

CANDOUR

News and Views for Ministers

Number 6, July 2005

Published by Presbyterian Publishing Company Ltd
PO Box 9049, Wellington

Ethics

Contents

Editorial	Amanda Wells	3
Essays		
Why codify ethical behaviour?	Alistair McBride.....	4
The code of ethics		5
The pastoral-counselling contract	Karel Lorier	7
Talking with each other	Sally Carter.....	8
Keeping stories confidential	Pamela Tankersley	10
Supervision: Why bother?	Annette Hannah	12
Whose ends justify our means?	Susan Werstein	14
Training tomorrow's ministers	Juan Kinnear	15
Pastoral care as friendliness	Boyd Glassey	16
Reviews		
<i>Is Christianity Going Anywhere?</i>	Reviewed by Alan Goss	18
Letters to the editor		19
Reflection		
The sad, bad case of Graham Capill	Chris Nichol	20

About Candour

Candour is a monthly magazine about ministry and leadership, distributed free to ministers and others in leadership in the Presbyterian Church in Aotearoa New Zealand. It is published by the Presbyterian Publishing Company Ltd.

For more information, contact:

Communications Unit
Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand
PO Box 9049
Wellington.

Selected articles also appear on the Church's website at www.presbyterian.org.nz/candour

Editor: Amanda Wells
Email: candour@presbyterian.org.nz
Telephone: 04 3818285

Disclaimer

The articles in *Candour* reflect the views of individual ministers or contributors writing in a personal capacity. They are not representative of the Church's official position.

Please approach the author for permission if you wish to copy an article.

Advertising

One-quarter page: \$80 plus gst
(8 x 12.5cm, approx 180 words)

One-third page: \$95 plus gst
(8 x 16.5cm, approx 210 words)

Half page: \$130 plus gst
(12 x 16.5cm, approx 390 words)

Any artwork must be supplied electronically and in a high-resolution format

Glen Innis Vacancies

August 1 - 8	Homestead/Cottage
August 8 - 15	Homestead/Cottage
August 15 - 22	Homestead/Cottage
August 29 - September 5	Homestead/Cottage

To enquire about vacancies, please email glen.innis@xtra.co.nz or telephone 06 855-4889

Print or email?

Enclosed with this issue is a letter asking you to decide how you will receive *Candour*. You can elect to be sent a printed publication each month, or to be emailed a pdf (as has been the case in May and June). Donations towards printing costs are welcome if you select that option.

Thank you for the feedback I have received on this issue. The majority of people prefer to receive a paper publication but many others have expressed their approval of the efficiency of the electronic version. If you have already expressed a preference, we will honour that and you do not need to return the form unless you wish to.

Contributions

Letters to the editor are welcome – please email candour@presbyterian.org.nz or write to the postal address above, clearly indicating that your letter is intended for publication.

We also welcome **responses** to published articles. If you would like to write a piece replying to any of this month's featured articles, please email candour@presbyterian.org.nz or telephone Amanda Wells (04 381-8285).

Articles on upcoming themes are also appreciated.

Themes for the remainder of 2005

August: Finance and resourcing for mission; 2005/2006 budget

Deadline: 1 August

September: Cross-cultural mission

Deadline: 1 September

October: Life of clergy

Deadline: 30 September

November: New congregations

Deadline: 1 November

Spontaneous contributions on these or any other topics are always welcome.

In search of Christian ethics

Amanda Wells

Doctor, police officer and minister: titles that have carried automatic respect and trust. But no longer. For the generations growing up with news of cervical cancer enquiries, misconduct allegations, abuse within the Catholic church, and the conviction of New Zealand's most prominent Christian for sex crimes against children, trust in proclaimed ethical standards has never been lower.

Why do people fall short of ethical standards? Because the standards are unattainable? Because the individual is inherently flawed? Or because organisations fail to police their values adequately? This *Candour* issue on ethics seems all too timely.

Chris Nichol's reflection on the back page addresses the Capill case and responses to it. It's easy, and enraging, to access online collections of utterances that Capill made as leader of the Christian Heritage Party. For example, in 2000 on the subject of adoption by people in homosexual relationships: "The perversity of their own lifestyles is unlikely to be restricted to the couples concerned and puts the children at increased risk of abuse." Your view on the gay issue is irrelevant: such hypocrisy has done incalculable damage to any Christian's ability to take a stand on a moral issue. Just imagine the wheels turning in the minds of the public the minute the next public Christian condemns pornography, prostitution or infidelity.

Destiny's political ambitions may be hit by the fall-out. But will a curtailment of public pronouncements on sin be a bad thing? Should we be better known for what we're against, rather than what we're for? (And being for the family doesn't count when it's merely anti-solo-parents in disguise.) Ordinary parishioners are tired of being embarrassed to claim the label "Christian" if it equates to "anti-fillinthegap", and bothered by that nagging memory of Jesus with the woman at the well.

Despite its less than overwhelming acceptance at the time, few could now convincingly argue against General Assembly 2004's decision to mandate supervision. Annette Hannah's article expertly outlines why this form of accountability can no longer be seen as an optional extra for ministers.

She cites research that shows 23 percent of a sample of 300 ministers (of all denominations) admitted engaging in inappropriate sexual behaviour since entering the

ministry. In another study, 70 percent of respondents said they knew of other ministers having sexual contact with a parishioner.

It seems to me that part of being a minister is to have that gift to inspire attention. You could call this charisma but you can also call it charm. And charm can be an incendiary quality when exercised by a disordered personality. Only through disciplined, regular examination of relationships and of personal mental health can the charming negotiate a successful path through ministry.

Pamela Tankersley, in her article on the boundaries of pastoral care, negotiates the maze of roles that confronts ministers. As she says, ministers must recognise the power inherent in their position and the duty to exercise this responsibly.

One of the Church's attempts to formalise this responsibility is through the creation of a code of ethics, which is reprinted on pages five and six. In the preceding article, Alistair McBride, who was involved in developing the code, considers whether any form of words can be an effective guarantor of behaviour.

Sally Carter meditates on the problem of bullying within the church and the conditions in which this behaviour thrives. We also publish a series of comments and email phrases excerpted from patterns of bullying communication by church members. Karel Lorier outlines the changing context in which ministers exercise pastoral counselling; and Boyd Glassey argues that the simple value of friendliness is being sidelined by our society's tendency towards superficiality and distance.

How can you teach ethics? How do you help a parishioner make decisions that tally with his or her perception of morality? Should you attempt to influence this? Susan Werstein of the School of Ministry discusses the pedagogy of ethics, while Juan Kinnear outlines the training that students are given.

We can't deny that questionable behaviour occurs. It will continue to occur. That's the balancing act of Christian ethical standards: to set up the best-practice ideal but accept that no individual alone can maintain this level of perfection. To put the fence at the top of the cliff but have the ambulance waiting below.

Why codify ethical behaviour?

Alistair McBride, Scots Presbyterian Church, Hamilton

I was part of the work group that created the code of ethics (reprinted on the following pages). We explored the codes of other groups in society, including the New Zealand Association of Counsellors, the code for Nurses and the work being done by the Anglican Church. We explored the difference between a code and a covenant, and decided to bring before the Church a pastoral covenant¹.

In the first instance, a code seemed to apply to people working in particular situations, while ministers and those working in positions of pastoral responsibility had no such time-limited boundaries. As clergy working out a calling, we are such 24/7. In a pastoral calling, we are in a covenant relationship with our parishes and members.

A code is related to the idea of contract, which presupposes agreement reached on the basis of self-interest. It sets a minimum standard for behaviour but implicit in that is a notion of minimalism, which means doing no more for your client than is required.

