

CANDOUR

News and Views for Ministers

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Teams that work

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Noticeboard

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Contributions

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

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Subscribers: please contact candour@presbyterian.org.nz if you change your postal or email address (whichever is relevant).

Glen Innis Vacancies

February 27 - March 6	Homestead/Cottage
March 6 - 13	Homestead/Cottage
March 20 - 27	Homestead/Cottage
March 27 - April 3	Homestead/Cottage

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.

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.

Focal Identity Statement and Book of Order

The first two topics you can have your say on are the draft Focal Identity Statement and Book of Order. Information about both documents has been circulated to ministers, presbyteries and other bodies within the church.

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

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.

Trying to be a team player

Amanda Wells

Is it true that people don't want to be part of teams anymore? Does a lack of desire for being part of a group underlie our congregations' decline?

Despite being schooled with "group projects" and enduring the era of workplace "teams" and team building, my generation appears to be one of the most individualistic ever (though Gen Y come next and apparently they're worse). Blame student loans or blame the ruthless tone of today's corporate workplace, but volunteering has gone out of vogue. Just look at the rise of individual sports (triathlon, cycling, kayaking, mountain running...) and the decline of club-based pursuits. People volunteer to get work experience or to brighten up their CV but service for its own sake is becoming rare.

However, I think that post-Boomer generations do want to be part of teams; that they do have a huge longing for community. It's just that they'll engage only on their own terms — frustrating though these may be. Casualness is highly valued, with rigid commitment an impediment to more exciting opportunities that might appear. Organisation has become the ultimate style-crime in the face of this "just do it" mantra.

So we seem to have two related problems: attracting people to join our team, and then facilitating that team's performance so that committed members neither get bored nor burn out. This month's issue of *Candour* deals with ways that you can manage teams within your parish to better fit the evolving demands of ministry.

An effective team spreads the burden of work. Responsibilities are released to different members, rather than being hoarded by one or two people. So you have to trust your team: both to carry out the work and to complete it to the required standard. This isn't always easy, especially when that "I can do it best and fastest so I might as well do it anyway" mentality has a foothold. Delegation means giving people room to fail. The task might be done less well, but its doer might feel more fulfilled, affirmed in their gifts and committed to the group. And you'll have time to do something else.

In this issue, we have essays that consider how teams function in ministry, the nature of leadership and its place in your wider community context. Andrew Norton discusses the essential components of a high-performing

team (which include "brutal honesty"), Howard Carter outlines the journey his parish is on towards creating team-based ministry, while Gordon Rabey asks how teams form. Tony Hasted elucidates how you can stop being a "one-person show" and embrace the benefits of delegation. Are you a mission-leader or a pastor-teacher? John Malcolm considers the difference. And Michael Thawley offers a guide on running effective, positive meetings.

Next issue's theme will be "Ministers and Stress". Aspects we aim to cover include: feelings of inadequacy and failure, handling discouragement, pressure to grow in the face of decline, pressure to adopt new models, happiness and hobbies, sources of support, lack of money, and families in the fishbowl. If you'd like to contribute an article (or suggest someone else to be shoulder-tapped), please email me at candour@presbyterian.org.nz. The deadline is 1 March. Other comments and feedback are always welcome.

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Creating real teams that work

Andrew Norton, St Columba at Botany, Auckland

The word “team” is another one of those words that is fast being devalued by over or inappropriate use. To call a group of people working or playing together a team more often than not is a blatant lie!

Many so called teams I know are simply one or two people doing all the work while the rest watch on; or one person barking the orders while the others comply in dutiful obedience.

What is a team?

A team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, set of performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable.¹

Experiencing the power of a high performance team is like driving a Porsche Carrera and then going back to a 70s Toyota. No driving experience ever seems the same again. This has been my experience of teams over the past couple of years. I can only say that once you’ve tasted you don’t want to go back.

I’m very aware that putting this in writing is also stating more than is reality in the team I work with at St Columba (ask them for yourself). I state the ideal as vision to which we can all aspire to.

Leadership — values champion

True teams don’t have a leader as we commonly know it. When a team is truly functioning as a team, the team is the leader. The team leader would be better described as “values champion”. Their task within the team is to keep the team true to itself, its values and goals. That’s why in a truly great rugby team, the captain does not need to be on the field to win: another team member can step into the role and champion the values, goals and behaviour that have already been decided on.

We the leader

*Hopes, hurts and hungers of the crowd have found an ear
the powerless are empowered
listen to us
Words whispered in silence find their way to the lips of one
who would lead
the voiceless find a voice
speak for us
Mist that veils the future, locks in the past as if ever present is*

*dispelled
the blind see - vision paints a new picture
see tomorrow for us
Alone each one living behind labels and in boxes
the isolated are formed into community
belong with us
The leader, listens, speaks, sees and belongs
We becomes the leader
We are therefore I am...
the leader*

Team charter

A team charter is the *raison d’être*, the reason for being, which includes four key elements:

- 1. A clearly defined goal**
 - a. An ultimate goal
 - b. Some short term wins along the way
- 2. What we really believe**
 - a. Values – what is held dear and will not be violated
- 3. How we want to behave**
 - a. How conflict is managed
 - b. How success celebrated
 - c. Expectations of one another and how values will be expressed
- 4. Roles**
 - a. Each person’s specific role or contribution to the team and the team goal
 - b. Identification of each person’s gifts to the team

Establishing a team charter is one of the most important aspects of a team experience as it also models what a team is. Goals, values and processes are not imposed by one or two dominant players but are discovered, articulated, shared and owned by the team.

