
So what does Fresh Expressions bring into a local situation where church members or a leader is keen to develop a new way of engaging the community or un-churched people? Fresh Expressions firstly helps to give some language and framework to this desire. It recasts it as matter of embodiment. How is the life of God to be expressed amongst these people in such a way that they might encounter Christ for themselves? Fresh Expressions affirms that one way forward may be to intentionally plant a communal expression of the Gospel that is more responsive to their realities and context. Many of our churches planted and grown in one kind of soil find themselves amidst increased cultural and lifestyle diversity, in much changed soil conditions, and limited in their ability to grow an engagement with people unlike themselves. The reality is while some churches adapt, planting the seeds of church into the changed conditions allows for more people in more conditions and cultures to find a welcome and a home.

<sup>4</sup> Evaluating fresh expressions: explorations in emerging church : responses to the changing face of ecclesiology in the Church of England Louise Nelstrop, Martyn Percy. London, Canterbury Press, 2009



Secondly, Fresh Expressions is positive about the role that inherited and present modes of church have to play. This is not a prescription for ditching the old and embracing only what is new and different. There is an affirmation of the catholicity of the Church and the need for new, alongside and in relationship with the inherited modes of the Church. Churches are encouraged to plant new expressions within “parishes” and to creatively maintain the apostolic link to tradition to fund their imaginations and faithfulness to the Gospel. However, at the same time inherited churches are urged to practice cultural hospitality by allowing space and permission for experimentation and radical developments to emerge.

Thirdly, Fresh Expressions has developed a sense of “best practice” to aid in the church planting task. Tellingly, it urges church planting normally not to begin with corporate worship. Beginning with worship events has tended to perpetuate attractional models of church, often growing by transfer growth from other churches, failing to evolve as contextual rooted expressions and resembling a cloning of church rather than genuine fresh expressions. A process of intense listening to context and God is urged, accompanied by loving and serving people in the desired locations or social contexts. This becomes a formative journey that allows community to emerge, the exploration of what discipleship means and finally the public shaping of church.



5

Fourthly, Fresh Expressions as a movement is developing resources that build capacity in churches interested in church planting. Their development of “Mission shaped Intro” and “Mission shaped ministry” training materials are designed to introduce people to church planting and equip motivated members of churches who may go on to form a team for church planting. Much of the story-telling material, available in DVD form, offers a catalogue of what God is doing through ordinary people taking risks to innovate and grow new expressions of God’s life in their communities. It is hoped that the production of a New Zealand equivalent will provide a diverse range of stories that can inspire and illuminate the art of the possible.

Fifthly, Fresh Expressions is building up a considerable body of research and reflection upon church planting from a mainline denominational base. It does not claim to have all the answers and is intent on learning from the grass-roots activity of experimentation, theological reflection and a praxis-based learning cycle. For instance, Graham Cray drew attention to possible sources of failure in church planting due to attempts at cloning, being too event-centred and burning people out through resource-hungry “attractive” events, lacking long-term investment in people and funding lone-ranger, personality-centred and CEO-type leadership models, and the failure to start with key DNA (expressive of the Trinitarian God, incarnational, transformative, disciple-making and relational).

That is a good place to finish. Fresh Expressions is not a new word for contemporary worship services or community projects. Fresh Expressions in the end is not a focus on “forms” or “expressions” but the kind of intentionality that accompanies church becoming the embodiment of Christ in the world. A church can only grow from the DNA present in the seed. “Unless and until the Kingdom and mission are in the DNA of the seed of the church, what is planted will prove to be sterile. If mission is not located in the identity of the church, planting is very unlikely to recover it.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> From Graham Cray’s Fresh Expressions Presentation, Christchurch July 2010

<sup>6</sup> *Mission Shaped Church*, 2004. P33.

# Starting from scratch: context and church planting

Howard Carter, *StudentSoul, Auckland*

**“Christianity over the past 2000 years has moved from a tribe of renegades to a religion of conformists.” –Erwin McManus**

For the past two years, I have had the great privilege and challenge of attempting to plant a new church. Almost two years down the track, the jury is out on whether it will be a success. Depending on the day, I can be upbeat and very positive, or rather pessimistic: positive as our small group gathers for worship and there is a sense of God’s presence, positive as I see real growth amongst our core group, positive as I realise that our small group of regulars reflects the new Auckland context that we are planting in. I am pessimistic when I focus on working in a rather structurally complex context, am aware of what limited people-resources we have, and of my own personal limitations, and when I question if the return is adequate for the investment people have made in this endeavour. I’m also pessimistic when the reality of where we are seems so far from my dream and vision for what God is calling us to be and do. “But”, I hear you say, “these are not different from the joys and sorrows, highs and lows, and day-to-day almost bipolar realities of settled parish ministry”, and you are right. Humbly I offer the following reflections from a place I call the research and development wing of the Church. They are reflections from the journey, not from any sense of having arrived, and I hope they will be helpful for starting fresh expressions of church or simply freshening where you are.