A covenant relationship may require one to be available to the partners involved in the relationship above and beyond what is necessary to fulfil self interest criteria. Key ingredients in this approach are promise and fidelity to promise. When a minister speaks in this context, he or she is altering the person's world by introducing something to them that would not be there apart from such an utterance. (For example, "I will see you next week. Despite the fact you feel all alone, I will not abandon you.") Such an understanding cannot be inferred from a code of minimum practice but is implicit in the covenant relationship that ordination and induction to a charge promise.

That was then (1993) and here we are now. The covenant became a code. One of the reasons for that was the development of case law around cases of abuse and the need for professional indemnity insurance by the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. The covenant was seen as more of an in-house document but in the harsh reality of the climate of the mid to late 90s, this was not seen as enough to guarantee behaviour. Also, the language of the subsequent code of ethics is more easily understood, as seen in the box on this page.

One of the questions that has exercised me since is whether any form of words is a guarantor of behaviour. I know when I accepted the call to my present parish, I was

It's about accountability

Leaders know they are answerable for their actions, and that there is value in giving an account of their actions. They also know that mutual accountability strengthens the Church and enhances the vigour of its mission.

As a result they will:

- *exercise their leadership in a professional manner*
- *adhere to the Church's code of ethics*
- *be committed to ongoing learning*
- *seek an appropriate level of supervision*

— *Equipping the Leadership Policy Paper*

asked whether I was prepared to adhere to the code – and of course I assented. The code represents our commitment to act in a professional, competent manner; to act in a way that protects the boundaries in the relationships we develop. However, those were the already accepted premises of my practice in ministry.

When I look at those who have been caught in improper conduct, whether sexual or connected to abuse of power, one of the common factors appears to be that they did not believe their behaviour was proscribed by such a code; either because it didn't apply to them or because, in their minds, their particular behaviour wasn't mentioned. This signals to me that a code will always have its limitations and that those who understand its purpose have already taken on board the disposition required.

We have to take responsibility for monitoring our work on the boundaries of relationships. That is probably the area that requires the greatest amount of diligence. It is also where a strong and honest relationship with one's supervisor is critical. First of all, this requires the disclosure of an at-risk relationship with a parishioner, and secondly ongoing monitoring by the supervisor as the pastoral relationship develops.

There are three issues I have had to deal with openly. One has been my level of competence and the appropriateness of what I am able to offer. The second is where and how to mark the boundaries of what can and cannot be permissible. The third is the whole area of transference. I can't always get my head around all of that but I know it when I feel it and, with my supervisor, carefully

put up the marker pegs for the parishioner's and my own safety.

In the case of a parishioner who came to me with a declaration of attraction, simply labelling it an unsafe relationship would not have helped her receive the counselling she needed in order to be healed. With the help of my supervisor, I was able to maintain the relationship at an appropriate level and obtain the professional help she required. This was not as easy as it seemed because she was also exploring her theology and its foundations through a house group I was working with, and the questions being asked of participants were taking them far outside their "theological" comfort zones. Further down the track, she was concerned that it seemed to her we could not be "friends", and once again the boundary work had to be done.

As my supervisor has often remarked, much of what we do is multilayered and there is a tremendous overlap, which gives rise to a blurring of the edges of those boundaries. What seems appropriate at one level may not be so at another level. The engagement of the mind in theological exploration can offer stimulation and excitement, and that has the potential to excite other parts of our personality.

It is no surprise to me that the issues of a journal called *Insight*, published in the late 80s, that required the most reprints were the ones on sexuality and spirituality. The

insights in those essays were neither new nor earth shattering but recognised that the exploration of both areas, whether through reason or the sensual, were intimately connected; and that we ignore that connection at our own and our parishioners' peril.

I need to touch on another important issue, that of collegial accountability. From my reading of other professions' work in this area, it is one we need to address. It relates to "whistle-blowing", turning blind eyes to colleagues' behaviour and practice, and to the regaining of trust with the wider public after revelations of priests' and ministers' involvement in inappropriate and criminal behaviour. A code may say it is wrong; but having lost a sense of covenant, there is a feeling that somehow we (*qua* church) have let people down, and no one is quite sure why.

I think that the code has its place. It is able to inform our practice, particularly when assisting those moving into ministry from other occupations to understand the complexity of pastoral relationships. This will become more critical as the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand addresses the changing environment of "doing church".

References

¹A helpful essay is "Code and Covenant or Philanthropy and Contract" by William May in *On Moral Medicine*, eds S Lammer & A Verhey, Eerdmans 1987.

From the Book of Order:

Code of ethics in pastoral care

(The 1996 General Assembly strongly encourages ministers, elders, parish councillors, sessions and parish councils to adopt the Code of Ethics as an agreed minimum standard of practice.)

Introduction

This Code is to be read in the context of the Preamble to the Book of Order, the Statement on the Book of Order, and the Standards set out in Chapter 1, Section A. These set out the basis of the faith, order and discipline of this church. The discipline of our church applies to ministers and other office-bearers, members and associate members who have arrived at the years of discretion.

This Code is a statement of how the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand understands the standards of conduct of those members who undertake the work of pastoral care in its name. In this context the term minister will include all, clergy and lay, who undertake the work of pastoral care.

Pastoral care involves the formation of special relationships characterised by openness and trust. These relationships are developed in a variety of settings and a variety of ways, from informal pastoral care to structured counselling situations.

This code indicates acceptable ethical behaviour for those offering pastoral care. While its focus is pastoral care, it is also applicable wherever there is a ministry relation between people. By the grace of God we are called to serve, and through the power of the Holy Spirit we are sustained and encouraged to keep within this code.

Responsibilities to those to whom we offer pastoral care

- 1 Ministers will deal truthfully with people, encouraging free and open discussion, upholding their best interests, rights and well-being.
- 2 Ministers will respect the right of people to privacy and confidentiality of information except when there is a clear and imminent danger to those people or others, at which time they will be informed of those limits.
- 3 Ministers will recognise the dignity and worth of every person and will offer pastoral care without unfair discrimination.
- 4 Ministers will not abuse their position by taking advantage of people for personal, financial or institutional gain.
- 5 Ministers will recognise that sexual intimacy in the pastoral situation is unacceptable and will not subject people to sexual exploitation, sexual harassment or sexual abuse.
- 6 Ministers will recognise that there are limits to their competence and will refer people to others when this proves necessary or desirable. They will not attempt counselling without training.
- 7 Ministers will recognise that there is a cultural context for pastoral care and will act with awareness and sensitivity.

Responsibilities to the Church

- 1 Ministers will uphold high standards of practice in ministry and work for the advancement of those standards.
- 2 Ministers will exercise stewardship in the time given to ministry, guarding against both over commitment and avoidance of responsibility.

Responsibilities to colleagues and other pastoral workers

- 1 Ministers will promote co-operation with colleagues, pastoral workers and members of other helping professions, treating them with consideration and respecting professional confidences.
- 2 Ministers will seek mediation through the courts of the church when conflicts with colleagues or others within the church community arise.
- 3 Ministers will take action through the proper channels concerning unethical conduct by colleagues or other pastoral workers.

Responsibilities to the wider community

- 1 Ministers will act to prevent and eliminate unfair discrimination in the wider community.
- 2 Ministers will encourage as part of their pastoral task, participation in the shaping of social policies, advocating the promotion of social justices, improved social conditions and a fair sharing of the community's resources.

Personal responsibilities

- 1 Ministers will use regular approved supervision to maintain accountability and a high standard of pastoral care.
- 2 Ministers will use regular opportunities for spiritual growth, personal recreation and refreshment.
- 3 Ministers will seek to extend and enhance their knowledge.