Everyone

*I am only one
but when I stand with others I become “we”
and when “we” becomes an expression of Everyone, an
unstoppable force is released.
The power of one is the power of Everyone and Everyone
gives power to the one
Everyone leads
Everyone grows
Everyone cares
Everyone serves
Everyone achieves
Everyone wins*

The success of a team will largely depend on the clarity of the charter and the ability of the values champion to keep the team on track with its charter.

Accountability

This is what sets teams apart from work groups or committees. A team stands or falls together and as such they hold one another accountable for both their individual performance and the performance of the team. Teams fall apart when blame is attributed to an individual or someone outside the team.

Brutal honesty

One of the greatest dangers to effective teams is toleration of silent dishonesty. Someone is not pulling their weight but is not challenged to lift their game; someone is late with no apology; someone is speaking too much and not told to be quiet; someone is too silent and not asked to speak up; or the team is not achieving their goals and no one ever asks “why?”.

Decide early on if you really want to be honest or not, and then be prepared for the consequences (this should

be covered in your team charter). I think “no bullshit” should be part of every team charter.

Shared lives

It is impossible to be part of a high performance team without becoming close to the people you share Team with. Each member brings their life into a team. Personal difficulties or issues and home life impact teams significantly. While care needs to be taken to ensure healthy personal boundaries, there is no way a team can function effectively without genuine love, care and concern for one another.

I’m sure this is not the last word on teams.

I’m convinced that teams are the only way to do ministry effectively. Isn’t that what the Body of Christ is? Members of a Team?

References

¹ Jon Katzenbach and Douglas Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams* (Harvard Business School Press, 1993)

Minister of the Word

Mt Pleasant Uniting Church (MPUC) (Western Australia) is seeking a Minister of the Word to lead our ministry team that includes part-time ministry positions in youth and children’s ministries, a part-time music director and office support staff. The church is located 10 km south of the CBD in Perth and currently has a membership of 180.

MPUC is looking for a minister who will work with the many gifted members that God has given to this church, performing the role of leader, listener and guide. The key tasks of the next minister will be:

- preaching God’s word
- coordinating the development and implementation of the Church’s vision
- encouragement and equipping of key leaders
- training in theology and discipleship
- regular interaction with and supervision of key ministry areas.

The Church is open to the possibility that this role may be shared between two people, both employed on a fractional basis.

This position is available from April 2006. For further information about the process of application and for a copy of the Church Profile, please contact The General Secretary, Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of WA, GPO Box M 952, PERTH WA 6843, Australia or e-mail john.evans@wa.uca.org.au

Closing date – Friday 24 February 2006.

On the journey to ministry teams

Howard Carter, Ahuriri/Putorino Presbyterian, Gisborne-Hawkes Bay

Ahuriri-Putorino embodies a lot of the struggles and difficulties that our church faces. We have an elderly core group who have faithfully kept the place functioning. Our worship style is very traditional. We have an historic building, which is going to need a lot of money spent on it. We have our main worship centre in Napier (Ahuriri) and three other worship centres in rural areas north of Napier. The congregation is smallish (averaging about 60 each week over two worship centres, about 45 at Knox in Ahuriri). And if you do your maths you'll see that this is too small to sustain full-time ministry.

When I came here two years ago, fresh from the school of ministry, it was with the understanding that if things didn't turn around in five years, then the financial situation would mean a major review. I agreed to come here because the session said they wanted to see their church grow again, connect with younger people and, yes, they knew this would mean changes... as long as I didn't want to paint the church ceiling purple and turn all the seats round, they thought they'd be open to change - and they had already laid some ground work for change.

In the two previous parishes I had been in, I had been part of a ministry team that came with the territory of being on staff as a lay assistant/youth pastor; now jokingly I say we can have a staff meeting in my office, with its three chairs, with the minister, the church secretary, the youth leader and worship leader present and still have two chairs to spare. But that is changing.

As an eldership, we have gone on retreats to pray and look at the future, we came to believe that part of the way forward was to develop ministry teams that will work with us to see our church meet the challenge of doing mission. We agreed over the second half of last year and this year to start by developing teams that would look at worship, Christian education, and pastoral care/visiting and then evaluate establishing more teams.

We developed job descriptions for each of these teams, setting out our vision for the parish and how the team fitted into that. This involved giving direction, outlining who and what we were looking for, levels of involvement, accountability structures, encouraging training and giving the groups freedom to set and spend their own budgets.

The first team set up was the worship team and we have a group of seven on this team. They are people with diverse skills and abilities, some in the field of music and being able to establish a more contemporary worship style. Some with organisational skills and a desire to see the best of our traditions upheld, others with gifts in leading liturgy, drama and administration. We have met over the past three months and I have benefited greatly from their input and involvement in the services.