I have found that the things that are at the heart of our tradition also dictate what we do in our worship and community

Firstly, nothing is really started from scratch. You start with people and models or ways of doing things that have been tried and tested in the past. StudentSoul Auckland was based on a model used in Dunedin; however, in a real sense it is totally different; you can’t just import something. I have found that the things that are at the heart of our tradition also dictate what we do in our worship and community. There is a centrality of the hearing and expounding of Scripture, and of preparing our hearts to hear it and responding afterwards. How we do this is shaped by traditions and by a desire to make it an authentic fresh expression of who and where we are. The ding of the Psalter’s pitch-fork is replaced with the hum of the data projector, and video and multimedia have replaced stained glass windows and banners as visual ways to narrate our worship spaces.

When you start something new, you need to be aware of what model you want to use, and the context will always dictate how that looks on the ground. In his book, *Planting Churches: A Framework For Practitioners*, Stuart Murray outlines various models of church planting: accidental church planting models, mainly through things like splits<sup>1</sup>; the multi-service/congregation model, primarily as a way of working round the whole culture wars phenomenon rather than an intentional church growth strategy; and mother-daughter relationships, where a church will birth a fully formed church elsewhere in a city from within its own congregation. The Rev Harry Morgan tells me that in one year, St Andrew’s Symonds Street planted 12 new churches. There is also the adoption model, where a church welcomes in another group, in particular an ethnic or new immigrant group, to be part of their worshipping community. This has been a big part of our Presbyterian Church story over the past 40 years. There is also dispersal, which means moving out into multiple campuses as a church grows or a city develops. We are seeing this model being used by megachurches in New

<sup>1</sup> Just recently I have been made aware of the growing number of Grace Presbyterian churches in New Zealand that claim to trace their parentage back to the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand but are developing links and support from American churches.

Zealand, with churches such as “Life” and “City Impact” using technology to link themselves, creating almost a franchise, with the main speaker/leader being broadcast to different sites on a Sunday. Then there are models from what we might call the more classical church-planting genre: sending out a group to intentionally plant a church, based around a church planter, or the solo church planter sent out alone to start something new.

## In my view, the individual church planter model is the hardest and most difficult

It’s important that each of these models is weighed and thought through carefully. Launching fresh expressions from a church or collection of churches will often mean a sacrifice of the best people, but in the long run it can multiply leadership and giftedness among both the senders (as people step up and fill the gaps) and in those sent. Multiple services and adoption make good use of available resources like buildings and technology and allow for leadership and financial services to be shared. Adoption has its upsides and downsides. It is interesting to read the stories of some church plants in the US that were welcomed by and shared buildings with Presbyterian churches as they got started. They have gone on to grow and become worthy of record while, sadly, the Presbyterian churches that offered them space have stopped being viable. In my view, the individual church planter model is the hardest and most difficult, as a huge amount of energy needs to go into the development of a core group. Being in a group or team setting seems to me more Biblical (Jesus sent people out in twos and the church in Acts seems to have done the same).

If you are going to start from scratch, then it is good to have an itch to scratch. It actually takes a lot of energy to get something up and going from scratch, so it is necessary to have a passion or compelling reason or vision for doing it. In our Presbyterian tradition, we would name it a sense of call. It gives the drive and determination to keep going even when the going gets tough. What often keeps me going in seeking to establish a student-focused church (and beyond) is a personal sense of vision and mission “to see emerging generations of New Zealanders become lifelong followers of Jesus Christ and live in a way that brings glory to God for the good of the world God loves”. The core passion and itch is a Gospel one of seeing people become followers of Jesus. Often that means sacrifice, being willing to step out of our comfort zones and traditions, and even our likes and dislikes, and to do something new.

If you are going to start from scratch, it has got to be about more than substance or style. A lot of the church planting and fresh expressions have had to do with style and different theological understandings (substance), rather than a real determination to embrace what it means to be God’s people. It had a lot to do with the culture wars, or what Leonard Sweet calls the “cultural tsunami”, that we in the West have shared and are still going through. Our culture has been radically changed by new ways of thinking, new technology and new cultural generators. We have churches that have wanted to hunker in the bunker and let the storm of change pass; others have become expressions of ideologies like modernity and post-modernity; some have embraced cultural shifts and come out strong on the other side; others are saying, “we have still got a long way to go, so just call us emerging.”