The pastoral-counselling contract

Karel Lorier, minister within the bounds, North Shore City

Traditionally the role of minister has been that of confidant and counsellor to many people. Sometimes even people who had little contact with the church sought his help (it was invariably “his”) in time of trouble. Remnants of the role of father-confessor, spiritual director, mentor and wise man gathered round the role of minister and they were transported across the world to New Zealand. It remained so until the 60s and 70s and in some places is not completely gone.

However, in the past 30 years, many ministers’ traditional roles in the community have been taken over by counsellors, psychotherapists and helping agencies. Celebrants perform naming ceremonies, weddings and funerals. They design and officiate at other rituals that mark the changes in the life of an individual or family. The need for help and rituals has not abated. There are now, however, many providers. What the church traditionally provided has become professionalised and commercialised. In the eyes of the community and many parishioners, the status of ministers has declined and the minister is treated much more as peer with special knowledge. This is an improvement on when ministerial status was so powerful and authoritative that people were dismayed to discover feet of clay.

It is in this context that ministers exercise pastoral care. When compared to other providers, ministers face a complex task. A counsellor or celebrant will negotiate a contract with the client. Such a contract will include matters of confidentiality and boundaries and will determine what task is required or goals to be reached. They will also contract where and when they will meet. For example, a counsellor may contract with the client for six sessions to address a particular problem. At the end of those six sessions, the contract may be renegotiated or terminated, and in the latter case the counselling relationship is over. Client and counsellor will possibly never meet again. Celebrants will contract to create the ritual for a particular celebration or ceremony. The relationship is limited to that particular task.

In contrast, the minister engages in pastoral care with a far-from-clear contract and may have a pastoral-care relationship that continues over many years. The special quality of that relationship may even go beyond his or her time of ministry in a particular parish. People entrust all sorts of confidential information to a minister simply because he or she has been called or appointed minister.

Confidentiality and the limits to confidentiality are not spelled out. The context is not the privacy, convenience and limitations of a counselling room. I remember significant pastoral encounters with parishioners taking place at the swimming pool while watching our respective daughters learn to swim, at the supermarket and while driving to a meeting. Confidentiality was not spelled out. I knew that the conversations were part of my pastoral care and therefore confidential. The sharing took place because these people knew I was a minister. They had certain expectations.

How can we earn back trust?

These expectations are wearing somewhat thin these days. Ministers are not exactly tops when it comes to being professionals to trust. We now have to earn that trust. To earn that trust, I think we need to take confidentiality very seriously and be professional. This means making it clear to our spouses, family members, or parish assistant that the fact that people visit or phone is confidential. It means using our sensitivity to gauge which matters are private and confidential.

If we feel we have to share information about a parishioner or someone who seeks our pastoral help, we need to ask their permission. Asking it in the form of a question such as, “Please feel free to say no, but would you mind if I shared this with (your elder, or session, or congregation, which ever the case may be) so that you can receive the help and support our parish would like to offer you?” clarifies why you wish to share the information. It also gives them permission to say no.

If there is no reason to share the information, then do not share it. It becomes gossip, which does not help future pastoral encounters. Would you share deeply of yourself with someone who is going to tell a dozen others? Having such a reputation harms pastoral care. People have different ideas of what they consider confidential, private and sensitive matters. Mrs Y would like the world to know that she is in hospital for surgery, while Mrs X wants her hospital stay, diagnosis and surgery to be a deeply private matter. We must use our sensitivity and check if we need to share information.

We need to also be aware that there are limits to confidentiality and, when appropriate, communicate this to people under pastoral care. The suggested code of pasto-

ral conduct makes this clear: “I will respect the privacy of individuals and confidentiality of information. The only exception is where there is clear and imminent danger to the person or others, at which time he/she will be informed of those limits.”

Pastoral care or pastoral counselling is different from counselling, although there may be an overlap of skills. There are a number of long wordy definitions of pastoral care or pastoral counselling. My personal one is that “pastoral counselling or care occurs when a pastor empowers a person through his or her presence, listening, reflection and challenge to apply that person’s spiritual resources to significant life events.”

Unless you are a trained counsellor, it is not helpful to counsel parishioners and others who seek help for complex matters requiring psychotherapy or marriage counselling. If you are a trained counsellor, you will know to avoid such counselling because of the complications it imposes on the pastoral relationship.

An important skill to master is to refer people to those who can help. Knowing or having access to information about the helping resources in the community is useful. Make it clear to the person that you are not placing them in the too-hard basket, or getting rid of them, but rather that you want to refer them to the best help available. If you maintain contact for pastoral care, without necessarily sharing the details of their counselling, the pastoral relationship may be kept alive.

To be effective in pastoral care, we need good supervision. In such supervision we can examine our pastoral-care journey, hone our listening skills, make sure that we are challenging effectively and checking that we are not imposing our personal journey onto others. Clergy pastoral care, although not valued by the community as much as it has been in the past, is an important task. Our humanity motivates us onto a spiritual quest as we journey through life. To be a pastor to such people is a task that merits being done well.

Talking with each other

Sally Carter, Christchurch North Presbyterian Parish, Christchurch

How many of you suffered bullying in the playground as a child? I certainly know that “sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me” was not true as far as I was concerned. Today we see in our schools a concerted effort to overcome bullying, which is seen by many as one of the symptoms of the violence and conflict that saturates our world.

But what about bullying in adult life? Surely we have grown beyond the need to tease, taunt, call each other names and exclude one another from our games? Alas, no. Workplace and organisational bullying is every bit as common and every bit as hurtful as the bullying that made lives miserable during our school days.

And, while we might hope that the Church has taken to heart its calling to compassion and grace, we are not immune to bullying. In its various forms, bullying is one reason people give for leaving churches and never returning. As an organisation, we are no better than any other at acknowledging the impact of intimidating behaviour. Ministers can bully parishioners, parishioners can bully ministers, and we can bully our colleagues and companions.

I think it would be fair to say that the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand is in the midst of an organisational shakeup. Financial and theological pressures create a situation in which bullying can flourish. How much are we prepared to tolerate? Why do we feel powerless to confront the violence we do to one another through our language in letters, phone calls and, especially, emails? Just when we need to talk with each other meaningfully, we taunt, tease, humiliate, insult or demean. Sarcasm, “just joking” humour, put-downs, and patronising comments become commonplace, often with a subtlety that stops just short of clear harassment. Our internal censors seem to allow language in emails that we would never consider saying face to face.

What is bullying? One definition: Bullying is persistent unwelcome behaviour, mostly using unwarranted or invalid criticism, nit-picking, fault-finding, also exclusion, isolation, being singled out and treated differently, being shouted at, humiliated, excessive monitoring, and much more.¹

Email bullying is both particularly prevalent and particularly difficult to counter. “The more you try to explain, negotiate, conciliate, etc, the more gratification the one

doing the bullying obtains from your increasingly desperate attempts to communicate with them.”² People can face a huge volume of messages that are hurtful, deprecating and discouraging, and which can lead to considerable stress, decrease in productivity and even resignation.

I suppose we think that when we use bullying language we are being assertive and effectively getting our message across, as in this email example: “Just sort it out, tell him what he has to do, clearly, simply. Now.”

However, bullying is not “tough management” but “the self-interest of individual survival at the expense of others. It is the expression of weakness and inadequacy through the control of others using physical, psychological and emotional violence”.³

Bullying “works” for its perpetrators because, taken in isolation, any one of the incidents may not seem all that objectionable. But taken together, they amount to a sustained undermining of confidence. A good indication that a person is being bullied is when their emotional reaction seems disproportionate to the event(s) they report.