The Christian education team is a bit harder to recruit for as I think people fear they will end up being Sunday school teachers. We will launch the pastoral care/visiting team early this year.

When we proposed teams, the major criticism was "it would just mean more work for the same old people". This turned out to be far from the truth; all but one of the worship team came from people who had joined the church in the last year. This was a way that they saw themselves being able to get involved in ministry and contribute to the life of the church they were making their home. It was also a success because these people are younger, which is a visible sign that the painful changes we are making are bearing fruit.

Yes, initially it means more energy from me to get these things up and running and learning new skills, but it's worth it in the long run. It involves me taking the role of player coach and learning to give people the skills and the game plan and letting them have their head.

This role fits well our reformed understanding of the ordained ministry as teaching elders. My commitment to working in teams comes from a theological imperative. In the reformation, the catch cry was the priesthood of all believers and the catch cry for the "reformMission" that God's spirit is leading us into is the ministry of all believers. The Spirit has filled and enabled his people to play a part in seeing the body of Christ function and do mission. Church is a team sport.

The journey has just begun and in the long term, when we look back in the future, I believe we will see that establishing such teams was an essential part of turning this parish around.

Creating essential community

Gordon Rabey*

“As we look forward to the year ahead, the guiding sign pointing direction would appear to be a question mark. And if we’re not sure where we are going, any road will take us there. Meanwhile, let’s enjoy today.”

A cynical worldview? Perhaps, but a closer look suggests we have lost predictability and our uncertainty finds expression in many ways. For instance, no employer can now give any assurance of long-term employment. Short-term contracts are becoming the norm. The effects of globalisation and new technology that affects us all will continue to dominate the patterns of our living and all planning is under continuous review.

Education, in its wider social context, has yet to realise that a key objective now must be to equip young people with the core knowledge, skill and humanity so that they can adapt to and cope with the complexities of the world within which they will live; and surely teaching values is part of this. The omens do not augur well. Today we are seeing the emergence of a want-borrow-spend-waste generation driven by an “I want it, and I want it now” impatience fuelled by intensive, intrusive and unceasing commercial promotion; the immediate outcome of which has been to create an economy in which spending commitments tend to exceed income while debt increases. My late grandmother’s dictum of “If you can’t afford it, don’t go” is a remnant of another age.

But that’s looking through a wide lens. Let’s narrow the focus considerably. On a recent weekend, Paula, my wife, and I were invited to a neighbour’s house. We were told: “just a few friends – you’ll know most of them. Bring a plate, come and enjoy.” So we did and met some 15-20 others plus some children, and we did enjoy. Nothing was arranged, much inconsequential chatting and a sharing of topics of general interest. The children were self-contained and happy and overall the scene was warm and relaxed.

A quiet observer might have noticed something else. As each small informal group found a common topic individuals started to disclose and share more of their own

personal feelings on that and related topics. Rapport and a measure of trust was being established and perhaps might have continued subsequently. People had found and shared listeners.

And in the pressures of today, this seems to happen less often, yet the need is always there. All too frequently conversation stays at the level of exchange of platitudes and feelings remain dormant.

At this point someone is bound to say that what is really needed today is leadership: “We’ve never been so much in need of good leadership everywhere.” The literature reinforces this – it is estimated that in recent years some 15,000+ books and articles on leadership have been published. So it must be true.

But is it? Leadership is based on the concept of a leader with a vision of a goal who has the ability to encourage and lead people towards its accomplishment. But two questions emerge. First, leaders are wholly dependent upon followers, yet

We seem not to have noticed that team building is really a human characteristic

following is voluntary action and if people choose not to follow the would-be leader has only assumed authority to fall back on. And secondly, followership requires commitment to a cause - admittedly in various degrees.

However, today people are reluctant to commit themselves, for this carries an obligation to give personal time and effort. We’ve all seen the recent decline in the membership of clubs and groups and the reluctance of people to sit on committees. Furthermore, leaders cannot really be appointed as such with any assurance because their performance can be evaluated only by their effectiveness and achievement. History suggests that the event or occasion will produce its leader who until that moment had not been seen in that role (Churchill, Mandela, Lincoln, Luther King, for instance) and who when their purpose was served either stepped down or was replaced. Leadership is both situational and transitory.

We seem not to have noticed that team building is really a human characteristic. Bring together a group of people with a measure of common interest (perhaps work or

community based). Identify a task which they feel needs serious attention, outline its parameters and conditions, and give them the responsibility for resolving the issue. Within a very short time there will be an accepted leader, a deputy, a detailer, a questioner, followers and so on – each in a role with which they feel comfortable. Some changes may follow but the “natural team” tends to grow and to take care of its own.

Yet rather than developing this, we persist in attempting to organise people by assigning roles. In the example above, people combine in meeting a need they feel must be met and will put in extra effort, far more so than if they had been given instructions to follow. Motivation responds to a freedom to decide.

But here there are still leaders, nominated as such, who fail because they do not understand the realities of the situation. People do not always want to follow paths into which they are being steered. They first want understanding of their own feelings and needs. If they could vocalise it, they might say “we want to meet others, to be com-

fortable in sharing thoughts and exchanging ideas, and to learn from their experiences”.

