

CANDOUR

News and Views for Ministers

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Sharing resources and creating networks

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Noticeboard

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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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To enquire about vacancies, please email glen.innis@xtra.co.nz or telephone 06 855-4889. Ministers are welcome to inquire regarding vacancies due to cancellations.

Bush Telegraph

Are you on the list?

Bush Telegraph is sent out by email on the 1st of every month. It contains updates from the Moderator and Assembly service team, information about new resources, a noticeboard, the latest job vacancies and news about events around the country.

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

If you can't receive information by email, contact Amanda Wells to discuss alternative arrangements (04 381-8285).

Make sure you're receiving the Church's monthly news update.

Have your say!

This is a General Assembly year, and input from the wider church is being invited on a number of different matters before the proposals are presented in their final forms to GA06.

Assembly Assessment

A report on the findings of the review of Assembly Assessment has recently been circulated to Presbyterian ministers, presbyteries and other bodies within the church. Feedback on the proposal is due with the Assembly Executive Secretary by 15 June 2006.

Stipend Review

Much work has been done on this review, and the Task Group plans to send out a report for consideration by the wider church in late April.

For details about how to contribute feedback on these and other matters that will be considered by GA06, check out:

www.presbyterian.org.nz/ga06

Reaching out and around

Amanda Wells

When I started commissioning articles for this issue, my expectations were not hugely high. But the interest and enthusiasm with which people agreed to write on sharing resources and creating networks was refreshing. Pooling our strengths provides a strong foundation for renewing mission in our communities.

To share resources implies that we're all part of a wider team; that there is no competitive gain to hoarding what you've developed. It implies that to lend part of your work to your neighbour will advance the common good. It's about more delegation and less personal responsibility; greater openness and fewer barriers.

Negative talk about presbyteries and other church structures is always floating around. But how do we deal with a structure that isn't working? Try to repair it? Demolish that structure and replace it with a new, more promising alternative? Or first seek to understand what made it fail? We're often looking for a magic bullet solution, but this issue of *Candour* illustrates that useful collaboration is occurring in the midst of – or despite – our existing structures.

Wheel reinvention really frustrates me. There's little worse in a work context than the feeling that you're figuring out how to do something that's already been done but because there's been some disconnect between then and now, you're at square one. Writing deskfiles and sets of instructions is far from interesting, but shows your belief in the value of the work you're doing, as opposed to your belief in the value of your personal contribution. Through the course of Presbyterian history in New Zealand, much has been learned about what works in our context and we shouldn't devalue this information.

Passing on knowledge can be accomplished in a variety of ways. Mentoring transfers learned experience from one generation to the next in a more subtle way. Most ministers have related examples they can think of in their own careers. If you're a fairly established minister and you're not mentoring a newer colleague, what about making contact with one? Perhaps the arrangement might be far from formal. But chances are you'll get just as much out of it as they do.

However, networking is a word that fills many people with dread. Visions of business people frantically shak-

ing hands as they swap business cards hardly connect well with more altruistic goals. But, as several articles in this issue outline, whether or not we use this label, networking is what we need to strengthen each other in our work.

It takes a long time to establish effective networks, whether business or social. Perhaps it's a year in a new town before you start forming genuine friendships; at least six months in a job before you've formed effective team relationships. It's hard to rush this process. It's the same when you join a new church. Whether minister or parishioner, it takes a while to get past social chit-chat into meaningful interactions. With some people, and in some churches, you never do. Creating real networks means abandoning the façade that things are fine, and acknowledging that we all fall and fail.

Some of our networks have grown out of our key documents. This issue seemed a good fit with an article on the path taken by the Book of Order workgroup, which sought to restructure the current Book into more user-friendly forms. Brett Johnstone outlines the process so far and suggests the new forms that the Book might take.

Other articles include a consideration by John Roxborough of presbyteries, followed by an essay from Peter Cheyne on the components that can make a presbytery effective. Robyn McPhail explains the success of the rural ministry network, while Allan Kerr considers another form of networking in a rural context. Then Bruce Fraser discusses how relationships form and what this means for a definition of networking.

Some more personal reflections on practice follow: Helen Harray relates her experience of team ministry and collaboration, while Iain Dickson explains the benefits of mentoring. Finally, Jose Reader explains how effective communication can widen your church's networking reach. The issue concludes with a reflection by Rinny Westra on our ethos and our future.

Despite the advantages of technology, the best way to create relationships and therefore networks is spending time meeting and getting to know people. This is something I'm looking forward to as Jose and I conduct our CWM-funded regional media workshops during the next six weeks.

Reworking our Book of Order

Brett Johnstone, Somervell Presbyterian, Auckland*

I have this image of Moses descending from Mount Sinai carrying two blocks of stone, feeling pleased because there were only 10 laws chiselled on them. Ruling will be a doddle, he must have thought; only 10 laws to keep track of and administer. I can see him marching down the mountain, whistling a happy tune, carrying the stone tablets. How wrong this image is. The 10 words proved a good standard, but other rules and regulations were soon added, till in some books of the Torah that's all there seems to be.

One of the aims in writing the new Book of Order was to make it smaller. We may not have achieved that aim, but we hope we have achieved our other aims, which were to make the re-written book easier to use, logical in layout, and as far as possible not weighed down with legal or ecclesiastical language.

Once we started on our task, we quickly realised that our current Book of Order is made up of a range of different material. There are laws, historical documents, how-to guides, thoughtful reflective pieces and various statements of policy from General Assembly. The current Book of Order reminds me of my father-in-law's library, which had a basic structure of commentaries, theology, pastoral issues texts, worship and liturgical texts, but in which it wasn't unusual to find a detective novel placed next to Calvin's Institutes. Our Book had grown like top-sy, and needed a good old rake out.

We have done this. What we have done is put like material with like. We have created a stable of four "books". The first book contains all the regulations of the church; the law of the church. The second contains the subordinate standards of the Church, the third contains the various procedures of the Church, and the fourth gathers together all the various historical and doctrinal statements of the Church.

The first book is The Book of Order. It contains a short opening chapter that gives the context of the Church, including the regulations that set out the supreme and subordinate standards of the Church. Then there are some 16 short chapters that contain the various regulations regarding church councils, presbyteries, discipline and the Assembly. We have gathered all the regulations regarding membership into one chapter, and we have included a chapter on property and finance. We have created sepa-

rate chapters on ministers and elders, ordinations, inductions and commissioning, as well as a separate chapter on ministry settlement.

The third book will be the most fluid of the four, as it will contain various manuals or procedural guides. Some of these are in the process of being written and we hope will be available before the Assembly. The main one will be the new conditions of service manual, which will contain everything relating to standard terms of call, employment contracts and the like. Other procedure manuals could be ones to do with ministry settlement, treasurer's manuals, ordination and induction manuals, training manuals and so on. Though we talk about this as a "book", in reality it may be a loose collection of manuals, most likely available on the church's website.

The fourth "book" will contain other material in the existing Book of Order that the church needs to keep. This includes the various statements on ordination, historical material relating to the Union of the Otago and Southland Synod, and so on. The second book is of course the Westminster confession and the catechisms.

Our committee has confined its work to the first of our stable of books, that is the Book of Order. In rewriting this we have sought to use clear language, and a logical framework for each chapter. In breaking the old Book up into more and shorter chapters, we hope it will be easier to navigate. We have also produced a table that shows the relationships between the main chapters, and a chapter of defined terms that we hope will be useful in keeping the book internally consistent. Each chapter has an index at the start, and there is a general index at the start of the whole Book.