Why is bullying tolerated? Because targets can find it hard to believe it is actually happening. As with other forms of abuse, shame and guilt come into play. Bullying is often symptomatic of deeper and wider systemic issues. The

most effective response is to expose it and confront it for what it is, and so eliminate its power.

If we are to be an organisation that refuses to countenance bullying, these are some steps we could take:

1. Acknowledge that bullying exists and overcome denial. We can enable this by believing and taking seriously reports of bullying behaviour
2. Identify behaviours that constitute bullying and name them when they occur
3. Identify the factors that stimulate bullying and address them
4. Identify the causes of what makes people become bullies
5. Address those causes.

Our study group has been going through the book of James. It reminded many of us of the power that can be unleashed through our tongues and how easy it is to let our language get away from us. Perhaps there is one adage we should take seriously: “Count to ten before you speak.”

References

¹ From a web site devoted to all aspects of bullying — www.bullyonline.org

² *op cit*

³ *op cit*

Bullying: some examples

A request for examples of bullying behaviour by ministers and those in parish leadership roles quickly garnered these examples. Many relate to communication with Assembly Office staff. Sally Carter was given these examples to reflect on while writing her article.

Emails:

Sarcastic: “I have many suggestions as to how PCANZ processes can be exemplary and I am saving them up for a rainy and wet day. Be warned and watch the weather forecast.”

Language: “I would like to express a hell of a lot of annoyance and exasperation in discovering...”

Language: “Just what more do we in our damned arrogance think we can teach him...”

Demanding: “Just sort it out, tell him what he has to do, clearly, simply. Now.”

Calling into question integrity of a staff member: “To do anything else, if one were inclined to think of it in this way, could be considered irresponsible and lacking integrity.”

“I think there is now reason to consider an action of complaint... On the basis of negligence of duty and responsibility and lack of consultation... But I’ve got better things to do now.”

Letters:

“I do not want to receive any more so-called Accounts statements...”

“As silence is consent, we do not owe any money!!!”

“He states that ‘it appears to be...’ If it ‘appears’ then it can equally disappear. End of that story!!!”

Telephone conversations:

The person making the call raised his voice and said that he had “shouted” to get what he wanted, and said he was prepared to “shout even louder” to get what he wanted.

These examples should be read in the context of sustained exchanges conveying the same tone, creating a pattern of disheartening communication in which clear examples of unacceptability are difficult to pinpoint.

Keeping stories confidential

Pamela Tankersley, St David's Presbyterian Church, Palmerston North

I have come to regard a person's story as their taonga; a precious treasure that belongs to them. If they choose to share their story with me, it is an immense privilege and not to be taken lightly, for they have given me some power over them – especially if they perceive I “know their secrets.” They have become a little more vulnerable and I must protect that vulnerability. I have no right to give that power away to anyone, for that would be an abuse of the trust that has been given to me, particularly as I am seen to be the representative of God.

But always keeping confidentiality and respecting the boundaries of pastoral care are enormous challenges for those in ministry. There are some particular danger points.

For instance, the prayer chain! How easy it is for this to become a gossip session and in effect a sanctified way of passing on the story – “in love”, of course! We must insist on:

- Vetting participants for their suitability. If they have a reputation for passing on stories, then your prayer chain will not be trusted
- Asking the permission of the one for whom the prayer is offered. I think they should be asked to help frame the very words of the prayer, and have some idea of what kind of group will be praying for them.
- Training and supporting the people praying, and monitoring the load so that it doesn't get so heavy they “just must share it”
- Leaving plenty of room for anonymity.

Another danger area is the pastoral team – the minister, pastoral workers, elders, and visitors. I find that a lot of “off-loading” happens in an informal manner in the church secretary/pastoral administrator's office. How much confidentiality is expected here? When is it OK to pass on the information that someone needs some help? A good rule is that if pastoral information is to be passed on to someone else in the team, it must be on a “need to know” basis and permission should be sought from the one whose story it is. “Would you like me to pass this on to the minister?” are good words to use, as are “may I share this information with your elder or the parish clerk or....?” “Do we insist on training all those involved in pastoral work in the ethics of confidentiality?”

My experience is that a church's reputation for confidentiality hangs on the least trustworthy person in the team. Remember that the one who gossips to you will also gossip about you (and others).

Recognising the power of our roles as ministers is another danger point. We have to recognise that our status as ministers and pastors gives us the opportunity to exercise power – for good or bad. We have education and life experience; we have the affirmation of the church to do our job; we have authority and the mana to make a huge difference to people's lives, as they grow in their spirituality and we help them struggle towards health and wholeness. And often what make us powerful in our calling are personal qualities and gifts: wisdom and stability, as well as charismatic and articulate leadership. These gifts draw people to trust and respect us because they perceive that we may be a channel of God's grace for them. What a huge responsibility! Thank God for the model of Christ, to lead us with humility, gentle wisdom and reliance on Him.

The struggle, however, is how to deal with our lack of choice about how others define the role of minister. No matter how many times we might say, “I just want to be friends”, we are nevertheless, in the eyes of the other, still “the minister”. Frustrating, isn't it?

But being “safe” in ministry is mostly a matter of keeping the role boundaries clear. In my view, we are very loose about boundaries in parish work, (especially in small towns and rural communities, perhaps?) Yet it is well researched that the potential for the abuse of power in a professional role is very high when we have more than one role in another person's life.

We might be next-door neighbour, golf mate, fellow school parent, fellow Rotarian, and minister, pastor or elder. My experience is that when we are unclear what our role is at any given point in time, and how that determines our relationship, we get into trouble. There is a lot to be said for making sure that you develop sufficient friends outside the parish, so that your social needs are met beyond the bounds of pastoral responsibility.

My advice is, if there is a conflict of interest in the roles you are being expected to adopt, be clear – and if necessary, withdraw. Remember that the person who has the power in any situation (usually the minister) must take

responsibility to uphold the boundaries. Taken to the extreme, I reckon that many of the difficult incidents of ministerial sexual abuse in our church would not have happened if the minister had refused to step out of the role of minister into a relationship of "friendship". The questions to ask yourself are: "Who is primarily served in this relationship? Whose needs are being met?" If the answer is you, then make some changes.

Now that we are all in supervision, we will be familiar with guidelines in terms of sharing the stories of our parishioners within the boundaries of the supervision contract we have set up. Mostly we will use pseudonyms when we talk about our work, and we will only use as supervisors those whose confidentiality we can trust. And this is one of the important places of accountability for our use of power. When I am supervising ministers, I ask that we have an agreement that every couple of months or so, I may ask my supervisee: "Look carefully over your relationships with your people. Are there any that are developing in a way that might make you or them vulnerable? If so, what are you going to do about that?"

It is a worry for us in the ministry of the Church that the public at large no longer puts our profession at the top of the list of those most trusted. However, this makes it incumbent on each one of us to strive more effectively to be trustworthy, to keep confidence, to be accountable for our power, to be clear about our roles and our boundaries. May God's strength and wisdom empower us to fulfil the promise and the trust placed in us.

ARE YOU

Interested in empowering and facilitating an established congregation to revitalise its mission to the surrounding community?

This could be the challenge you are looking for.

CLERGY VACANCY

Lansdowne Presbyterian Church is situated in the Borough of Masterton in the bustling Wairarapa.

The Board has in mind a full-time position in line with the Standard Terms of Call. However, if you have some other suggestion, we are happy to discuss it.