Communities – where families are based – should be the influencing and the stabilising components of our society and for this reason they should be valued. On no account should people attempt to organise them, for with restriction they will shrivel. But they do need to be recognised.

The existing fragmentation of their many activities is the outcome of choice and will continue to meet the wishes of their participants – but one may wonder if the helicopter is high enough to glimpse the potential benefits which might accrue from closer linkages. The immediate danger, of course, comes from the competing and conflicting pressures of the wider world, which might cause us to lose this foundation – and we and our children would be the poorer.

**Gordon Rabey is a Wellington-based management consultant and writer.*

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North Shore City

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How to stop being a one-person show

Tony Hassed*

One of the most talked-about, written-about topics today is leadership. A colleague who is a professor of leadership at a United States college tells me that there are at least 15,691 books on leadership!

From my reading, you can broadly categorise the thoughts on leadership into two main categories: being a one-person show and not being a one-person show! Depends on which end of the spectrum you want to operate.

So let's focus on the "not being a one-person show" end. There are some skills and some competencies required to have the confidence to let some of the reins go.

For clergy, loosening off the reins can be fraught with difficulties – more so than in a secular vocation. After all, if the member(s) of the congregation to whom you have entrusted a specific task don't meet the timeframe or walk away from the task, it's most likely to be you who has to pick up the pieces. That has led a number of clergy whom I have dealt with to be very reluctant to loosen off the reins.

Conversely, one clergyman I knew not only loosened off the reins, but gave the horse a bit of a spur along at the same time, so that before long the congregation was all over the place – very undirected and heading rapidly towards burnout.

What are the key skills you need to develop or nurture to stop being a one-person show?

- Top of my list: you have to want to.
- The second on the list is discernment. Have you got the people; can you privately identify those in your congregation who can accept responsibility and who know how to use authority in a Christian context?
- Then comes such other skills as trust and confidence.

Let's start with the top of the list – you have to want to. If you are feeling pressured by all the demands and expectations placed upon you and you can't see your way to tomorrow, let alone next year, then you probably have enough reason to see what can be parcelled out to others.

The first place I would start is by making an inventory

of myself. What are the things that I am good at and/or enjoy doing? List those down or mind-map them if that is your preference. Then list or mind-map those things that you have to do, but you don't enjoy doing or you don't have the skills to do adequately. Then there are probably some things you do which are neither exciting nor enjoyable – they just have to be done. Make a separate list of them.

Now have a look at the unenjoyable list, asking yourself, "what on this list is it feasible/responsible to ask someone else to do? Is there someone who could do this task better than I do?" As an illustration, some years ago my personal assistant badgered me to let her do some of the routine work I was responsible for. After putting her off for some months, I finally relented and found she was much better at it than I was, she thoroughly enjoyed the challenge and we were both more fulfilled in our roles.

Now comes the second skill – discerning who to ask to take on the task. With some tasks, it may be possible to allocate the entire task; with others, it may be a progressive allocation. That is, you allocate a portion of the task and check progress before allocating a further portion.

When allocating a task, there are some key requirements:

Firstly, are you absolutely clear about what you are allocating, and can the recipient recite back to you their understanding of what is being allocated?

Secondly, have you identified what responsibilities and authorities go with the task?

Thirdly, have you made it clear when you expect the task to be completed (or progress milestones completed) and the recipient acknowledges those timeframes?

Fourthly, have you made it clear to the recipient where to go or what to do if they strike difficulties?

Fifthly, how will both of you know that the task has been completed to your mutual satisfaction?

The third and fourth skills, trust and confidence, are introspective. If you are not a person to whom trust in others

comes naturally, you probably won't succeed in releasing others to share your workload. Likewise with confidence – that belief that people are inherently trustworthy and keen to help.

It's my view that being an effective clergyperson in today's environment is one of the toughest jobs around. As I've observed clergy at work, it's those who have got their vision fixed on the future who seem to get the most enjoyment from their calling. How do you get to have the time to focus on the future? Again, from observing successful

clergy in action, they have developed the art of developing leaders from those around them – leaders who can pick up and effectively discharge those responsibilities you have handed out to them. By so doing they've moved away from being a one-person show into a team leader.

** Tony Hassed is chair of the New Zealand Institute of Management, active in his local Anglican Church, and has provided assistance to the Presbyterian Church through governance training for the Council of Assembly and mentoring of the AES.*

Mission-leader or pastor-teacher?

John Malcolm, First Tahunanui Presbyterian, Nelson

Jesus was both a mission leader and a pastor/teacher. These are not mutually exclusive tasks or callings; rather they are complementary. What differs is the emphasis with each. Pastor/teacher is more aimed at those within the fold, caring and nurturing those already gathered in, fulfilling Jesus' command to feed my lambs; while mission leadership focuses on sending out, and harvesting those yet to be gathered, fulfilling Jesus' command to go and make disciples.

I experienced a special moment recently when, one evening, my wife Melanie and I discussed what God had spoken into our lives that day. Quite independently of each other, we heard God saying, get out of the barn and into the harvest field. Clearly a call to mission, not just for us, but for the congregation we are part of. This reinforced for me the importance of mission and leaves me prayerfully asking and looking for ways that might be fulfilled. It also raises challenges as to how I will lead in mission.