Alan Roxburgh in his book *Missional Map-Making* suggests that things need to go deeper. We need to rediscover again the core habits and practices that make us the people of God, and build a core community committed to living them out. Out of that, fresh expressions of church, in a myriad of different forms, will emerge. This has challenged me about whether I have thought deeply enough about starting something new or even about being involved in ministry (and I hear some of you saying, “I could have told you that, mate” ☺). Fresh expressions of church and new ventures and leading congregational change lead us to ask once again, “what does it mean to be God’s people in this context, in this time and place?”

It is a chance to stop and to rethink. In church history, we can see it in the desert fathers and in the forebears of Scottish Presbyterianism; the Celtic monks who stepped out of their culture and wanted again to rediscover what it meant to be a genuine Christian community. They wanted to be a place of healing and salvation, of learning and safety, in the midst of a world in flux. They often went off into the wilderness or to an island near a large people group, to seek after God. They developed a way of life, habits and practices to do that, and found that people would gather around them and be attracted to them. It helped that among their practices, they shared the gospel, served others and cared for the poor. Amongst many young adults, I see a longing for this counter-narrative to our consumer world; even to our consumer church that vies for our tithe/offering dollar by providing for us the flavour or the services we most want.

This leads on then to how starting from scratch affects people as leaders. Tim Keel, Senior Fellow for Congregational Studies at Laidlaw College, has been lecturing on “Missional Church Leadership” and one of the key postures he has been postulating is that we as leaders need to become learners and novices again, and to invite people on a journey of rediscovery of what it means to be a follower of Jesus and be the people of God together. Brian McLaren in his great article “Dorothy on Leadership” uses the metaphor of Dorothy in the film *The Wizard of Oz* to expand on this. Dorothy is the one who provides us with the model of leadership. In an age of strong male leadership (the film was made in 1939), this was quite revolutionary. She was the wrong gender, the wrong age and she was as lost as everyone else, but invites equally hurting and lost people to come together with her and form a community that journeys to find the answers together. Rather than having the answers, she is the chief quester. She encourages, invites and walks alongside people as they discover the answer to their brokenness and find wholeness. Starting new stuff is often a matter of letting go of the position of expert (or the one who has all the answers) and saying, “hey, come walk with me as we follow Jesus”. Starting something new has caused me to start something new within myself.

Recently we have been talking about clergy becoming more professional and I agree with that when it refers to the way we act, manage our time and manage our relationships - but I agree with McLaren when he says that we also need to rediscover being true amateurs. The word “amateur” means to do something out of love: to journey deeper into God and invite people to walk with us. Strangely I feel that this has always lain at the heart of Christian leadership.

I started StudentSoul with a day-dream of being able to do the whole production number, but reality was so much smaller

Starting from scratch has also challenged me about resources. I am drawn to the passage in Haggai 2:1-9 where those who have come back from exile are called upon to rebuild the temple, the symbol of God’s presence with his people. As they celebrate having cleared the rubble away, the enormous task of rebuilding the temple hits them. At one point, they are supposed to give a festive shout but instead the tears of many are mingled with those shouts. How can what we do now rival Solomon’s temple? It was made when we were at our peak as a nation and empire. Here we are a small rag-tag remnant (think intro to *Battlestar Galactica*) with no resources. Haggai says to them to take courage and to build because God is sovereign and able to provide the resources. It would be great to start new things from a position of strength, to have all you need. I started StudentSoul with a day-dream (yes, you can say delusion) of being able to do the whole production number, but reality was so much smaller than that. God used Dave Gibbons’ book *The Monkey And The Fish* to remind me of Moses’ encounter with the Burning Bush. You could imagine Moses thinking he would need a whole lot of military hardware to convince Pharaoh to “let my people go”. But God asks Moses a very challenging question, “what have you got in your hand?” This question reorientated Moses, and me, to look not at my wish list but at what God had given me. It now shapes what we do.