Expressions of interest, requests for further information etc to:

The Nominator
Lansdowne Presbyterian Church
The Rev. Robin Lane
97 Calcutta Street
Khandallah
WELLINGTON
Ph 04 479 5157
e-mail: robin.lane@xtra.co.nz

GISBORNE PRESBYTERIAN PARISH
WHICH INCORPORATES ST. ANDREWS' CHURCH: GISBORNE,
AND MATAWHERO HISTORIC RURAL CHURCH

We pray and believe that somewhere, God is speaking to a minister to call them to a new field of Christian ministry among us. We want to hear about God's love and to experience it in our worship; to see it in pastoral action; and to be encouraged to do some new things.

This is a secure, FULL-TIME call with ministry opportunities to encourage lay involvement.

Strictest confidence maintained on any initial interest or enquiry. PROFILE available

Contact the Nominator:

Rev. Dr. Clive Yates, 20 Turenne Street, Kaiti, Gisborne.

e-contact is: g04cby@clear.net.nz (zero-four)

Supervision: Why bother?

Annette Hannah*

Supervision provides an ongoing formative role in establishing and maintaining professional competence, building on personal strengths, knowledge, faith and understanding of our individual ministry. Research has clearly shown that supervision is a key factor in the maintenance of well-being and in guarding against burnout in clergy. An established supervisory relationship, where openness, respect and trust provide a safe, if challenging, place can be crucial in dealing with the crises and issues that are an intrinsic part of ministry, parish life and family interactions.

Conflict management (or avoidance) is an ever-present facet of church life, with bruising clashes of family members and family systems often occurring daily, especially if changes are being suggested or implemented. These can be painful and full of conflict, as well as loving and nurturing. On top of this, we often have “gospel” expectations of how we and others should and shouldn’t behave, and high expectations for our effectiveness.

Good supervision is a way to keep on track. As one experienced minister said: “It helps reign in an over-inflated ego and messiah complex.” Over-commitment, avoidance and a sense of isolation in ministry are key issues that can lead to anxiety, depression and burnout. Good supervision is a protective factor that helps identify and mediate these.

Accountability

Ethical and safe practice reduces the frequency of boundary violations surrounding ministry (work) and family life. Keeping a balance in these areas is not easy. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand wisely brought in compulsory supervision for all ministers in 2004. Since cost is often used as a reason for not engaging in supervision, parishes should be encouraged to pay for this.

A trap that clergy can often fall into, unwittingly or deliberately, is the role of mental health practitioner, marriage counsellor or psychotherapist - without adequate training or professional supervision. Sometimes it’s a case of a little learning being a dangerous thing. Christian discernment is no substitute for professional training. Good supervision will assist ministers to keep effective limits that are appropriate to their professional level of training and

to make good referrals to other agencies for professional care.

How do we decide what is and what is not appropriate behaviour? Sometimes we are able to convince ourselves of the rightness of our own or others’ behaviour, decisions or perspectives in the face of serious inappropriateness.

“The next highest incidence of abuse takes place in intact, highly religious homes.”

Many individuals and congregations find themselves manipulated and intimidated by gifted charismatic personalities with a strong sense of Christian vision. Often we experience a combination of giftedness and expertise in some areas but in other areas of our lives we can have areas of blindness and even feel a sense of self-doubt and inadequacy. Balancing these personal issues is part of an ongoing journey of self-discovery.

Furthermore, abuse of women and children has been found to be highest among alcoholics and the “next highest incidence of both incest and physical abuse takes place in intact, highly religious homes.”¹ This is not helped by an oft-cited “Biblical” theology of women that effectively gives permission for male power - under the guise of “protector and provider”. The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand is 63 percent women, while a large proportion of its clergy are men.

An associate professor of law in the Notre Dame Law School said in 1997 that he had handled 500 clergy sexual misconduct cases in the space of eight years. The Archdiocese of Boston was considering filing for bankruptcy when faced with hundreds of sexual misconduct cases. The offending of Rev Graham Capill and accusations of sexual abuse within one of the agencies connected to the Presbyterian Church are two New Zealand examples that have recently come to light.

Misconduct in the church is often masked within its ranks because we have a strong theology of grace and forgiveness. However, this further highlights the huge gap between high moral discourse and rhetoric about Christian sexuality and the reality of human sexual behaviour in general, including by those who profess religious faith. Over the years, the high rates of inappropriate sexual behaviour of ministers of all denominations researched

has highlighted this. For example, Hall (1992) cites several studies that show 23 percent of 300 ministers of all denominations surveyed acknowledged inappropriate sexual behaviour since entering the ministry. As many as 69 percent of participants in one study identified that this was with a sexual partner in the church. In another study, 70 percent of those pastors surveyed reported knowledge of other pastors having had sexual contact with a parishioner². This also alerts us to the inherent trap of power and charisma. As agents of the church and society, supervision helps keep ministers safe and more accountable to those whom they serve.

Personal insightfulness

Getting into the habit of reflecting on our work – how we approach tasks, problems and people; exploring areas of work content and concern, and coming to new understandings and altered decisions for ourselves about how to respond - is an exciting and healthy process. It engages us in continuing personal and spiritual growth, and ongoing ministry formation.

However, there are many anxieties that people feel in relation to supervision. Supervision can raise transference issues related to an experience with a critical parent or authority figure; create a feeling of being under examination; generate a fear of being seen through; and raise concern of having caused harm, fear of failure, worthlessness, or inadequacy. Gaining some personal insight into these very normal human experiences (even among Christians!) is a valuable asset in ministry, especially when we are often encouraging and expecting others to grow in their own personal lives.

Referral for therapy

Supervision is not therapy, pastoral counselling, or spiritual direction, although there will inevitably be elements of all these present. If the need for therapy/pastoral counselling or spiritual direction arises, then an appropriate referral should be recommended.

Characteristics of good supervision

Good supervision will insist on clear contracts and open discussion of the nature of the supervisory relationship, process, expectations, purpose, goals for session, and so on. The supervisee can expect a safe climate: risk taking and openness is encouraged; identification and acknowledgment of our anxieties related to supervision can be discussed. Good supervision develops an understanding of our coping style that assists us to recognise our own defensive reactions and their effect on the supervisory process; acknowledges and affirms our effectiveness and strengths; and engages in appropriate pacing of depth and

focus. The supervisor can be expected to keep appropriate distance at all times, even when the supervisee attempts to engage in a closeness that may compromise objectivity. While supervision can be expected to be supportive, effective supervision is not a meeting with any kind of supportive group nor is it a friendly chat with a colleague. Having supervision is a privileged opportunity that many people need but don't get.

**Dr Annette Hannah completed her training as a Presbyterian minister and continued on to train in Psychology. She lectures in the University of Otago's Department of Psychological Medicine and is an elder in the Dunedin Presbytery.*

References

¹ Stewart van Leeuwen, Mary. (1990) *Gender and Grace: Women and Men in a Changing World*. Downers Grove: IVP. pp. 119,170.

² Hall, T. (1997). "The Personal functioning of Pastors: A Review of Empirical Research with Implications for the Care of Pastors." *Journal of Psychology and Theology*. Vol 25(2) 240-253.

SENIOR MINISTER

ST COLUMBA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
OTUMOETAI – TAURANGA

An established parish in a progressive
and desirable community

Genuine enquiries invited from
an ordained minister with:

- Experience and energy
- Visionary leadership and preaching skills
- Ability to foster pastoral relationships

Please contact:

the Rev'd Tony Hepburn
48 Te Koari Drive, Tauranga
(07 576 8072)

for an information pack.

Whose ends justify our means?

Susan Werstein, School of Ministry, Dunedin

How do we decide what is good or bad? What is right and wrong? Who do we listen to, who do we reward or punish, what should we do? These are the questions answered by ethics.