On 25-26 March, our committee met with a range of people from across the Church for a weekend consultation over the new Book. The weekend was helpful and very fruitful. People pointed out gaps we needed to plug and some material that could be dropped. We were grateful for the feedback we received and hope to present to the General Assembly in September a Book of Order that will serve the church and the mission of our Lord for the next 100 years.

**Brett Johnstone is a member of the Book of Order Rewrite Committee*

Presbyteries: Pain and empowerment

John Roxborough, School of Ministry, Dunedin

We need “healthy presbyteries” as well as “healthy congregations.” Parishes cannot do all that mission needs doing, nor be all that we require to be fully church. However, strong our sense of identity as congregations or through our connection with Christian movements, we also need to be part of the wider church, nationally, globally and ecumenically.

Like the Christian life itself, this is a spiritual reality that needs to be embodied in human life. The church is not only who we are locally; it is who we are together, and who we are in connection with the whole body of Christ. We need structures that expose people to these dimensions. Presbyteries are part of that story. They are not some sort of trap people have fallen into, even if for most of us they are not yet the energising centres of life and mission they could be. If presbyteries are to be more about empowerment than associated with pain or embarrassment, they need to change.

Of course, this is a journey most presbyteries have been on for some time. Change itself is not usually the problem. A reformed heritage gives us permission to change our structures for the sake of the mission of the church – more perhaps than we sometimes realise.

The difficult thing is agreeing on what is needed, and finding cures that are not worse than the disease. We may know that we need new ways of freeing up people and churches to follow the Spirit; even if minimising the effects of sin and foible is an exercise in containment, not of perfection. However, we are not always sure where the Spirit is leading us. There is no escape from extended, informed and prayerful discussion.

It can be helpful to remember that over time the primary functions of presbyteries have changed. After the Reformation, they developed out of sessions whose responsibilities included all the congregations in a town, and as replacements for the diocesan structures of the medieval church. Scotland’s story was affected by the politics of the day, but the idea of leadership of the Church by assemblies of elders in which none could hold authority over the other became a key.

Presbyteries were one level of this model, which found its inspiration not only in secular models such as city councils (others were session, synod, general assembly and in-

ternational assembly), the Conciliar Movement attempts at reform in the previous century, and the ecumenical councils of the early church, but also in Acts 15 and other Biblical examples. The purpose of presbytery developed from fellowship, Biblical teaching and responsibility for discipline, to a quasi-legal court of appeal. They had a mission for the provision of places of worship to cover the territory, the supervision of education and poor relief, and the processing of disputes.

Today we need to reassess whether the things we do are worth the energy, and to have a clear sense of where commitment beyond the parish is worthwhile. It may be that an important part of the discussions we need is to gain clarity about the pastoral, discipline, and mission functions that are best dealt with regionally. We may need to be quite radical in pruning what would be nice but is no longer essential. We may need to allow parishes more space to make their own mistakes. We may need to see all our assemblies as more about inspiring and encouraging others rather than telling them what to do. To get there, we also have to address not only the mission focus of the business of our presbyteries; we also have to address the culture of interaction that surrounds the process itself.

Even at their best, for younger elders and youth leaders, presbyteries are a spectacle from another planet. Yet there is diversity and complexity in our experiences of presbytery. What is seen as good change by some is seen as a recipe for disaster by others. We may not share the negative or the relatively positive experiences of others, but we need to take both seriously if we are to reach consensus about new structures and more appropriate cultures of decision-making and conflict resolution. It is frustrating when there may be a common sense of malaise but not an agreed vision of how things need to be and how to get there.

Both the problem and the solution lie in our values, our attitudes to others and our way of life as a community. Some things need Book of Order change through formal decision making. Some things need a change of heart and culture, which cannot be expressed in regulation. We may find that one of the lessons is that communication is more important than being concerned about winning debates.

As long as Presbyteries involve open forums, meetings will at times be unhappy places. We cannot have a par-

participatory life based on a theology that believes that each person has something to offer, without the risk of forms of Presbyterian road rage. If presbytery meetings are to no longer be places where bad behaviour is excused, they also need to be communities that help people face and process their frustration – including the frustration and anger generated by presbytery itself.

We are not always going to agree. We should not expect to, but we can give space for healing, reconciliation, and mutual understanding, even with views strongly held. Being church is about being big enough to know that gatherings of wounded healers will sometimes be more about one than the other. But it will also be about making it less likely rather than more likely that we dump stuff on one another, and that we learn ways of acting together that model Christian standards.

Hopefully we really are leaving behind cultures of language and procedure that have outlived their usefulness, and will no longer give permission for insult, politicking, and seeking to effect change by narrow majority rather than general consensus. In the quite recent past, some meetings have been places of humiliation and convoluted process more than of fellowship, inspiration and effective decision-making. It may be a long haul. We can commit to moving from being places where trust and transparency seem hard to find, to places that reflect the best of participatory decision-making and the avoidance of power games and corruption. Peacemakers seldom get there in a day, and we should not be surprised by the time scale or the cost involved.

Sometimes our best contribution in a meeting is to do nothing and pray. Chronic helpfulness can prolong agony rather than save time or improve the quality of decisions. Wrangling over points of order like aged sumo wrestlers may demonstrate that some care about process, but it might just be better to let the moderator make a mistake.

Even at their worst, presbyteries have often rescued me out of my own little world. They have forced me to take seriously people and views I need to understand better than I want to. In the long run, they have made me pleased to be part of a church that works serious stuff through seriously, whether I agree with a particular outcome or not. We are stronger for facing issues rather than avoiding them.

Respect is the essence of empowerment of people to take responsibility for their lives and ministry. It may be less difficult than we think for presbyteries to become bodies that are considered a privilege to belong to, that contrib-

ute to a sense of the catholicity of the Church, and that renew not only congregations through its resource and planning decisions, but its people through the inspiration of its vision and the support of its fellowship in a common cause.

A few ideas of things we could do:

- 1) Make the practical application of John 15 an exercise in prayer and action for every level of the Church.
- 2) Take time for celebration, encouragement and thanks.
- 3) Let go of the need to know: trust others to make decisions without everybody being involved in everything.
- 4) Put executive decisions in the hands of working ministers and elders; consult with senior ministers and elders, but restrict decisions to those holding parish positions.
- 5) Allow parishes to make their own mistakes with their own resources.
- 6) Commission profiles for each presbytery that outline the history of mission in the presbytery area, how places of worship were established, and the story of how the community and the church interacted. Share that story and grow it year by year.
- 7) Introduce peer reviews for presbyteries and allow parishes to invite review by parties of their choice who may be from other presbyteries.
- 8) Make courtesy a way of life.

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Maintaining a positive presbytery

Peter Cheyne, Calvin Presbyterian, Gore

Mataura presbytery is a small but happy presbytery. Whether or not it is effective is a different question and, of course, can only be measured when we know what we are meant to be achieving. Some years ago, at a retreat, the ministers came up with a statement that was subsequently adopted by the presbytery. According to that statement: presbytery has a passion to fulfil its leadership role in encouraging parishes to work together, supporting and resourcing one another in order to grow the Kingdom of God in this region.

That is not too different from the often-repeated statement that presbyteries exist to resource mission.

We like our statement. We think it says some important things very well. At the same time, we recognise that the real question is whether or not we are fulfilling it. Periodically, we ask ourselves that question because the reality is that we are not.