Music is still important but it will have to wait, and we sing less in our worship. We use song as a response to the use of text and video to reflect on who God is and what he has done. Silence and reflection have become more part of whom and what we are. Slowly I am starting to see that each person has gifts to bring to worship and am inviting them to bring them, to be more a part of what we do. It is strange but there is a sense of our authentic voice coming out rather than a plastic reproduction. I am aware of too much of my own voice in our worship times but know that the day is coming when we as a community will have multiple voices blending together. Even our connection with the Maclaurin Chapel and our need to be more “ecumenical” (whatever that means) has meant we have embraced the sacraments more fully as part of our worshipping life. We celebrate the Lord’s Supper each week and with this is a real sense of God’s spirit moving. The starting point is always at what you have in your hands. God has the rest under his control. We should not let lack of resources stop us from starting something new or from scratching what itches.

**W**e should not let lack of resources stop us from starting something new or from scratching what itches

I am glad that some of the tools I have in my hand are a laptop, a data-projector, a connection to the internet and good video editing software because I have to confess (it is good for the soul) that a lot of the creativity we use is borrowed - although hopefully it is just a way of kick starting our own creativity.

In reflecting on “Starting from Scratch”, maybe I have just scratched the surface. In his book, *U Theory: Leading from the Future as it Emerges*, Otto Scharmer describes a comprehensive process of listening, reflecting and acting to bring change and a preferred future. He talks of discovering how designers work and how it is different to other fields of endeavour. Designers do not perfect before they produce. They bring out prototypes; see how they work and where they do not. Then they go back to the design process and keep going. His process for change encourages that sort of experimentation and prototyping. This is the way I am approaching church planting; I have a vision and dream in mind that I believe is God-given, but I am not going to wait until I have got it all sorted and sussed before I launch. A friend at StudentSoul is a computer programmer, and as we talked about this he admitted this is what computer programmers do. They put out a version of their programme on the market and as people use it and reflect they are able to make modifications improve and change. They have feedback loops to spot glitches etc. It’s even more collaborative a process with open-source software. We are coining the phrase “church2.0”; we’re doing something new. I’m sure there will be updates and upgrades and whole new versions to come.

I started this article with a quote from Erwin McManus, and for me starting from scratch has to do with a willingness to rediscover a non-domesticated imagination; to take the risk of journeying into uncharted territory. It’s about looking through the baggage we are carrying with us to see what is worth taking and what is not, and finding other stuff that will help us on that journey.

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# A messy expression of church

Sue Fenton\*

**“Chosen... blessed... broken... given”: Henri Nouwen based his inspiring book *Life of the Beloved*, which is about being a disciple of Jesus, around these four words from the Last Supper. The *chosen*, *blessed* and *given* concepts sound OK, but the *broken* part is more challenging. What does that mean for us as individuals and faith communities? Putting cultural and contextual considerations aside, it would be hard to imagine Jesus giving each disciple their own individual whole bread roll or a neat slice off the loaf. It just wouldn't be the same. Instead he offered them a share in a broken loaf of bread that he ripped with his bare hands into uneven and ragged pieces. Every time Jesus shared food with others, there seemed to be baskets of broken bits left over... it sounds messy.**

As people of God, especially in the Presbyterian church of Aotearoa New Zealand of course, we like to think we are specially *chosen*. We believe we are loved by God, and we are quietly proud of our form of Church structure and governance, although of course we work ecumenically where we can. We have been *blessed* by the heritage of our reformed background, *blessed* with our reformed patterns of worship, which are intended to keep us on track in our services, *blessed* with our focus on Word and Sacrament, *blessed* by our General Assemblies (mostly) and Moderators, *blessed* and at times challenged by the huge theological diversity that exists within our Church.

So far, so good, but what do we do with the *broken* part? How are we as Presbyterian and Uniting parishes in NZ in this century (in whatever place on the theological spectrum we would see ourselves), being broken in order to be given to others? Are we solid crusty bread rolls, unyielding and inaccessible to those with false teeth, or no teeth? Are we prepared to break with some of our comfortable, existing patterns of worship, prepared to rip apart the loaf, in order to make the bread more easily available and accessible to others? The risk is that breaking bread into pieces will make a mess. Crumbs may drop on the floor, the pieces will be uneven, we might have to share our bread with unappealing strangers sitting next to us at the table, we may have to put some effort in, and most surprisingly, we might have fun and grow in our faith while doing it.

After a process of local community research and listening, St Mark's (part of an amalgamation of churches called Hutt City Uniting Congregations), a small and ageing, yet brave and spirited, congregation took a big risk and decided to plant a new congregation on a Friday night called Messy Church. It was made clear from the beginning that this was not being started to get more bums on seats on Sunday mornings, it wasn't designed to boost the offerings and top up the bank account, nor to gain more members in order to pay more presbytery and Assembly levies, as worthy as all these aims may be. It was simply to provide a form of worship, hospitality and accessibility to learning the way of Jesus that wasn't currently being provided at St Marks to people of all ages from the wider community.