Ministers, present and future, need to be grounded in ethics – both as advisors of how to make decisions and as professionals who need to ground their behaviour morally.

Grasping this dual focus of becoming an ethical person and advisor is a critical part of the School of Ministry's programme for national and local ministers. The main ethics course covers three parts: the basics of ethical systems, Christian ethics and professional ethics.

For example, you have heard the expression, "the ends justify the means". The majority of people follow this adage, which is an individualistic approach to utilitarianism. This system has goals of independence, success, autonomy and power.

Ministers need to understand how widespread this ethical belief is – especially in their own thinking and even in the church's. If, for example, one believes that increased attendance is the greatest goal for a congregation, then this shapes the budget, the efforts, the preaching and teaching of a church. If the goal is providing a service to the community, these factors shift to support that end/goal.

There are other systems: for example, doing one's duty or keeping promises. This is a focus on the means rather than the ends. It can lead people to actions far different from utilitarianism. As ethical advisors, ministers need to be able to work alongside others to see what their assumptions are and what principles and loyalties are shaping their behaviours.

Consider a situation: Anne is debating if she should keep her job. She is making good money, but is basically dissatisfied. She needs the income to support herself and children, but is becoming more and more depressed. Should she put her own needs aside to support the family? What is best for each person? For the family? What is the right thing to do? What limits are there on self-sacrifice? Is work a part of God's calling? What is the role of a church when a family in its midst is suffering?

An ethical advisor can help Anne consider all the facts and then look at what principles and goals are most helpful. Anne is the one who must make her own decision, so assisting her to know how to see what is right or wrong, good or bad, is crucial for all concerned.

"However, we know that knowledge of what is right does not guarantee right behaviour."

The minister can also be aware of how the congregation can support members or people in their community. The minister should be familiar with the systems that are in place. However, he or she must also know how to act professionally as an advisor. Confidentiality is one of the basic principles of ethical advising.

The second focus for the School of Ministry's teaching ethics is to emphasise the importance of professional boundaries, activities and attitudes. Our newspapers are filled with ethical tragedies when ministers and church leaders do not live up to the moral standards of their calling.

The ethics course teaches about proper conduct, confidentiality, referral procedures, and so forth. How to minister ethically is well understood by the end of the course. This knowledge helps prevent tragedies based on ignorance.

Enabling personal formation

However, we know that knowledge of what is right does not guarantee right behaviour. Certainly most of the people who make the headlines knew their behaviour was wrong. This is why an absolutely essential aspect of teaching at the School of Ministry is about personal formation. Enabling students to know themselves and to develop a strong spiritual relationship with God is perhaps more crucial to ethical behaviour than knowing about professional rules of conduct. Helping students integrate self-understanding, emotional maturity, professional proficiency and spiritual discipleship is critical in preparing men and women for ministry. This undergirds our entire approach to teaching – just knowing the how-tos of ministry does not result in a safe, professional minister.

Ethics can be defined in one sentence:

"The system of evaluating voluntary and competent actions based on agreed upon principles and societal values."

Each word of this sentence is crucial. Ministers need to know the principles and values of their Christian faith in today's world. Actions need to correspond with these values. Competence depends on knowledge and practice of the various systems. Crucially, however, ethics is an evaluation of voluntary actions. And for a minister to live and serve ethically, he or she must be in control of

her or himself. Formation is needed as well as knowledge.

It is our prayer that the School of Ministry's courses provide the context for this maturing process. In this way, the Gospel may be served ethically by the actions and advice of its ministers.

Training tomorrow's ministers

Juan Kinnear, School of Ministry, Dunedin

Stanley Hauerwas claims that "ethics was and continues to be the project of Protestant Liberalism. The Protestant project has been to put the Church at the service of making ours a society like no other."¹ For those of us involved in training ministers, this is a very challenging perspective on what it means to teach Ethics as an academic discipline. It also challenges us to think carefully about how to equip men and women in positions of Christian leadership to act ethically.

The reality is that while most Christian leaders act within acceptable moral parameters, the abuse of money, sex and power is not unknown among ministers. Additionally, consensus eludes us on issues of human sexuality, gender roles, socio-political and economic concerns. How then, do we equip ministers with the ability to lead exemplary lives, while at the same time providing them with the skills required to foster moral transformation within their communities?

Some would argue that any shortcomings in the moral fibre of modern day ministers result from a lack of clear doctrinal teaching during their training years. They would say that unambiguous Christian morals, taught in an authoritative manner, are needed to give ministers the confidence to go out into society with a clear message of right and wrong.

This approach unfortunately does not cast much light on the question of which moral values are normative and how such morals might effectively be communicated in a "one size fits all" manner. Instead, the realities of life in a complex, pluralistic society demand a more nuanced approach.

Consequently, the Ordination Studies Programme at the School of Ministry attempts to address these challenges by:

- Ensuring that trainee ministers are comprehensively briefed on the "professional" ethics demanded of them. These parameters are usually expressed in a "Code of Conduct", which has been written and officially approved by the denomination.

- Encouraging students during their formation period to explore those features of their personality that may make them susceptible to unethical behavior and to make use of self-care strategies and counselling to address their vulnerabilities.

- Consciously exposing students to a spectrum of ethical viewpoints that accurately represent the realities of congregational ministry. Encouraging disciplined theological reflection and the study of Scripture and tradition to illuminate these realities.

Is this sufficient? While one would hope that all graduates leave as well-rounded, level-headed and theologically informed men and women, the formation process has no guaranteed outcome. Indeed, ministry formation is a life-long process and depends as much on our maturation as people, our acquisition of wisdom and experience as it does on what happens in the lecture theatre.

Consequently, our sphere of influence is limited to providing our graduates with a set of analytical tools, some theoretical knowledge and most importantly, a commitment to the Gospel message with which to set out transforming our context into a society like no other.

References

¹Hauerwas, Stanley. *Wilderness Wanderings*. London: SCM, 2001.

Pastoral care as friendliness

Boyd Glassey, Minister Emeritus, Wellington

Plodding up the hill to home loaded with a couple of bags of groceries, head down, I suddenly hear a little voice: “Sir, will you say hello to my new dog, my friend?”

I look up and see her right under my nose.

I say, “Oh, aren’t you lucky? What’s the name of your dog?”

She tells me with enthusiasm. Shame I can’t remember.

But I remember the event. She was asking me, a perfect stranger of aging dimensions, to be a friend in a lonely moment as she wandered home. She typifies the strength of our human need to “be a friend, and to find a friend.” She wasn’t worried about political correctness, strangers, or that I might be a sex offender. She went for what she needed and she got it and she picked the right person at that moment. I could have said “go away little girl, don’t put me at risk” and ignored her dog. Shame! The danger of “being a friend” and “needing a friend” go together, and we cannot avoid them.

Friendship is a social reality and a personal need for individuals, whether in the Church or part of social gatherings of all kinds. In these modern days, when churches often gather together only once a week, the art of meeting people as some kind of friend is very subtle and very necessary. We do as much pastoral care by knowing how to be friendly over a cup of coffee after Church as we do any other way.

Permissions

People prone to over-familiarity are criticised in our society because they intrude on our choosing of friends we like. We secretly criticise such presumption and refuse many permissions to be regarded as friends. But people who are standoffish and too distant may need our permission to be closer. Developing friendships takes time, negotiation, acceptance and having things in common. We learn to manage friendship as we mature in a family, a society, and a job. Some have no family, not even parents, who are their friends. This could make them both selective of friendships and, at the same time, too independent. It could make friends hard to get although much needed, though that need might be denied.