Over the past few years, our congregation at Tahunanui has been working through issues related to mission. This has necessitated the development of mission leadership. We have been faced with both crisis and opportunity that have caused us to reflect on how we live as a mission congregation. During this process, I have become more of a mission leader. But mission leadership is not something that fits easily into a Presbyterian world view. In some ways I struggle to see how leadership fits into our traditional understanding of what it is to be a minister of a local church. In 2000 I took study leave to consider leadership, to take time to reflect on this and to better equip myself for the leadership role.

In our tradition, the minister has generally been a teaching elder called to pastor. When a minister is called, there is an undertaking on the part of the congregation to respect, encourage and support the minister, but nothing is stated about following their leadership. Typically the minister moderates the meeting of the ruling elders, but can't move motions and has no deliberative vote. This is leadership with one arm tied behind your back, and is hardly conducive to building leadership.

Generally, we tend to shy away from the notion of leadership and many people feel uncomfortable about recognising themselves as leaders. I learnt this at a planning meeting for parish leaders when some elders didn't turn up because they didn't think of themselves as leaders. Perhaps the tall poppy syndrome that is part of our national psyche tends to make us averse to rising to leadership; and our traditional approach to ministry tends to hinder leadership rather than foster it.

I have been encouraged to see leadership being more readily discussed in recent times, but question if our structures of governance and congregations are ready for teaching elders to become leaders. I think the Equipping the Leadership Policy Group raised some important issues in the competency framework. Among them it looks for leadership skills such as being a change agent. I had a chuckle when I read that and wondered how many people in our congregations would agree that they had called their minister to be a change agent. Part of the tension of moving from being a pastor/teacher to being a mission leader may be due to differing expectations people have of a minister's leadership role and the degree to which they are willing to be led. You may have had experiences

similar to mine where a prominent member of the congregation reminds you that you are the minister, employed by the parish and should do as you are told!

In reality, not many congregations would welcome a leader who insists upon making the executive decisions; neither would many of us want to be such a leader. We have another possibility in that our model of eldership lends itself to more of a team leadership approach. Session/Parish Council is already a team of sorts. With some discussion and thought, it could work more as a team than as a committee. This would require the acceptance of the minister as not just a moderator or pastor but as having a real leadership role and being given permission to lead. This would give us the possibility of not simply having one mission leader but multiple mission leaders.

Part of the process for our congregation emerged from crisis – not enough finance. We were on the verge of going to Presbytery to begin moves from full-time to part-time ministry. I am sure that many of you can relate to the difficulties that come with a lack of finances. It brought us to a new place of prayerfulness, focused us on core issues regarding our mission and gave us a good dose of reality – that things had to change!

Through some generous gifts we emerged from the crisis. We were given a vision of the church being like a person who had had a heart attack and needed to find new health. This linked in well with the Presbyterian Church's directions for a spiritually healthy church. We made a commitment to being a spiritually healthy church and have begun to see some positive results. Through discussions with the eldership and congregation, we have been focusing on different aspects of church health and this has brought us to a point where we have a five-year mission plan for the parish.

I have been really encouraged by the development of a mission plan. It is heartening to hear the discussion as people talk about mission with a growing passion. When you start to delve into it, the things that people are passionate about are inspiring, but getting to this point has taken time.

To get to this point I have led in mission in a number of ways, including:

1) Developing a culture of permission-giving. I have found that people in the congregation often have great ideas and passion for mission. More is achieved if these people can readily get permission to put their ideas into action.

2) Holding an annual planning day and having informal discussions at other times. The more people we can involve in discussions, the more ideas emerge and the more people feel a part of what is happening.

3) Celebrating achievements at the end of the year. We will end this year with a service listing around 50 events in the life of the congregation that we want to give thanks for. Some of these things may seem insignificant on their own, but celebrating even these little accomplishments can gradually build a sense of achievement and momentum into the life of the parish.

Each of the above is a struggle and has its critics; some want to control rather than give permission; some don't want to plan or, alternatively, just want to get on with things rather than taking the time to talk about them; some feel it is wrong, perhaps a sign of pride to celebrate achievements, while others are concerned that those not celebrated will feel less valued. Despite such criticisms, all these things are worth doing to move in mission.

Reaching the point where we have a mission plan is helping us to focus and consolidate our ideas for mission. Rather than having a vague notion of the necessity of mission, it is something that is becoming more concrete and better understood. Together we have discussed it, been involved in it, and celebrated it.

As a parish we are in the process of mission. Along the way we have made mistakes, there have been disappointments and times when we have failed to respond to mission opportunities. This is all part of the process and I expect we will not always succeed or make the right choices in the future. However, while not neglecting the need of the pastoral/teaching ministry, we are increasingly focused on mission as part of being a spiritually healthy congregation. It seems to me that this is what mission leadership is about.