You may have read the details of how Messy Church works in a recent *Spanz* magazine (September 2010), and if you want to know more you can contact me ([sue.fenton@extra.co.nz](mailto:sue.fenton@extra.co.nz)), look at the Messy Church website ([www.messychurch.org.uk](http://www.messychurch.org.uk)) or read the books entitled *Messy Church 1* and *2* by Lucy Moore. In short, each monthly service runs from 5pm-7pm on a Friday night and includes crafts, activities, structured worship and teaching, and a sit-down dinner, all based around a Biblical theme. It is very relational, relaxed and inclusive. It is now averaging 50-60 people of all ages, which is twice the size of the Sunday morning congregation. St Mark's minister the Rev John Turton, a team of around 12 St Mark's people, and myself, organise and run Messy Church. Each month we have had groups from at least one other church come to visit and see whether they would be interested in starting a similar expression of church. This has not been planned, promoted or orchestrated, it has just happened by word of mouth.

Rather than go into great detail about what we do at the service, what I want to address in this article are the objections, questions, comments and debates I have encountered, mainly from those within the institutional church, since Messy Church started one year ago at St Mark's.

## “I don't like the term Messy Church”

A common objection I hear from those already in churches is that they don't like the term “Messy Church”. I wonder why that is? Would we prefer church to be tidy, orderly, controlled and

predictable? Does that make us feel more comfortable and in charge? I agree there needs to be some order and structure, which there is at Messy Church at St Mark's, but we also need to remember that Messy Church is not intended to appeal to those already attending a Sunday service. If you really have a problem with the name, but like the concept, then call it something else! Most people I talk to outside the church are intrigued by the term, and feel that it sounds like a place where they would be more comfortable than an existing church service, especially with young children - and these are the people that we should be listening to.

### **How does Messy Church follow the pattern of reformed worship?**

According to one of our recommended texts when I was training at the Knox Centre of Ministry and Leadership, *The Worship Sourcebook*, the basic pattern of reformed worship is: to gather, proclaim the Word, respond to the Word, participate in the Lord's Supper, and send out. Some have voiced concerns that Messy Church is not true Reformed worship or authentically church. I would suggest that Messy Church follows this reformed pattern very closely, and often more authentically than some pew-based services I have attended. For the first 40 minutes, we gather together as an all-age congregation to laugh, play, create, talk and listen with each other, doing things together with the foundation of a Biblical text or theme; we then hear the Word for 20 minutes through music, interactive teaching, engaging as many learning styles and senses as possible, and have an opportunity to respond in some kind of prayer or reflective activity. Then we share a meal together and continue to respond to the Word made flesh in the whole body of Christ as we come together at the table. The sending out is done as we clean up together, give the leftover food out to be taken home, and bless each other as we say goodbye.

### **Will we see more people coming to church?**

My initial answer to this question is a resounding "yes". However, this depends on how we define church. What is usually implied by this question is, "will we see more people coming on a Sunday morning?" The answer to that is probably "no". This question requires the unpacking of how we define church. Does real church only happen on a Sunday morning? How do we count and assess for statistical purposes those who attend these alternative congregational services? Can we be generous and open-minded enough to consider those who may attend something like Messy Church once a month on a Friday as being as much of a member (whether official or not) as someone who comes on a Sunday morning (maybe only averaging once a month attendance too!)?

### **How would Messy Church work in different cultural contexts?**

Messy Church is not a rigid model or franchise that has to be closely adhered to. It a Fresh Expression of church ([www.freshexpressions.org.uk](http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk)) that can easily be adapted for a particular context.

### **Messy Church is just a glorified Kid's club**

Messy Church is an all-age congregation. It is made clear in our publicity that children under 14 must be accompanied by an adult. It is not a place to drop your kids and run. One of the delights of Messy Church at St Mark's is the inter-generational relationships that are forming. The other encouraging sign is that we are getting the whole family; including non-churched dads who come straight from work, join in worship, enjoy spending time with their children, and sit down to a meal that has been prepared by others. We are seeing families come who would never consider darkening the door of a church on a Sunday morning.

Messy Church at St Mark's has a long way to go. It is very much in its early stages, and there is so much more that could be developed and worked on. It is not yet financially self-sustaining, and may not be for some time. There are leadership challenges for next year. It is hard work, risky, fun, incredibly rewarding and stretching, and is taking the team who run it, and hopefully in time those who attend, on a journey of discipleship of being *chosen, blessed, broken* and *given*.