Relationships

Mataura is a happy presbytery largely because it is united and has very few real differences of opinion. There is a family feel to it because of its small size, and because there is substantial theological harmony. Time that might otherwise be wasted in tiresome debates can be spent more constructively and there is good understanding of the issues the different churches are facing and support for one another.

Some suggest our presbyteries, in general, are far too small. That may be true. Certainly, when it comes to needing more specialised skills to handle difficult issues (for example, sexual misconduct) small presbyteries often don't have the required expertise. We have tried to overcome that by joining with neighbouring presbyteries to appoint those sorts of people to serve across the presbyteries.

Most of us probably enjoy being in a small presbytery where we know each other well and distances are not too great. That is not to say that we would not discover real advantages from being part of a bigger unit.

Presbytery meetings

For a number of years now, our meetings have included a "ministry equipping slot" from 8:30 to 9:30pm. Speakers are invited to share something that would equip presby-

tery members in their ministries. Recently, we have had: a panel speaking about the future of rural ministry in our area; Alan Kerr speaking about pastoral visiting; an elder speaking about "the interface between church and community in rural parishes"; Kevin Ward speaking about the modern mission environment; and parishes that had used "40 Days of Purpose" sharing their learning with other parishes.

These times are quite specifically not for someone to come and speak about his/her ministry or missionary activity. The purpose is equipping members for ministry. Parishioners other than those serving on presbytery are welcome, although we haven't been very diligent about advertising. It is also slightly more difficult now that presbytery is moving around.

Until about a year ago, presbytery met every time in Gore (except for those meetings when a new moderator was to be inducted). More recently, we have chosen to move the meeting around all of the parishes. In this way we hope to increase people's awareness of presbytery and sense of connection with it.

Our intention has been to modify the meeting structure so as to increase the focus on the parish being visited. We have always had a part of the meeting when we have broken into groups to pray for a couple of the parishes within the presbytery, or some other event that is looming (for example, an Easter or Labour Weekend camp). Now, we pray only for the parish where we are meeting. This follows a period of worship led by that parish and it has been suggested that the parish could report on whatever is current so that the presbytery is better informed. It has also been suggested that the equipping topic could be tailored to be relevant to the host parish.

Presbytery has traditionally started at 7pm but we are now starting at 6:30pm. That makes it slightly more awkward for presbytery members to get to, being earlier and closer to meal times, but the rationale is that the business can be finished by 7:30pm and parish members invited to join us then rather than coming out at 8:30pm.

There has been talk about delegating some business matters so that they don't all have to be handled in the presbytery meeting, but this needs to be developed more.

The meetings are enjoyable and the equipping slots valuable. However, meetings are not enough to truly fulfil our statement.

Churches Working Together

There is relatively little working together of parishes. There is some sharing of resources or personnel but it is limited. There is little strategic planning of events or programmes designed to enhance mission within the region, other than what individual parishes do.

We do have a scheme whereby each parish prays for another parish in the presbytery each month. Prayer coordinators send the prayer topics for their parish on to another parish and distribute the ones they receive, so that they are included in prayer within worship or small groups or whatever. This is a direct parish-to-parish link. The information doesn't pass through the presbytery meeting itself.

Collegiality

There are good relationships between the ministers. We know each other well and support each other. However, they remain moderately superficial. Over the years we have tried having a lunch together once a month so that we can chat and discuss and pray. Time pressures (or is it poor prioritising?) mean that only some attend and these meetings have tended to fizzle out. If there is to be greater support for one another, more time is going to have to be invested in the relationships and there needs to be a greater willingness to be vulnerable with one another.

The relationships are good, and we have had some retreats and social events, but they could be a lot better. There is relatively little contact other than at presbytery meetings – despite being theologically aligned and within reasonable distance of each other.

Some sub-networks have developed. For example, the ministers in the lower Maitai Valley formed their own team and met weekly, gaining good support from each other. However, changes in personnel have meant that this has ceased in the meantime.

Relationships require an investment of time. The dream of the presbytery requires intentional fostering. Otherwise, we are all busy enough working in our own little patch, even though more co-operation might produce better results.

Collaboration with other churches

There are other churches in some towns within the presbytery and, in general, the churches work together well.

There is a significant desire amongst the Gore churches to work together more closely. That means that Presbyterian ministers are involved in two networks, both seeking ways of co-operating in order to extend the Kingdom. Given the comments about the investment of time required, which network is most worthy of that investment? And then there is the tension of knowing how much time to invest in these relationships as compared with working to lead and develop one's own church.

If the churches in a region were to work together, that might mean forming one network rather than having two, both seeking the same end. Indeed, the suggestion has recently been made that the presbytery and the Ministers' Association could perhaps merge. Who knows whether that idea would gain any traction and what the consequences would be?

There is much that is already being done and an awful lot more that could be done. But through it all Maitai remains a happy and positive environment in which to minister. I, for one, am very grateful for the support of the other pastors around me.

The central issue remains growing the Kingdom of God. We need to be open to how best to do that.

Ministry Study Grants

Are you a Presbyterian minister planning further study?

Applications are invited in April and September each year for Post-ordination Study Grants for ministers in good standing of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. These grants are made possible through the generosity of the Mary Ann Morrison and M S Robertson estates.

How do I apply?

Applicants are asked to address the criteria and set out their expected costs including conference fees, tuition fees, basic accommodation and travel, and to supply any other information that may be relevant.

Enquiries to Juan Kinnear, The Registrar, School of Ministry, Knox College, Arden Street Opoho, Dunedin. Applications are due on 30 April and 30 September respectively.

See www.presbyterian.org.nz for full details of the criteria for applications.

Keeping the rural ministry grass growing

Robyn McPhail, Wesleydale Memorial Church, Kaeo

One of the best booster shots for rural ministry work has been happening as I write this article: a visit from another rural ministry practitioner, with the opportunity this brings to question and be questioned; to listen and be listened to.

Heather Walker, a Methodist presbyter in East Anglia, UK, has been on study leave visiting different parts of New Zealand. She is exploring ways of providing ministry support to rural churches as times change and old models no longer function. She'd approached the Methodist Church of New Zealand, who immediately referred her to the rural ministry network. A flurry of emails among us led to invitations to Canterbury, Nelson, Manawatu, Hawkes Bay and Northland.

The rural ministry network in New Zealand is incorrigibly ecumenical, from which stems both its strength in practical terms and its "edge status" in relation to denominational church structures. It is also self-propagating and a matter of choice for those involved. People with a heart for the Gospel in the rural context seem to have instinctively linked up with one another and have pooled their resources of hope in the face of hopelessness. Solidarity has produced a greater sense of purpose in being rural churches and it has helped nurture a rural theology and language that has enhanced the worship life of rural church people and in turn fuelled their mission as a church.

There is support, encouragement and the challenge of knowing that even though you are small, you can still have a mission in your community, if you are willing to heed the Gospel call. And it's catching: that's the self-propagating aspect, as rural church people meet up with other rural church people and discover the value of sharing ideas and experiences. This rural network that I got drawn into some years back, in Central Otago and then in Mid-Canterbury, is a bit like the northern grass kikuyu. At one point, kikuyu was introduced to this country but since then it has just grown as it will. It sends out runners to spread new connections and it's a survivor. It is one grass that will keep growing when the conditions are too harsh for anything else.