I have found the following resources helpful in thinking about mission leadership:

WM Easum *Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers – ministry anytime, anywhere, by anyone* (Abingdon Press, 1995)

A Malphurs *Ministry Nuts and Bolts – what they don't teach Pastors in Seminary* (Kregel Publications, 1997)

W Cordeiro *Doing Church as a Team* (Regal Books, 2001)

G Barna ed. *Leaders on Leadership* (Regal Books, 1997)

Running an effective meeting

Michael Thawley, Minister Emeritus, Christchurch

What makes a good meeting? I suggest that it is one where the participants leave feeling good about it; feeling their time has been well used and their gifts and insights have been valued. That would be the measure for the meeting of any group. There is an extra dimension in church meetings though – the feeling that it has been an experience that is “faith enlarging” or, at least, “faith affirming”.

How can a chairperson/moderator contribute to such a meeting? In these “offerings” I have in mind meetings like parish council/session etc.

1. Preparation is absolutely critical.

- Keep in touch with the members of the council/session etc. This is a team you are working with: each member has his/her strengths and weaknesses. Engage in team building and offer opportunities for members and partners to enjoy each other’s company socially.
- Keep in close touch with the key members – the secretary, convenors, and offer them specific pastoral care and support in their responsibilities.
- Now for the meeting itself... the agenda. A printed agenda with copies of reports and any correspondence needing a decision(s), and the availability of all this for all members well before the meeting is important. Remember, you may know what’s happening, but others don’t have the same opportunities!
- Thoroughly familiarise yourself with the reports etc. a few days in advance. At least give yourself time enough to check anything you are not clear about and to work with the secretary and convenors on how to deal with their issues.
- Identify where the “hiccups” (like points of order!!) and irrelevancies might emerge. Research the rules and regulations etc. and have a strategy or proposal in mind to deal with each one if and when it arises. “Hiccups” can sabotage the meeting if you are not prepared – we all know that!
- Identify the main issues. Is a decision necessary? What are the possible outcomes/decisions?

- Then annotate your own agenda with time targets, scheduling the closure at least 15 minutes early! If there are no unexpected items/issues or delays you can offer that rare gift – an early closing!

- Prepare devotions with the same thoroughness as you prepare worship.

- Focus on the meeting in your own prayer/devotional life.

2. Discipline in meetings is essential (we all need boundary pegs) and it is a spiritual issue.

- Always call the meeting to order on time!
- Allow time at the beginning to reach agreement on the main matters for this particular meeting, and elicit a commitment to focus on these.
- Any matters not previously circulated should be added only with the agreement of the members at the beginning of the meeting. Are they absolutely necessary for this meeting?
- Does the meeting have an expected closing time? If there is no such convention then agree to a time to which you will all work.
- You and convenors should assume all circulated material has been read. Don’t let the valuable time of others to be hijacked by the lazy few!
- Allowing for each member to contribute if they so wish and all members knowing this is vital are key elements. So encourage members to think about their contribution before they begin to make it.
- Don’t be afraid to be firm!
- If the meeting is running behind your time targets, ask yourself why. You might have missed some aspect of the issue, or maybe the discussion is becoming repetitive.
- If, when you are getting close to the expected closure time, it seems likely the agenda cannot be completed in that time, ask then if members want to go over time.

Asking early allows time for re-arranging of business.

- Close the meeting in a significant way. This may be a prayer, or it may be a summary of what has been achieved. By all means say the 8 second “grace together” (this is an amazing gift we can offer each other), but only after the members have been able to affirm what they have done.

3. Sensitivity should accompany discipline

- Ask yourself frequently during the meeting: “What is this meeting doing to these people?” “Why is X so silent?” “Why is Y talking so much?” “Should I be more proactive in involving particular members on this matter?”

- Time-out prayer/reflection is often helpful. In a strong debate, for example, egos can take over. At such a time, silent time out for personal re-focusing and prayer can bring people together. Invite members to consider questions like:

“Am I closing myself off from other possibilities here?”

“Have I put someone into a box and not heard their cry or conviction?”

“Am I stuck in a need-to-win or need-to-save-face mode?”

- Sensitivity also includes enabling the meeting to be very clear about its procedures and decisions. Consensus decision making may help people feel they have been heard, but it can intimidate quiet or “out-numbered” people into acquiescence, and can cause uncertainty about what has been decided. On the other hand, formal voting and majority decisions may be time efficient and clear, but do not guarantee every member will actively support the decision. There is no perfect model. Whatever model you use, be aware of its limitations. Procedures and rules are important boundary markers, but they can be used to manipulate others, and they don’t always build community and mutual trust and respect.

4. Don’t forget the postscript! What happens after the meeting is no less important than the meeting itself.

- Are there any pastoral concerns that should be followed up?
- For the health and well-being of the body, it is essential

that the decisions made are acted on promptly - because the members of the meeting have invested significant time in the meeting.

- Make careful personal notes about the meeting. Can you do anything to make the next meeting a better experience? Are there matters or concerns (even throw-away or off-the-cuff comments) from the meeting that should not be lost?

Believe, and make it known that you believe that: (a) meetings can be good positive experiences; and (b) when they are also worshipful experiences, they are the best way we know of discerning the will of God together.