I tried to train Ministers of Religion to be appropriately friendly and supportive of other people in their work. They asked:

1. “How can I be friendly with all the people I meet and not reveal that I don’t really care about them?”

Their answer was to “show face” or play games that were politically correct but not of great value.

2. “How can I be friendly without the fear that they will reject me?”

In this, their answer was to approach all people with a defensive, screwed-up attitude. No contact, no friends. Others boasted they would not allow themselves to be friendly to any one person and implied that this was what it meant to be “professional”. They remained distant, protected by formality and function.

Friendship requires the courage to face the risk of being with people and develop a degree of friendship that we can accept. Those who master the art of friendliness become friends with themselves and their own humanity. With no social agenda or purpose for friendship, they stand, speak, think, and engage with people in a friendly way. Communication is not loaded with need or fear of need. This composure tends to break down when inner and personal insecurity increases.

But in needing friends, we do not collect them as curios. They endure, if we do. We engage in the very simple behaviour of knowing how to be a friend. We are not possessive, controlling, dominating or missionaries for friendship — like a Church with a rigid doctrinal barrier to exclude what is too human. That’s not healthily human for me, yet it happens a lot in church circles and destroys our pretensions about inclusiveness quite easily

One of the ways we make friendship difficult for people is when we use it as a stepping stone to sex, but this is really a subject for more detailed coverage. Communication intimacy is simply the basic and best quality of friendship in any form of social engagement. It means that we develop the art of talking with a safe openness and interactive friendliness. We also allow people to be different and disagree.

Jesus presents a model of friendship for his disciples in John 15: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friend - I have called you friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father”.

There are three good Presbyterian points there:

1. Friendship is a form of love, warmth, and human compassion. We used to spend endless time on three Greek words: Philo, Agape, and Eros. Philo can cover the lot for me now.
2. Jesus is the commander of his friendship with us, and we share that command with him and our friends. We cannot order anyone in the name of our alliance with Jesus. Our personal authority in friendship is paramount, and we extend the same authority to those we befriend.
3. Jesus, in dying, tries to tell us everything is “open” about friendship. A difficult assignment, which aided his death. Most of us are much more cautious about friendship; sometimes for good and other times for ill.

An Anglican colleague sweating his way through a Clinical Pastoral Education course used to say, “pastoral care is learning to say ‘hello’ in a communicative way”. Friendliness is related.

Practising pastoral friendliness

Pastoral friendliness is often rubbished and discounted by those who experience it. People may feel “got at” by ordinary church-goers, who mostly have no such intentions.

Small talk canvassing “where do you come from?” may result in a well-meaning person overlooking the fact that the other has been around for years and they live there. We go away laughing - or more than slightly offended. It is a mistake to try and be friendly and not notice that you have seen the person before. It is also a danger to engage in “small talk” in a casual way without being prepared to go beyond the weather. You can train yourself to go further by asking a person to repeat their name for the third time, because 10 to one they have not remembered your name either. To care enough to be that interested is a good start. Here we need to warm to the fact that people have names, families and jobs, and are mostly very like us.

As a once-shy and wordless person with no confidence and a “yeah, right!” response, I stayed stuck in the morass of reluctant social participation. I was trained to be intolerant of assumptive friendliness. It was tricky territory,

and learning to negotiate it was more rewarding than I can credit.

During the 60s, Presbyterians tried saying “peace” to each other as a kind of greeting in Church, which supposedly helped cross the friendliness barrier and satisfied a dozen other spiritual reasons advocated by the Anglicans. One of my uncles always sat at the end of the pew so that he only had to say “peace” to his wife. I know many who still react in the same way. Perhaps a genuine gesture of greeting demands more closeness with others than we’re prepared to give. We have been trained to keep our distance and not get too close to people in a legitimate friendly way. We breach this barrier in the name of the Lord and his peace or shalom.

If we can feel there is gain for ourselves and others by participating, meeting and greeting might become a more pleasurable activity. It is not unique to the church. The friends at the golf club are just as good at pastoral care as the church, though they only say “giddyay”. Three church people and a member of the golf club visited me when I had a heart bypass. I’m reasonably certain that some of the golf club would have turned up to my funeral if I had died then.

For me, this space of friendliness helps me “belong” and be recognised as a recognised member who is precious to the church, like I am to the golf club (having paid the fee, of course). In the latter I’m rated a poor player, but I still participate with the best and sometimes, by some special miracle, even win. Why do we need it to be different in the church? I often find our attempts to be Christian, charitable, caring and friendly have a superior ring. It seems like we get caught up in some large competition. Relax; for me there’s nothing special in this kind of caring except my love of myself and of human beings like me (Jesus surely said something about this, see Leviticus 19:18/Mtt 22:39).

It is my human spirit that needs to belong to the human race, and I try to meet the same need in others with no “glow” on my halo. I do not need nor have any Jesus magic, except that I care in my own limited way.

Some people are talented in this area of life. They have confidence, intelligence and are relaxed in most things that they do. Good. They often decide that what they do is “good enough” and that it does not need analysis nor training. Good! Let them stay in the arena of caring for all with some patience, and not just waltz off with the first person they find who is like them and they naturally find easy to like. I quickly felt excluded in that kind of mob

and I have heard myself being criticised because I stuck with them more than they will ever stick with me. I used to be jealous of such cliques, but now I simply rejoice that they enjoy friends who befriend as easily as they do. Good. Jesus had something to say about this which I do not need to quote either. It might sound like a judgment (Lk. 6:32).

So why did I go to all the trouble of five CPE courses and numerous supervisory training courses (10 at least)? No one paid me, that's for sure! The main reason was that up until completing the first five, I needed training. After that, I sought through small peer group learning processes to help others learn. Notice I refrain from saying that I was the teacher. Self-learning is paramount in this process, and a contract with yourself to learn is needed.

For me, what happens in normal pastoral friendliness is I share myself with others in a church group as a human being. I neither feel any better than nor any worse than them. I usually go to church without my wife who works. I have a somewhat retired and alone existence and am now 78. I do not enthusiastically run down the road to church but I walk back up with a strengthened step and spirit, just because I have allowed myself to belong with my fellow human beings. It's a spiritual exchange, that's what happens!

Some Christians think this can only happen among the devout. My experience is to the contrary. They might turn out to all be atheists or Christian nit-pickers as I get to know them. Even so, I still join them for my sake until they totally reject me or me them. (Why they might do that I have no clue? Sermons are usually good.)

General Assembly Budget 2005/06

Information about the General Assembly budget for year ending 30 June 2006 was posted to parish treasurers, presbyteries and union district councils in late June.

The budget provides a summary of how General Assembly funds will be used during the 2005/06 year.

You can view the budget information on the Presbyterian website at:
www.presbyterian.org.nz/finance

Questions and comments about its contents and format can be directed to:

Administration and Finance Policy Group Co-convenor
John Trainor; john_trainor@clear.net.nz

Geering dissects the church's death

Lloyd Geering, *Is Christianity Going Anywhere?* (St Andrew's Trust, Wellington, \$12)

By Alan Goss

Lloyd Geering's short answer to the question posed in his May 2004 lectures at St Andrew's, Wellington, is "yes". But, he says, the Judaeo-Christian path of faith will in future be a secular one, leaving behind orthodox Christianity, which has ground to a halt with no place to go and no prospect of recovery.

Geering, in four succinct chapters, expounds how Christianity has come to a crossroads and stands at a critical point in its long and complex history. He also shows how the emerging secular and humanistic world, rather than being treated as Satan and an enemy to be defeated, is not anti-Christian but is an offspring and product of the Christian West. It evolves, and continues to evolve, out of the Judaeo-Christian tradition and is driven by the hopes, visions and values of the Christian past.