Rural networking has been much like that over recent decades. Trans-Tasman conferences, forums and workshops in different regions, and ideas and stories shared through

a rural ministry newsletter have been our kikuyu, helping us survive and even thrive, as well as spreading the word that rural churches have a mission that counts.

Changing times in the 1970s were the context for the first efforts in intentional support for rural churches and their leaders. Church, university and community leaders got together to examine the social and economic changes that were happening. Their goal was to help churches and communities respond constructively. By the early 1980s, rural church leaders from Australia and New Zealand were working together to identify viable options and signs of hope in what seemed a hopeless context of political and climatic crisis. Trans-Tasman conferences continue to be held every four years, with the next one to be in the Nelson-Marlborough area in 2008.

Within New Zealand, two regions that had taken a turn to host one of these conferences – Canterbury and Hawkes Bay – built on the ecumenical foundation their host role provided and continued to work together on rural issues. Over the years, they have held training events and forums for rural church people. The Canterbury group also saw the potential of developing a national ecumenical newsletter. "Rural Network News" is now in its 11th year and is produced up to three times a year.

"Stories of change and stories of hope" would be the best short description of this newsletter. Not "stories of success", that is, the kind of thing where you read about a church somewhere else and you feel inadequate in contrast, or feel you have no hope of being able to achieve anything comparable. The pattern with rural people has been to tell the story of how it is; complaints and problems as well as points of pride or satisfaction. Those who read the stories of other places may get ideas for their situation, but just as important is the catalyst to think through their own story and identify the positives they can build on.

Farming people have always talked together like this. I remember Sunday mornings in the 1960s, when we had an hour in church and then an hour waiting while the adults talked. Whether it was about farming or family, the government or society, it was pretty much the classic SWOT analysis, even if often in reverse order: beginning with the threats and opportunities from outside influences and edging around their own weaknesses and strengths.

Networking among rural church people is our chance to do that sort of talking together. That's why some of us put time and energy into getting together for conferences, encouraging regional groups like the Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit and rounding up stories to share in the newsletter.

Anyone is welcome to join the newsletter mailing list (donations towards costs are invited) and the link to all editions stored on the School of Ministry website is provided through Bush Telegraph whenever a new edition comes out. This has been our primary means for linking rural church people together across New Zealand and it

also gives access to news and views from other parts of the world through the International Rural Church Association. Like rural ministry networking in New Zealand, IRCA has been formed through the energy and enthusiasm of rural church people in different parts of the world and aims to offer support and broaden our perspective on the gospel through interaction with people in different rural contexts from our own.

Please get in touch with me at chirmac@xtra.co.nz if you have rural church news to share, or would like to hear what others are saying.

Networking through care and prayer

Alan Kerr, Knapdale/Waikaka Presbyterian, Southland

Today I watched two headers circling a paddock of wheat with lorries in tow to collect the grain pouring from the bins when the headers paused. This was no ordinary harvest; it was an attempt on the world record for wheat production per hectare. As I watched I was aware of the network of relationships at work in the paddock. There was the river silt soil, rich in nutrients. There was the weather, variable and testing. There was the farmer and his wife, anxious, yet relieved the wheat was finally being lifted off. There were the agronomist and the MAF scientists who had advised the farmer throughout the months of "gestation". There were the Justices of the Peace to verify everything was done properly. There were the drivers of the various vehicles and supportive neighbouring farmers and friends. Even the minister was there! It was a reminder that none of us lives alone; our lives are sustained by a network of relationships, with the creation, with one another and, supremely, with God.

This is the story of discovering and creating networks in the rural Presbyterian parish of Knapdale-Waikaka in Southland. My wife and I arrived in the parish 20 months ago in the depth of winter. As I pulled the car up onto the lawn in front of the manse I felt the wheels lock and slide forward on the spongy surface. Our daughter, driving another car, drove boldly onto the lawn and promptly got stuck in the mud. Our new neighbour, seeing our plight from her veranda, shouted, "welcome to Southland!"

Over the next three months, we went up and down every muddy gravel road in the parish and knocked on every house we could see and introduced ourselves: "My name is Alan Kerr and I am the new Presbyterian minister to the

district and this is my wife Marion." Once people got used to the idea that this was the Presbyterian minister and his wife and we had no secret agenda, we were almost invariably given a warm welcome. If people had a reasonably firm church connection, they would soon tell us and we were able to affirm the connection and encourage them to develop it. Of course many folk had only a tenuous link with a church and they would respond to my question about a church connection hesitantly, not wishing to cut themselves off altogether but also not wanting to be too close to it. One day we visited a young mother who was distracted by her crying baby and anxious for us to be on our way. As we were going I asked her if she had any association with a church and she said, "no, nothing". We went to the next house and I asked the man the same thing and he said, "anything, anything at all".

We have now visited most homes in the parish several times. When we knock on the door we are almost always instantly recognised and invited in. Most people realise we are not after their money or even to get them to come to worship. We are there to talk with them about their work, their family and any troubles they may have.

We are finding people are responding to our visits more warmly now that they are getting used to us and we are getting to know them. Increasingly, we are able to pray with them before we leave. However, this a sensitive matter. We don't feel free to pray with folk who have a firm pastoral bond with other churches. We feel it would be a kind of trespass to do so. On the other hand, we do not hesitate to visit such people on behalf of the community in which we all share.

What of those who have a very slender church connection, if any? Should we pray with them? I see no reason why we shouldn't, if people are willing for us to pray. When they have been laying before us all the stresses and troubles of their lives, what else can we do but turn to prayer. It seems the most natural thing to do.

Sometimes the mention of prayer comes as a shock. People are not used to having someone pray in their home sitting around the table with empty cups of tea and a partly eaten plate of tomato-topped crackers. But invariably they are grateful that their burdens have been placed in the sure hands of the Lord.

This prayer ministry finds corporate expression twice a week, first in the meeting on Tuesday at 6:45am at the Knapdale Sunday School Hall where about a dozen people (mostly men) gather summer and winter to give thanks and pray for local and national needs. Mostly these needs will be known to the group through the weekly church service sheet and the local and provincial newspapers. Often we pray for individuals. Here care is taken to preserve confidentiality of information gleaned through visiting. We do not want to damage the trust we have built up with folk by speaking of their private concerns to others. The second prayer group meets at the Manse on the Waikaka side of the parish at the more respectable hour of 10am on Fridays. Our focus at this gathering is the Waikaka district, which is different from the Knapdale and Otama communities. Our concern at both these meetings is to lift our communities to the Lord, asking God to touch people's lives with His saving grace through Christ.

One of the more recent group of arrivals in our communities is the modern dairy farmer. These people work very hard, with little relief for community activity. Generally they don't stay long in the district because they want to get ahead. "Gypsy Day" is 1 June, when dairy farmers are on the move with children and furniture. This year, our session has decided to make up a "welcome package" for all the new dairy people coming into the district. This consists of groceries, meat and vegetables and information about organisations in the district. We hope this initial hospitable offering will open the door to the formation of significant relationships.

One Sunday afternoon, about the middle of February, I baptised two young women in the Pomahaka River. The congregation was gathered on the bank and after the baptism, when we had clambered up out of the river, one of the baptised young women was standing, waiting for the next part of the service. Our oldest member aged 88 came forward and put his hand on her shoulder and said,

"Grandmother would be so pleased". Those who heard thought he was referring to the young woman's grandmother, but he was actually speaking of his own grandmother who died 80 years ago. She would have been the young woman's great great grandmother. This remarkable woman of prayer had asked God to touch the lives of her offspring. One of her sons became a missionary in India, another a Presbyterian minister and the third, though blinded in the First World War, became an evangelist in rural parishes throughout New Zealand, and now here a great, great granddaughter is professing faith in God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and being baptised in the river. Prayer touches not only those in the present but also those yet to be born. What more can I say? "I believe in the communion of saints!"

EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST ARE INVITED FOR AN ADDITIONAL FULL-TIME MINISTER AT COASTAL UNITY PARISH, DUNEDIN

Coastal Unity Parish is involved in a range of exciting ministries and seeks an ordained minister who will nurture, encourage and contribute creatively to these ministries in co-operation with the existing ministry team.

We are also looking for someone with vision who will develop and respond to new ministry opportunities within the community.

We look forward to welcoming someone who:

- Is enthusiastic about collegial team ministry
- Can share a theology that is closely connected to every day reality/living
- Shares the vision for the ministry and mission of the whole parish
- Approaches ministry with theological insight and wisdom
- Has a Christ-centred faith
- Liberates and encourages the gifts and ministry of others
- Will be committed to building the whole community of CUP
- Is vibrant and enthusiastic in their faith
- Can lead people to a greater depth of faith
- Leads people forward and takes people along with them
- Has good communication skills
- Shares the joy and humour of following Christ

For more information, contact the nominator:

Rev Helen Harray
03 473-7511 or 027 473-0042

Making networking meaningful

Bruce Fraser, mission advisor, Synod of Otago and Southland

“Would you write something for *Candour* about networks?” Who me? What do I know about networks? I’m not so sure that I can be of much help on this topic. I have many contacts but then that is the nature of what I do. In my function as the Regional Mission Advisor for the Synod of Otago and Southland, I get to meet very interesting people in various interesting and diverse places. I am in touch with those people so I suppose that is, in a sense, a network.

I enjoy the convenience of modern technology and the ease with which we are able to contact each other, but I value more meeting face-to-face, perhaps sharing a drink together, taking time to talk and build relationships. Is that networking, I ask? I do get concerned that with the convenience of electronic communication, we are increasingly dealing with each other in an impersonal way. Is that networking? I don’t think that chat rooms are necessarily good examples of networking – connecting with people and ideas, yes, but is that networking? To my mind, no! How can you communicate effectively with someone when you cannot hear the inflection of the voice, see the body language, sense the emotion/passion as you talk face-to-face, and explore the way we use words differently? I suppose this sounds a bit like I’m a technical Luddite. Not so, really. What I am trying to say is, beneficial as modern communication is, to me the best form of networking involves time taken to meet face-to-face, which in the end helps understanding when it comes to other forms of communication.

I suppose the key for me is enabling the other person to sense that you are really interested in them for who they are. I have to work at this myself. I recall a parishioner going through a very difficult time and it being suggested to them that they might be helped by getting involved in something in the church. The retort was, “are they only interested in me for what I can do, not for who I am!” It’s the idea that the person is of importance and interest for themselves that I think makes for effective good networking. I wonder then, if for some, networking is simply a way of forming connections from which we can glean, gather, harvest or flog ideas.

I look at the example of Jesus and His network. It was intentional and highly personal. I suppose what I am saying is that networks are relationships more than connections. Certainly here in the Synod region there is great

opportunities to build relationships because of the way the Synod conducts its business. There is cross-communication through six presbyteries, each with its own distinctive flavour, but the commonality of the Synod means we have to meet and talk with each other. There is the opportunity to build significant relationships over quite a large geographic area.

Certainly in my own experience I have found this to be true. I have lived and worked in the Synod area for six years now and when I took up this post with the Synod, I already had a network through the common work of the Synod.

So, to build a meaningful network there needs to be opportunities for people to get together, to get to know one another, share ideas face-to-face, to laugh and cry together. Is this what Scripture means when it talks of the community of the faithful?

I suppose that in some ways I am defining networking into a very narrow frame. After all, the dictionary defines a network as connections for the exchange of ideas. In that sense it is much broader than I would appear to suggest. Which is why I asked if I really knew anything about the subject. However, I am mindful of the words of Paul Simon: “people talking without listening”. That was true when he wrote “The Sound Of Silence” and I wonder if all the exchange of ideas has made any measurable improvement to our world, or even the church to which we belong. I suspect there is a lot of talking past each other and few are really listening. It is easier to talk past one another when we are not face-to-face nor interested in each other for who we are. There is a huge flow of information but are we any better informed as a result? I wonder if, as people involved in church leadership, we are more interested in “networking” and chasing information in all the places we can go to find it, but failing to actually take time to listen to the One voice that is the real source of information for us in our vocation.

Enough, the preacher is starting to emerge! So to sum up: networking is not a word I like to use. Building significant relationships is what I advocate. That seems to me to be the cry of the age in which we live, an age that is being buried in information and shallow connections. As followers of Jesus wouldn’t it be better to be counter-cultural?

My experience of collegiality

Helen Harray, St Stephen's/Leith Valley, Dunedin

For the past four years, Richard Dawson and I have worked as associate ministers, effectively as colleagues, in developing student.soul. Now we are associate ministers of St Stephen's/Leith Valley, with two congregations. Richard takes responsibility for Leith Valley and I for student.soul, but we both make contributions in each other's patch. This year we have begun a third service at 11:15am, which is a combination of students and Leith Valley people and offers more teaching and discipling as its emphasis.

As a new minister in 2002, my brief was to plant a church on the Otago University campus. I was doing this with Richard, but it was clear from the

outset that he already had an enormous responsibility at Leith Valley and that I would need to lead the way. Richard gave me a huge amount of room to develop this ministry the way I wanted, but was constantly there as a sounding board and a physical presence at every service, in every social event and on our many camps. Four years down the track, he continues to fulfil this kind of role and things have evolved as we've have gotten used to each other, and the students to us.

How does our team work?

On a practical level, we have a weekly two-hour meeting in which we discuss the coming services, debrief the events of the last week, talk through pastoral concerns, pray, wrestle through theology and with where the church is going. During the week, we keep in contact as things come up and have learnt the value of close communication and of keeping things out in the open as they happen.

Time and persistence has helped us to develop a relationship that we both value enormously and find supportive and safe. It comes out of the context of us both having good marriages and spouses who complement us and add balance to our lives and partnership. There is much humour and a place to argue or creatively communicate, where neither of us feels threatened or under attack. We support each other and our families in prayer, and we find that the burden of ministry is halved and shared as we do this.

We both have regular monthly or fortnightly supervision and spiritual direction. This is not an option but an essential key to our working relationship. We don't counsel each other. We know that the relationship is confidential and therefore provides a safe context for discussing concerns knowing that there is a place for that which is secure. This can mean that our marriage relationships are not burdened as much by those particular dynamics.

It has been a journey to learn to trust each other enough to say the things that bug us and to be prepared to be honest about how we perceive each other's ministry and interaction with people.

It comes with time and experiences. I think this is also possible because neither of us is trying to be the best. There isn't a competition. In fact what I admire about Richard is a consistent attitude of humility and teachability. He has listened to and embraced the values I have of relationality and of becoming more self-aware, of attending to mental and emotional health issues and of building communities that reflect this. Maybe what one might call more feminine values. He allows me a lot of room and this has empowered me as a woman in ministry to do the things that tend to come out of my right brain and my intuition, not always the logical, "normal" way of doing things. In many ways, he has held a safe place for me to express my gifts and his encouragement has given me the courage to go ahead.