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MISSION POSSIBLE

Created in consultation with national mission enabler John Daniel

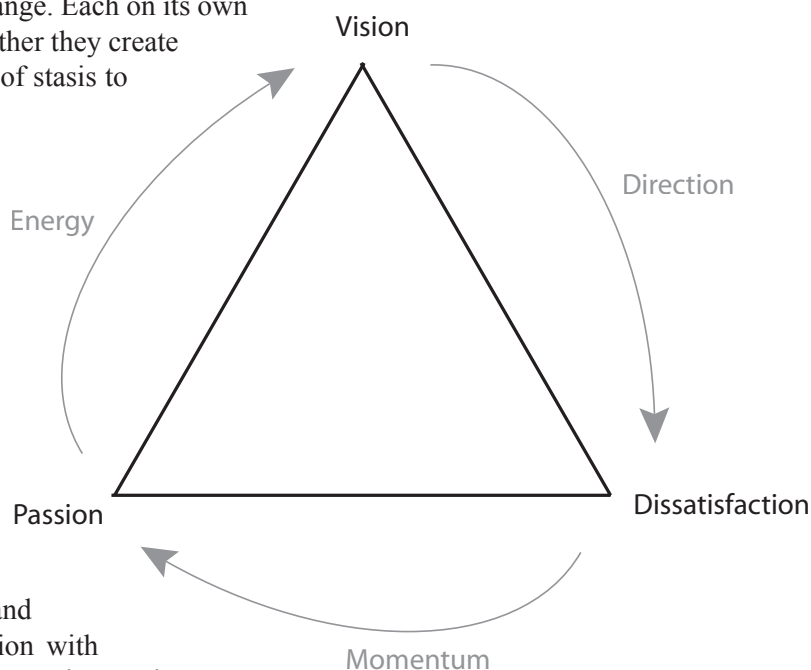
What are the key factors for change?

Three components are needed to stimulate change. Each on its own is not enough to make real progress but together they create the necessary drive to make a leap from a point of stasis to one of dynamism.

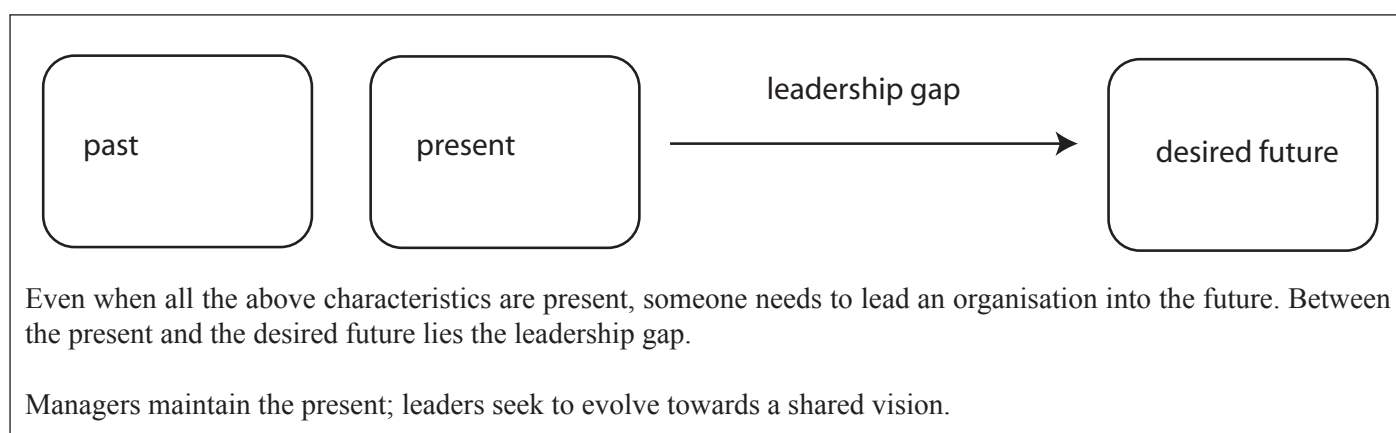
Passion creates energy, which means enthusiasm, emotional commitment and a willingness to take risks to achieve desired outcomes.

But without vision, passion remains directionless and ineffective. Vision provides a framework within which passion can be focused; it turns feelings and thoughts into intentions that aim for results.

Passion and vision on their own may not be enough to effect significant change. For a reworking of existing structures, ideas and culture to occur, there needs to be dissatisfaction with what we have. This sense that the present is not good enough creates momentum for action.



In combination with passion and vision, dissatisfaction is a powerful tool to effect change. But dissatisfaction alone, without direction or energy, turns inward and can destroy what exists without creating a replacement.



If you would like to be sent the previous pages in the Mission Possible series, please email candour@presbyterian.org.nz.

John Hunt *Bringing God Back to Earth: Confessions of a Christian Publisher* (O Books, Winchester)

By Alan Goss

John Hunt is a publisher of religious books of a radical and liberal kind. Reading other people's scripts has obviously given him lots of pleasure but also — in some cases — considerable pain.

Bringing God Back to Earth is an earthy, no-holds-barred account of our religious legacy and is generous with its insights and scope. The book deals with a number of religious topics - belief in God, good and bad religion, the teaching of Jesus, how that teaching became perverted, where we are now and the way forward. And it is all done in a very readable, even racy, sort of way that sustains interest and leaves you wanting more. Writers such as John Spong and Richard Holloway have commended it.