*\*The Rev Sue Fenton is Wellington Presbytery's Pioneer Mission Ministry Co-ordinator*

# Changing the conversation

Mary-Jane Konings

**W**e've been thinking about worship in Timaru. My personal observation is that people choose where to worship on four things – time, location, what might broadly be described as 'style,' and who else is going. For most people, one of those will be a strong driver. We've had people say "I don't care where the service is, as long as it is at 9am" and they've backed that up with behaviour. Others are determined to stay with a particular location, for various reasons. For some, a particular style of music or preacher or level of formality is either attractive or a disincentive. Finally, some people just want to be with people like them, or people they know.

Until recently, the Timaru Presbyterian Parish has four similar Sunday morning services that started within an hour and half of one another. Average attendance at all of these services continues to decline. A majority in all services are over the age of 65.

We've been talking about and trialling some different styles of services – café worship, SoulSpace, and interactive stations. We've trialled some combined services with all four congregations. We've trialled visiting one another. We've had several worship forums and discovered that we say we want faithful worship that is Biblically based, and theologically solid. We want a variety of expressions of worship at a variety of times. Some of us don't want to change but some of us want to hurry up and get on with some fresh expressions of what it means to be church. Some of us want to develop worship that is attractive to the community around us. Parish Council has also decided that we want to work towards becoming Kids Friendly.

But all of our discussions are with the people who are already coming - or still coming, depending on how you look at it. And we've discovered that despite our best efforts, some of our members are only starting to engage with the deeper issues involved now that there is a concrete proposal on the table to Change Our Worship. We've had several forums on the topic over the year, asked for written submissions, and encouraged the elders to discuss this as they visit but I think that many people didn't expect anything to change. One person went so far as to comment "I thought it was going to be like a Council consultation – they ask us and then do nothing".

Some of the questions that we are trying to articulate revolve around the very nature of worship and what we understand worship to be. For some, their definition of worship is based entirely on experiences of traditional Sunday morning worship.

What is worship? For some, worship is about sacred time. Rob Pearce offers an internet short course on changing to contemporary worship at [www.worshipbasics.com](http://www.worshipbasics.com), and his suggestion is that, in America at least, Sunday morning is still "church time" in the heads of most people in the West, even those with little or no church connection. And yes, I know about Saturday night mass that many Catholic churches offer, and I'll get back to you on that one. I think there is a fair bit of anecdotal evidence around that the same case could be made in New Zealand. Certainly in our community, there is a strong sense that 10am is the ideal time on a Sunday morning to gather for worship. This is when we worship. We're still going to start new things at different times, days, and places during the week, but Sunday morning remains a key focus.

What about mid-week services? At special times during the year we offer Lenten and Advent services, and by and large, they are not well attended. We have not yet attempted to build a community around a regular mid-week service, which I think is probably worth trying in a town that often empties out in the weekend as people head away to recreational activities at the lakes or nearby cities.

For some, worship is about sacred place. Whether that place is a historic building, marked by colourful windows, or a simple hall that has become for a person the place where they meet God; whatever the habits and symbols that mark the place for them, the location is a help, for some. For one of our members, the place where they worship regularly has strong ties to her family, and it is not easy for that person to contemplate worshipping in another venue. Those of us who have moved around a bit need to be careful that we don't dismiss these feelings lightly.

For some, worship is about the style: whether more head directed or heart directed, whether dominated by music with a beat, or centred around a profound celebration of the Eucharist. What



some people look for is a sense of recognition and familiarity, or perhaps simply enjoyment. At a recent combined service, we sang “Forever,” much to the delight of one member who usually worships in a more traditional service. “I know this song” he explained later. “I listen to it on a CD but I’ve never sung it in church!” For some people, different aspects help them to know that they have connected with God in a way that is recognizable and meaningful for them.

For some, a sense of encountering God is associated with community. I wonder sometimes if that sense of community is more an illusion than a reality – surely it takes more than sharing an hour in worship together to build a relationship and be a community? I’ve discovered that people worship together in the same building and still don’t know each other’s names, as we have met in small groups for “Muffins with the Minister.” As we’ve invited people to visit other congregations, people are meeting for the first time even though they have lived here for a long time and attended many of the same events. There has been great joy and in delight in the building of new relationships in the process of amalgamation for many.