At the same time, he brings to the team a wealth of theological understanding. As we talk together, an interaction between the different ways we see and approach things and then how this applies practically to students becomes possible.

Over the years, our partnership has developed to the point where we can interact conversationally as we lead the evening services. This comes out of long discussions around the theme and the Bible beforehand, and some practice. It means that we can bring out our differing perspectives as we share the communicating of the content. We find this approach is well received as it allows different voices, it brings a visual face to the two genders up front as role

models and “parents” and thus the often-differing way of expressing something theological or practical. It also takes some of the pressure out of one person having to communicate a huge body of teaching. But while I say that, there is no great simplicity about the kind of interactive, visual and kinesthetic approach we take to the content of a typical student.soul service! It calls a lot out from us on every level and to be honest neither one of us could do it for long on our own.

The more we go on, the more we value our partnership; the hugeness of enjoying regular support, encouragement,

feedback and the shared opportunity for brainstorming and visioning for the future. Neither of us anticipates nor wants to be in any future ministry that doesn't have this component. We can't stress enough the value of spiritual support when one is tired from carrying something alone or under spiritual attack and not always realising. The other can often see what is going on, can offer prayer and stand in the gap. A team approach has the benefit of corporate wisdom, in our case also a balance of gender, an ability to bring out the best in the other's spiritual gifts and perspectives and above all a sense of God's purpose and blessing.

Creating networks through mentoring

Iain Dickson, St Andrew's Presbyterian, Te Puke

At the beginning of a new millennium, we find the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand Church declining in numbers, with the majority of its members in the retirement age bracket. Our churches are often losing the connection between generations. Many older people are perplexed as to why the younger generation do not want to hold to the same faith and values that they do. The older generation are at a loss as to how to pass on their faith to this new generation and fulfil Jesus' commandment to make disciples.

Jesus told his disciples that a “...disciple is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully qualified will be like the teacher.” (Luke 6:40). Since Jesus is the supreme mentor, or exemplary role model, with whom each of us develops a Christian moral character, the whole Christian tradition points to him as the source of its vision and virtue.

This is especially true for new Christians who need some basic teaching for Christian living and service. Since the elder has gone a long way in achieving such a character, it seems only right for them to begin to shape another person's character by becoming a role model for Christian living.

Most Christians can identify a person who, at some time in their life, had a significant and positive impact on them. We look at them and say, “they really know what life is about. I want that for myself. I want to be like them”. It is this power of example that is the most formative influence on shaping character.

What the Christian faith community needs are Godly role models to look up to and turn to when times get tough. As long as there is someone behind them, beside them, supporting them, then the next generation will always have the strength to keep going.

But what is Christian mentoring? John Mallison defines Christian mentoring as “...a dynamic, intentional relationship of trust in which one person enables another to maximise the grace of God in their life and service (Mentoring: Scripture Union, 1999)”.

If mentoring is the relational glue that can bond our generation to the previous and to the next, then it is something that every Christian leader should be involved in. It does not require any special skills; just an ability to listen and offer friendship, guidance, and encouragement. I am part of a network where much of this is done via email. The network at present consists of senior and younger ministers who meet once a year as a group to support and encourage one another, as well as responding by email to any ministerial problems that the younger protégé may be experiencing.

If we are to be intentional in turning the current tide of church decline and in being proactive in recruiting potential leaders for full-time ministry, then it would be wise for our ministers and people in leadership to begin to see themselves as mentors to this next generation. There is ample evidence to suggest that many young people have felt called by God to full-time ministry but do not follow through because of problems. Many of these are

problems that a mentor could have helped to solve with a quick email or a chat over the phone. It is not only young ministers who need help; there is evidence to suggest that many senior leaders within our congregations also could benefit from the mentoring process.

It is encouraging to remind ourselves that it is a requirement of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand for ministers to see a supervisor once a month so that they can share and utilise the wisdom and ministry experience of other professionals. However, in many churches around the world today, we hear of ministers and staff leaving their posts. Mentors could have helped these leaders through their spiritual crises and perhaps sparked a spiritual awakening within their God-given vocation.

This suggests that far more ministers need mentors than there are ministers who have made the decision to become a mentor. But I would also suggest that it is the responsibility of the minister to make a commitment to the Lord to make him or herself available to be used as a mentor to others. Hopefully we will see other ministers networking together to encourage and support those who are just starting out in ministry.

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Community-based Mentoring

The church has a lot to offer the community at large in creating networks through mentoring relationships where church values are often under-valued.

In July 2004, Judge Andrew Beecroft was a speaker at the Youth in Local Government Conference held in Dunedin. He was Dunedin's Youth Court Judge at the time and gave six characteristics of serious young offenders:

1. 85 percent male
2. No male role model/family dysfunction
3. Up to 80 percent not "engaged" with school
4. Up to 75-80 percent drug and/or alcohol abuse
5. Psychological and psychiatric issues
6. At least 50 percent are Maori.

He also noted that serious young offenders have several things in common, including:

- Major personal, family and social disorder
- Lack guilt or remorse

- No victim empathy
- Egocentric; seekers of immediate gratification
- Do not think of consequences
- Can be identified early.

The challenge he says is, "how to influence violent, defiant, impulsive, truanting, teenage boys (disproportionately Maori) in the grip of alcohol and/or drug addictions, who have borderline personality disorders from dysfunctional families with antisocial peers". One of his solutions is "effective, creative, community based action plans". The Presbyterian Support Buddy Programme is one of these "community-based action plans" and provides support for over "...100 children throughout Otago each year through the development of one-to-one friendships with caring adults".

With its long history of being involved in the community and helping those less fortunate, the Presbyterian Church could learn much from the Presbyterian Support in establishing our own community-based mentoring programmes. The basic requirement to be a Christian mentor is to have a living relationship with God

and an ability to listen and respond sensitively, and to encourage. If this is true of you, you can be God's agent in enriching another person's life. Hey, it works!

I have enjoyed immensely my mentoring relationships over recent years. As I begin to work out my calling as a minister, I can see that I am now reaping the benefits of a lifetime of pastoral experiences that my mentor learnt in the ministry and is passing on to me through our mentoring relationship. Now I am also in a similar position of responsibility, passing on my experience on to another. There is something rewarding and challenging about such a role.

Surely this is what Jesus meant when he said to his disciples, "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Keeping communication channels open

Jose Reader, communications manager, Assembly Office

Often we are so focused on “doing the doing” that we can forget to keep others up-to-date with what’s going on. How often have you heard something like “don’t ask me, I just worship here”; comments like this are often a symptom of ineffective communication.

When communication is being done well, no one notices – it is the invisible glue that holds everything together. However, when communication is done poorly or not at all, boy, do people notice! In a church context, people may express their unhappiness through an unwillingness to help on committees, low commitment to the goals of the church, or through grumbings about seemingly small things. When the wheels fall off your communication, the symptoms are diverse and are likely to negatively affect your church’s mission.

Addressing ineffective communication is not the answer to every problem you may face but putting a plan in place to address communication gaps will go a long way to building a strong platform from which other initiatives can flourish.

Finding out what people want to know

So, where do you start? One of the most effective ways of establishing if any communication gaps exist in your congregation is simply to ask people. Consider informally surveying congregation members, youth leaders, and session/parish council members about what they would like to receive information on, and then compare this against what you’re currently doing.