Like an artifact on a pedestal in a museum, the concept of God is fully explored and considered from every possible angle. At the end of the book, Hunt writes, "maybe He (God) exists out there, maybe He's all in our heads. Maybe it's the same thing. It's all worth believing, but it's not worth a moment's argument, a single wrong action". Elsewhere Hunt rules out our need for God, suggesting that Christianity without God has been around - and quite unobtrusively so - for quite some time.¹ God is too big an idea to be pinned down; there are thousands of ways of portraying God. For this author, what counts "is the purpose and effort we bring to things. The relationships we develop, the good we do, the art we create, the choices we make, the footprints we leave behind". It's not beliefs about God that matter but how these beliefs make us better people, he suggests.

Parts of the book are quite disturbing; they jolt the conscience and force the reader to re-examine entrenched views about the Christian faith. Hunt contends that from the sixteenth century onwards, the spread of Christianity has been achieved in large measure through episodes of inhumanity and genocide on a massive scale. Controversially, he holds that "holocaust" is not too strong a word to describe aspects of the Christian impact on the world. Christians, he says, have developed a religion that gives its opponents reason to describe it as amongst the worst of its kind. This could be seen in the powerful fundamentalist "Armageddon" mindset in the United States that suggests God has conflict, even annihilation, on his agenda except for the chosen and the saved.

In my view, this dangerous phenomenon, while not yet

as widespread or extreme in this country, is nevertheless slowly gaining ground. The mainline churches are becoming more conservative and are slowly being locked into the fundamentalist mindset. In the Presbyterian Church, two of its ordained ministers, Lloyd Geering and Jim Veitch, while widely acknowledged as prophetic voices by the community at large, are sidelined or totally ignored by the churches. Any prospects of real and meaningful reform are becoming more remote as reactionary voices gather momentum.

If there is so much bad religion, then how can the situation be changed? Maybe, says Hunt, Christians should reject the capital C "Church" as it exists now and invent a new religious language that works for most, form looser networks with smaller numbers, abolish hierarchies, honour all festivals, own no property, encourage diversity and invite all religious traditions to play a part. Ministers of religion should be just that, ministers of all kinds of religion rather than purveyors of a particular brand.

In our conflicting and changing world, both Christianity and the church are clearly in a state of transition. This book alerts us to some of the challenges that inevitably confront us, now and in the future.

¹ See Lloyd Geering's *Christianity Without God*, p145.

Editor's note

Provoked by this review? Strongly disagree? Want to see different types of book reviews?

I'd love to have more book reviews contributed by readers.

Email them to candour@presbyterian.org.nz.

What's happening with Youth Ministry?

If you have any PYM general enquiries, email youth@presbyterian.org.nz (an on-to-it PYM person will help you out).

John Daniel and the Youth Focus Group are looking at the future of youth ministry resourcing at the moment.

Who are the silent majority?

Gordon Rabey

Without being conscious of doing so, we take a proprietary interest in the community in which we live. We may not be personally involved but we do feel a sense of ownership in our local school, shopping centre, transport system, church – and generally in everything that is going on. And when change in any form is proposed, if is not entirely to our liking, the muttering will be heard: “what right have they to...?”

But at the same time, there is a reluctance to get personally involved in the issue, though if the provocation is sufficiently strong an irate letter to the local paper may emerge. This is usually individual reaction that is not likely to be particularly effective.

This then seems to lead to an inevitable question: can there be a significant public voice if it does not represent the views of the community, or at least a significant part of it? To which the obvious response is that ratepayers, community, progressive associations and other similar bodies are already functioning in many areas. But these are concerned almost exclusively with what might be called operational matters in the community – roading, transport, public facilities and the like. These agendas are driven by a need to establish and maintain at an optimum level the services considered to be essential.

There's more to community than this. What seems to be missing here is the human factor – sharing and generating thoughts and ideas in the community for mutual advantage. Within each of us there is a basic need – to feel part of and to participate in a congenial society. The uniting component of community is interaction. There is a growing awareness and concern that communication is becoming a one-way process. Television and radio – the one-to-many messaging – and the ubiquitous e-mail are all word-passing processes, impersonal and faceless, and unless you have a very flexible thumb and are fluent in the texting language of the young, you are isolated from this medium.

The UK is witnessing a revival of the coffee forum, where people come together informally to discuss topics of common interest, to explore and share ideas and possibilities with no fixed agenda and with ongoing action solely dependent upon what emerges. Participants take ownership of ideas and follow them through to the outcome sought.

Two widely different variations of this come to mind. Some years ago in one electorate here, the local branch members of one political party met every month for a year with the sole agenda item being “what shall we discuss at our next meeting?” Attendance and interest were maintained, they chatted happily about the political scene, others joined, friendships were formed – and, no doubt, quite coincidentally, their candidate was elected.

In the other example, not here, a coffee chat group is being formed – the topic proposed is simply “Jesus, Mohammed, Abraham and the Buddha”. People want to share thoughts and ideas – and aren't these the building blocks of community?

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