One small group merged with another larger group over a year ago. They no longer meet separately for worship, but they have retained their identity, and function as a small family church in some ways. They care for one another, meet for shared meals, and continue to identify themselves as part of this special community in a helpful way, while at the same time actively participating in the wider life of the church, leading in worship in more than one location. They are a living example for us of how a community does not necessarily cease to exist if they choose to worship in a different place or different location. They are quietly challenging our assumptions about what it means to be church, and what it means to be community.

Time, location, style, community - each of these are important markers of what it means for us to worship. I think it is fair to say that our understanding of worship, as a community, is flawed. Our conversation in Timaru is an invitation to critical reflection on the nature and practice of worship. The engagement in that discussion is obviously mixed. The extent to which our worship adequately reflects the nature of God doesn’t come up very often. What often comes up are practical and pragmatic concerns. Sometimes those concerns are deeply selfish, and sometimes wonderfully missional.

What we do in worship matters. How we worship, like it or not, says a lot about how we see God.

And we don’t just want to do worship with the people who already come. We want to grow. That means doing worship both with people who used to come, but don’t at the moment, and also doing worship with people who have never, ever come to worship. And if we are serious about that, that means changing the conversation. Again.

## Forming a church planting and church growth support network

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I invite you to send me your email address so we can form a network of support and encouragement

Send it to the Rev Jim Wallace, [wallacej@wave.co.nz](mailto:wallacej@wave.co.nz)

## Ministry Exchange/Overseas Ministry Opportunities

### **Presbyterian Church (USA) – Michigan**

A minister of the Presbyterian Church (USA) seeks a three-month exchange in 2013. The minister comes from a mid-to-large-sized ecumenical church that was planted in the mid-1980s in an area that attracts a lot of tourists. The church is active in the community, providing an afterschool youth programme, monthly community meals and a discussion group at a local brewery. The minister would be on sabbatical here as part of his doctoral studies, which are focusing on Reformed theology in a postmodern setting.

### **Presbyterian Church of Canada – Owen Sound, Ontario**

A minister from a large urban parish seeks an exchange with a minister in the South Island for approximately three months. The minister's parish has a ministry team and staff and has a strong focus on homelessness and poverty. The parish offers both contemporary and traditional services.

### **United Church of Canada – Ontario**

A minister from a mid-sized rural parish seeks a three-month exchange between May and October 2011.

### **Presbyterian Church in Canada**

A Presbyterian minister from a multicultural parish near Vancouver seeks an exchange.

### **United Church of Canada – Nova Scotia**

A minister of a historic church in Halifax seeks a six-month exchange from September 2010.

### **Presbyterian Church (USA) – North Carolina**

A minister in team ministry in Charlotte is seeking an exchange with a New Zealand minister.

Please contact Juliette Bowater on [juliette@presbyterian.org.nz](mailto:juliette@presbyterian.org.nz) for more information.

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# Which of these prisoners would you have visited in prison - Jesus, Joseph, Samson, Jeremiah, Daniel, John the Baptist, Peter, James, John or Paul?

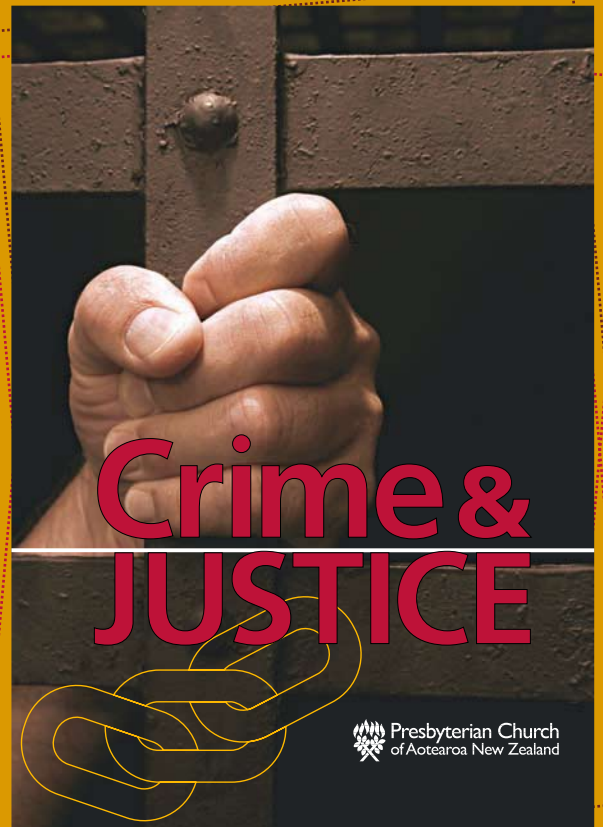
*Crime and Justice* is the latest Presbyterian Church social issues booklet. It explores the Biblical mandate for justice, punishment and forgiveness. It examines whether we are in a crime wave or if crime rates are in fact falling, how crime and our responses to it affect us all, and what actions we can take individually and collectively to reduce crime.