Armed with this information, you could consider developing an internal communication plan for your parish. The plan needn’t be a vast document – one page is fine, and it should set out:

- Objectives (what are you trying to achieve? On some occasions it may be to inform, it may be to raise awareness about something, or to develop buy-in for a particular project.)
- Audiences (different people within the parish have different information needs, so make sure you have measures in place to ensure all groups are getting the information they need. For instance, a one-size-fits-all newsletter rarely meets the needs of all audiences.)
- Tools (what techniques are you going to use to get the different groups of people the different information

they need to know?)

- Evaluation (how will you know if your communication programme is successful?)

Networks as a tool in your communication programme

The term “networks” can mean many things, and in this context I’m referring to a virtual or physical community of people with shared interests. Fostering development of, or involvement in, networks is a key tool that can be used to encourage more information sharing.

Networks can be developed around any purpose that suits the needs of those participating: they can be based on geography (those in a particular locality), theological perspective, sharing of resources, a particular project or initiative, or simply for social interaction. Think about where there may be a shared need for information or common purpose and consider recruiting members from your presbytery, or one that is nearby, for a network (sharing of resources is a good place to start because this is a common need across all parishes).

When creating your own networks it can be beneficial, depending on the purpose around which the network is gathered, to include people from outside the congregation – representatives from other denominations, experts from the private or public sector or Presbyterian people from other parishes. The addition of these people to the group adds fresh perspectives.

Encouraging people outside the Church to participate in the network needn’t be difficult. All New Zealand communities have persons within them who willingly donate their time and expertise to worthy causes – you just need to have a clear purpose in mind for the network and approach those with the skills and gifts that can add value to that network. Making the network one that has a discrete life may also encourage people to become involved.

Tapping into existing networks is even easier – many already exist within the Presbyterian Church and within the broader Christian community. Find one that meets your needs, and join up. The Rural Network (ministering in a rural context), Presbyterian AFFIRM, Association of Reconciling Congregations and Christians and the New Zealand Lay Preachers Association are just some examples.

Networks can be formal like those noted above, or more informal where people gather more loosely around a specific need. For instance, one minister tells of his regular meetings with colleagues in the local pub for collegial support.

Another example is a group of ministers who meet for theological discussion every year or so. Each person produces a paper on a pre-defined topic, and then they meet at central location (because the ministers come from all over the country) for discussion on the topic. The purpose of the network is for refreshment, renewal and collegial interaction. These informal networks are just as important as those that are more formally established.

Other tools you can use

Networks are only one of the tools that can be used to build more effective communication. Parishes around the country are using all sorts of techniques to keep their members well-informed and to share resources and expertise. Some of the tools available are:

- E-newsletters – this is the new generation of the traditional parish newsletter. For example, the Rev Martin Stewart from Highgate Mission in Dunedin, and the Rev Andrew Norton from St Columba at Botany Downs both publish excellent e-newsletters (these are two that I know about, and no doubt there are other examples around the country as well). Electronic dissemination means distribution costs are minimised, and the format also allows the authors to be more responsive to current issues because the format can be quickly and easily changed in ways that a printed newsletter can not. Check out <http://www.stcolumba.org.nz/4u> to read the St Columba newsletter.
- Parish newsletters – The parish newsletter continues to have a place in any parish communication plan. However, when compiling the newsletter, consider whether it covers the information that people are most interested in. People's information needs change over time, and it is useful to review the content every so often to ensure it still meets the congregation's needs.
- Email discussion groups – Examples within the public sector are many, and while the Christian community here in New Zealand has a few examples (such as the Vision Network general discussion group), they appear to be used intermittently. The same is true of our own nzpres email discussion group. Recent topics of discussion on nzpres have included debate about the repeal of Section 59 of the Crimes Act (to smack or not smack), discussion about the Assembly

Assessment review; and questions and advice about resources. Check out www.presbyterian.org.nz/nzpres to sign-up.

- Websites – Consider a website for your parish; it can be used to connect with those within and outside your congregation (If you're interested in exploring our parish websites package, email amanda@presbyterian.org.nz for more information). Don't forget that there are numerous excellent national and international Christian websites that have been developed to resource, nourish, challenge and inspire Christians. (Please let us know about sites that you enjoy or find useful, as we are developing a resource bank section for www.presbyterian.org.nz).
- Notice boards – Parish notice boards can be virtual (on your parish website) or physical. These continue to be useful tools for connecting with members of your congregation, and are best suited to information that is more generic and doesn't require a response – for instance, a lengthy report pinned to a notice board or left on a table at the church entrance is unlikely to be read. Choose the information you put on your notice board carefully.
- Visual communications – this is still relatively new technology for many parishes, and as a tool to support your communication programme, it shouldn't be overlooked. Don't limit its use just to services; for instance, experiment with projecting images from your latest mission project or other initiative onto a blank wall during a morning tea so people can view the images over conversation (often words aren't needed as the images speak for themselves).
- Presentations – make space during relevant gatherings for updates from respective committees and groups. People will be more inclined to support an initiative if they have had regular updates.

If your parish doesn't already have a communications officer, consider appointing one. His/her responsibilities could include internal communication activities such as keeping the notice boards up to date, overseeing publication and delivery of parish newsletter, monitoring communication within and outside the church and making recommendations on how these could be improved. The benefit of having a person in this role is that they are able to "champion" communications initiatives – a person with skills in this area would bring energy and passion to the role, which may well rub-off on others in the congregation.

The Sinners of Cramond: The Struggle to Impose Godly Behaviour on a Scottish Community, 1651-1851, by Alison Hanham. Edinburgh: John Donald, 2005. ISBN 0-85976-604-7. £20.00 pbk. BR 5346 C88. Reviewed by Jane Bloore, research assistant, Presbyterian Church Archives

Church records are a window into the past that allow us to see and understand not only the religious life of our ancestors, but the social and political forces that shaped them. *The Sinners of Cramond* is a detailed account of the relationship between Kirk and folk in the parish of Cramond from the years 1651 to 1851 that affords the reader a glimpse through the window of a distant Scottish past that, in the context of New Zealand's colonial history, turns out not to be so distant after all.

The struggle to impose "Godly behaviour" was one that was carried with the Presbyterian Church half way around the world to these shores, and anyone with an interest in the history of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand should enjoy Dr Hanham's eminently readable book. She was first introduced to the Cramond Kirk Session Minutes in the 1960s, and immediately became fascinated by their record of the "lively doings" of the former residents of the parish.

These "lively doings" included sexual misdemeanours, breaches of the Sabbath, especially by public drunkenness, cases of marital disharmony, fornication, infanticide, and much more. Since breaches of the Sabbath could include caring for stock, or routine housework, it was not surprising that many parishioners lacked the urge to spend all Sunday in church when other tasks (or delights), beckoned.

Records of such offences as ante-nuptial fornication, drunkenness, cases of adultery and illegitimate births are scattered throughout early Otago and Southland session minutes too. Those who professed repentance for their misdeeds were chastised and brought back into the congregation, but sometimes, as in Cramond, offenders refused to attend session, or left the parish altogether.

The fortunes of the parish waxed and waned with the changes of political, and thus religious governance, over the years (Covenanting, Episcopalian, and strict Presbyterian), but during all that time the vagaries of human behaviour were faithfully recorded in the session minutes.

As Dr Hanham observes in the first chapter of her book, the men whose deliberations are recorded in the minutes might "well be shocked to know that [they are] now read

chiefly because they bring so many of the parish delinquents to vivid life."