Why should Christians care about the perpetrators of crime as well as its victims? At the centre of the Christian faith stands the image of Christ crucified, a victim of Roman justice. Revealed in this man's dying prayer, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do," is the conviction that justice in itself is not enough, that the humanity of the perpetrators of injustice must be upheld alongside the humanity of the victims, and that justice must serve still higher goals of reconciliation, healing and rehabilitation.

*Crime and Justice* is the eighth in a series of group study booklets produced by the Presbyterian Church to encourage congregations to reflect about contemporary issues that are impacting our communities.

All parishes have been sent *Crime and Justice*. If you would like free additional copies, or copies of any of our previous seven study guides, phone (04) 801-6000 or email us at [info@presbyterian.org.nz](mailto:info@presbyterian.org.nz)

All study guides are also available on our website at [www.presbyterian.org.nz/speaking-out/resources-for-speaking-out](http://www.presbyterian.org.nz/speaking-out/resources-for-speaking-out).



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# Listening to Leonard

Martin Baker

**A few weeks ago, I had an interesting discussion with a minister who had just left a leadership role in a large, suburban church to take a position in a parachurch organisation. He reflected on the difficulties he was having finding a church to join.**

As a minister for many years, he was very conscious of the 'church shopping' phenomenon: people coming along for a few weeks to try out the church before deciding whether to stay or move on. He did not want to be seen as a church shopper but, after years of ministry and leading worship, he was looking forward to finding a place of spiritual nurture for himself. He confessed to me that he never particularly enjoyed singing, and though he greatly valued those who used their musical talents to enhance worship, he was seeking something different. He spoke to me about looking for simplicity, good Biblical teaching and time to reflect and pray, with perhaps opportunities to engage with what was being presented. Standing and sitting for hymns in some churches or in others participating for long periods of "praise time", led by a worship leader and band, were not the worship style that attracted him.

Though it might sound counterintuitive to suggest that a concert may give us reason to reflect on the place of music in worship, the wonderful experience of attending a Leonard Cohen concert made me think again about my conversation with this minister.

At 51, I was perhaps slightly younger than the average age of those who attended this sold-out event. Cohen held this Baby Boomer audience for the best part of three hours (including three encores). As I looked over them from my balcony seat, I realised that this audience was the generation who left churches in their tens of thousands in the 1960s and 70s. Unlike their children and grandchildren, a great many of those gathered here would have been to Sunday school and youth group, before moving away from church life in their teens. Like a lot of art, Cohen's music would be difficult to interpret without at least some small degree of biblical literacy; perhaps one reason for this generation to be thankful for the churches they had left.

We do not really know yet what, if any, decisions this Leonard Cohen generation are going to make about reengaging with the faith and worship of their childhood. I doubt that, for them, neither returning to a church that sings the hymns of their parents, nor being encouraged to sing songs whose lyrics are not dissimilar in depth to the pop songs of their grandchildren, will have much appeal.

Cohen's songs are gritty. They engage with the moral ambiguities of life, they question the old certitudes, they acknowledge the failure of old institutions and ideologies in dealing with the questions and experiences of an increasingly diverse and changing world. The songs, often heavily ironic, speak to people's sense of failure, loss and loneliness. The music, free of the use of platitudes and clichés to paper over the cracks of human experience, affirms a wonderful tenacity about the human endeavour.

*....I know there is an eye that watches all of us. There is a judgment that weighs everything we do. And before this great force, which is greater than any government, I stand in awe and I kneel in respect and it is to this great judgment that I dedicate this next song, "Hallelujah"...Leonard Cohen*

It may sound like I am trying out to be Cohen's publicity agent. However, I think our Baby Boomer generation, in their wealth and success, may have gained the whole world, but may also have also lost something. Cohen speaks to that loss, and maybe in doing so, he gives some clues as to where our Church voice needs to be for this generation; for my minister friend who can't find a place to worship, as well as his cohort who left those many years ago. A church that is relevant, real, meaningful and engaged. That acknowledges what the last decades of life have been like. A church where this generation hears words of authentic hopefulness within the change and complexity that has so much characterised their experience.

Thanks for your support