Sethy John Regenvanu, *LAEF BLONG MI: From Village to Nation*. Institute of Pacific Studies and Emalus Campus, University of the South Pacific, 2004. Reviewed by Alan Quigley

This is the beautifully written autobiography of an outstanding leader in Vanuatu. The author is a pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu, currently serving as minister of St Andrew's, Suva (part of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand). He played an important part in the development of Vanuatu, its transition to independence from the Condominium in 1980, held significant ministerial offices in the post-independence period and was for several years deputy prime minister.

Part of the fascination of the book lies in his account of his origins on a small island off the coast of Malakula. There he grew up naturally absorbing elements of traditional culture before starting formal schooling at about the age of 11. Later he was educated Onesua High School and Tangoa Training Institute, with both of which our church has a long historical connexion, and later at the Pacific Theological College, where he is remembered for his warm smile, outgoing nature, intellectual gifts and determination to get to the roots of anything he engaged in.

After ordination, he became education secretary of the PCNH, at a time when the churches were the main providers of such education as was available in the country. He became involved in the independence movement, which sought to free Vanuatu from the absurd colonialism of the Condominium and to allow his people to be no longer stateless but citizens in their own country. The achievements, the struggles and the disappointments of the post-independence governments are vividly chronicled.

This is also a warmly human story, of Sethy's personal development and his marriage while a student to Dorothy Rutter, who went from Australia to teach at TTI; of her commitment to life in Vanuatu; and of their five sons.

The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand has a long relationship with Vanuatu, going back about 140 years. This book enables us to gain through one person's eyes an insight into the successes and shortcomings of that enterprise, and to stand with him through some turbulent and highly significant years. As a contribution not only to church history but to our understanding of the present day Pacific, it is a very valuable work.

Death and resurrection and the Church

Rinny Westra, *St Aidan's Presbyterian, Northcote*

As Easter approaches, we celebrate once again the rhythm of death and resurrection as it is expressed for us in the suffering, death and rising again of Jesus. We do so, not only using Christian symbolism, but also symbolism from nature, such as Easter eggs and Easter bunnies, which remind us how death is universal but how new life continues to arise - prolifically - in nature. Human hope and Christian hope are thus grounded in both creation and redemption.

Can we apply this powerful symbolism to the Church? Churches do die. The church that I first served in as a minister, after many years of significant outreach and great work with young families and children, led back in the 1970s by a team of three ministers, closed its doors at the end of February. It was a very courageous decision. After years of struggling, they came to realise that all their hard work had in recent years become a matter of survival only. This was soul-destroying when its implications sank in, and so they made a deliberate decision to die. The tide had gone out for them, and however sad it was to close the doors, it was a liberating decision that freed them to throw in their support and commitment elsewhere. Maybe "little resurrections" here and there may follow from that decision.

Did you know that North Africa was once one of the most Christian parts of the world? St. Augustine was bishop of Hippo, in what is today Tunisia. Although a lively and often persecuted Coptic Church has existed and continues to exist in Egypt since the early centuries of the Christian era—there is an Egyptian Coptic congregation in Birkdale today!—Christianity has disappeared from most of the rest of North Africa. The whole area, including Egypt, was overwhelmed by Moslem conquerors, and now Islam is the dominant religion. It would be fair to say that many Christians who had become disillusioned with the state of the Christian churches did not take much encouragement to convert to Islam, which believed in one God and which held both Jesus and Mary in very high regard. It may have seemed like a change of denominations to them. In fact, however, the Christian Church in North Africa for the most part died.

Recently I picked up, from the library of the late Rev Phil Spencer, a little book which is a kind of festschrift to Professor Frank Nichol, who was principal at Knox Theological Hall when I attended there for a brief time in 1972,

and when I spent some study leave time there in 1978. The book was produced to honour Frank Nichol when he received (in 1990) an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from St. Andrew's University in Scotland.

Reading the little book became a nostalgia trip for me, remembering the days spent at Knox in the systematic theology classes of Frank Nichol, the pastoral theology classes of Ian Dixon (a position filled by Don Glenny when I was there on study leave in 1978), some church history classes with Ian Breward, and some New Testament classes with Evan Pollard. I have to confess that tears came to my eyes as I read the following description of what a visit to Professor Pollard's study was like: "his college study was as full of smoke as it was of fine classical music and his ready laughter was heard throughout the building" (p 38). In fact for me, these were wonderful times, attending a place of theological education of world stature, with scholars such as Evan Pollard, Frank Nichol, Ian Breward and, in 1978, Maurice Andrew, achieving international recognition through their writing and research. Knox was a truly stimulating place, and laid a solid foundation for a church whose ethos was deeply Presbyterian as well as open and ecumenical. The liberal theological stream was dominant, but the conservative stream was there too in the student body, and its representatives in the Westminster Fellowship, as it was then, were consciously part of the reformed tradition as expressed in the old Princeton theology, and were therefore strong churchmen too. There were deep divisions, but the liberals and the conservatives were one in their respect for the Reformed tradition and for the Church.

How things have changed! With the demise of the theological hall, our Church abandoned its responsibility for the theological training of its own ministers, and thus put significant nails into the coffin of a distinctively Presbyterian ethos. It is an open question whether our distinctive Presbyterian ethos will last into the future. Many of our congregations seem to have lost it, and one may as well be attending worship in any one of the evangelical or Pentecostal groups that are flourishing, many of them in school halls. Many of our more traditional congregations are on their last legs, and survival rather than mission are dominant there. As a distinctive Presbyterian denomination, death is staring us in the face. And, to quote Jim Veitch, "the liberalism Frank (Nichol) stood for is disappearing as a strand within the Church" (p 46).

The little festschrift to Frank Nichol is entitled *In Search of Truth!* For Frank, theology is a search for truth in the light of the Gospel, the Presbyterian/Reformed tradition, and all the help that theological scholarship today and in the past could provide. That is also how I see theology. As an open-ended search for truth that is firmly grounded in the tradition and life of the Church. In that sense liberalism and conservatism go together; they are not necessarily contradictory.

The rot set in, in my opinion, when the emphasis in theological education changed in the 1970s. The committee responsible for training ministers used to be known as the Theological Education Committee. The emphasis was firmly on the search for truth, and training people with all the resources available to engage in that search was central to training ministers. It was an exciting time. When the name of the Committee was changed to the Committee On Education For Ministry in the 1970s, this was symptomatic of a shift from a search for truth to pragmatism, and that has been confirmed by the closure of the Theological Hall and its replacement with the School of Ministry. Of course, theological education should be practical, but when pragmatism takes over, the theological heritage becomes peripheral, and that is what has happened to the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. As a result, we are a dying denomination — a blunt statement, but the statistics over the years are evidence of this. Sure, there are pockets of life and vigour here and there, but they are the exceptions that prove the rule.

Will we rise again? It is possible. Where there is life, there is hope. And there is life, including in our own neck of the woods. New Christian groups are sprouting all over the country, in schools and halls and converted warehouses. They are dynamic, and they are followers of Jesus according to their lights. The Church — the body of those who are committed to following Jesus — will not die. It is rising again in new and different forms all over the place. Our Presbyterian contribution could be to help them re-engage with the theological heritage of almost 2000 years, while at the same time focusing on where we are all at today and where we are heading in the future. The dumbing down of theological education needs to be counteracted. Hebrew and Greek are important! So is the study of classical antiquity and philosophy.

It is only then that we may come to know the truth. And it is only the truth that will make us free.

Happy Easter.

St David's Palmerston North

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