"Belief in a personal supernatural being became more and more unconvincing."

The first sign of cracks in institutional Christianity was the Protestant Reformation, which shattered the unity of the Church. Subsequently, confidence in the Bible was shaken — it was recognised as being of human origin — calling into question the divinity of Jesus Christ. The reality of belief in a personal supernatural being became more and more unconvincing. Three knowledge revolutions — the Copernican, the Darwinian and the modern knowledge explosion — have together lead to a critical examination of orthodox Christian beliefs. Geering emphasises that "it is in the context of the evolution of human culture that we must seek to understand the current crisis in the Christian path of faith".

Two major changes, known as the First and Second Axial Ages, that occurred during the long cultural evolution are outlined. The Second Axial Age refers to the huge knowledge explosion that has erupted during the past 500 years and out of which has grown the modern secular world. It is now circling the globe, compelling us to re-think religion and make a fresh start. A majority of people, both Christian and non-Christian, see little or no connection between the modern secular world and its Christian origins, which is why Christianity is at the crossroads and why groups like the Sea of Faith Network have been formed.

Two chapters focus on attempts by scholars, past and present, to recover the original Jesus of Nazareth and also his teaching. Both help us to understand where Christianity is heading. The claim that Jesus was divine, for example in the Nicene Creed, is challenged.

“The strong influence of Paul, who never met Jesus, must be removed.”

The layers of belief that have smothered the historical Jesus have slowly been excavated to reveal a different picture of the man of Galilee. The strong influence of Paul, who never met Jesus, must also be removed. We are left only with footprints and voiceprints of a Jesus far removed from those of an other-worldly miracle-worker who claimed to be Messiah and Son of God. Scholars of the Jesus Seminar in the United States have concluded that Jesus was primarily a teacher of wisdom, a sage, and a fully human being to whom modern secular people can relate more readily than the traditional other-worldly Christ.

Geering’s view is that although the institution of the church as a power structure deserves to die, the legacy of Jesus’ teaching will continue along other different paths. All the major religious traditions are evolutionary; they tend to diversify. There is no Christian “essence” because Christianity is too big – and too complex – to classify.

Traditional Christians who regard the modern secular world as a demon are whistling in the wind. In spite of its failings, it has given people the freedom to think for themselves rather than submit blindly to an other-worldly divine authority.

Three basic Christian themes (faith, hope and love) are explored, showing how they can take us into the Christian future. That path, Geering concludes, is a secular one and is a legitimate continuation of the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

Lloyd Geering’s ability to see the whole picture and compress it into a brief and readable form is legion. The position that he takes will be hotly contested and even ignored by traditional orthodoxy, and that is understandable. The real tragedy will be if the issues he raises are not debated at all.

[Editor’s note: The Rev Lloyd Geering delivered the annual Hocken Lecture at the University of Otago on 12 July 2005, on the topic of God in 20th century New Zealand.]

The Mission on our Doorstep: A brief response to the Moderator (Candour June 2005).

I agree that the ideal is ministry to children and their families within the church. However, my concern is for the large number of children in dysfunctional families. The nuclear family is not the norm in New Zealand today. I believe we have the opportunity to bring light to a child’s life by showing that there is an alternative lifestyle.

This was my experience in a 30-minute Religious Education class last month with eight and nine year olds. The topic was “communicating — learning about prayer”. On entering the room, a small girl snuggled up to me giving me a hug. She informed me her father had hit her Mum’s tummy and the baby had died. I asked her how many brothers and sisters she had. The answer: “It would be seven but the one in Mummy’s tummy died.”

A small boy, an Afrikaans immigrant, was sitting alone at his desk. I said, “are you alright, you look sad?” “My Dad has gone away.” “Where has he gone?” I asked. “To Afghanistan,” was the reply; “he blows up bombs.” “And you are worried about him?” “Yes,” he replied, “one blew up right near him.”

After the lesson on prayer, the children were asked to share prayer needs. A bright-eyed Iraqi girl who loves RE asked for prayer for her uncle who was trying to get permission to leave Baghdad. Another had a cousin with cancer. We prayed together.

This was one 30-minute lesson.

What a privilege to share God’s love in the classroom. “It is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.” Matt 18:14

Margaret Liow - St Columba Presbyterian Church, Botany Downs, Presbyterian Representative Auckland Churches’ Education Commission committee

What do you think? Letters to the editor on this subject or on any other matter that captures your attention are encouraged. Perhaps you would like to react to some of the articles in this issue, whether to agree with sentiments outlined or to set out your own opposing take on ethical matters relating to ministry. Please email candour@presbyterian.org.nz or post to Candour, PO Box 9049, Wellington, making it clear that your text is intended for publication.

The bad, sad case of Graham Capill

Chris Nichol, minister within the bounds, Wellington

The case of Graham Capill is a sad one. Here was someone who had proudly stood as a representative Christian. He enthusiastically accepted the mantle, and with it the unexplored risk, of exemplifying the New Zealand Christian. Many of us didn't ask him to.

But, like it or not, for a lot of Kiwis outside the Christian community Capill provided the paradigm and the caricature of the late 20th century Christian. They recognised that he had no tolerance for people who lived "outside God's laws"; that he called the nation to a straighter path. They heard his virulent criticism of weakness of the flesh.

No doubt the psychologists will already be having a field-day with Capill's now-demonstrated double life. The facts surrounding his appalling crimes stand in stark contrast to his need to be perceived as the personification of purity. If that were the end of the story, it would be a tragedy centred on a flawed individual. But it doesn't stop there.

Once Capill was charged and convicted, a surprising number of people both within and beyond the Christian community felt the need to tell us that he was really a decent, albeit defective, man. (See Steve Braunias' piece in the *Sunday Star Times* of 16 May.)

As someone who has spent a lot of time recently providing professional advice in relation to allegations of abuse, I can't help but find myself wondering why this is. Not that I would want to suggest that every element of Graham Capill is evil. But why the rush to rehabilitate him so quickly after conviction for offences our society considers among the most heinous?

And it got worse. His wife stands by. What is going on here? A friend says, "I hope he will be safe in prison". And while I wish him no ill will, surely this *crie de coeur* is little short of sick, given the safety Capill himself offered children in his care. Why are we bombarded with so much support for a bad (or at best a very sick) man and so little compassion and support and love for those he abused?

The Capill case highlights some stark contradictions that the Christian community, especially that part of the Christian community bent on promoting "narrowly branded Christian family values" will have to live with. It's worth noting a couple of them.

There can be no doubt that the Christian brand has suffered badly. We might have been seen as narrow before. But now we are narrow and hypocritical. This may not be true for the whole of the Christian movement. But it is certainly true for that sector which has embraced Christian politics.

The Capill case also promotes distrust of Christian leadership, and with it Christian values. To the wider community, Capill has been disclosed as a dangerous hypocrite; a hypocrite who is capable of the most savage violations of his own alleged code.

Some theological observations that relate to our personal conduct might be helpful here.

The first is that it is not only a mistake, it is bad theology, to present ourselves, however unintentionally, as morally secure and icons of the redeemed life. The reformed tradition ought to warn us about the dangers of this. It reminds us that from Luther down, (one could say from Adam and Eve onwards) fallenness is part of our being. As God's beloved human beings, we retain a capacity (sometimes a determination) to nurture and give life to our brokenness. Whenever we even imply that we are moral exemplars, we should be confident that it will inevitably end in tears.

This is not a case of pride coming before a fall. It is a recognition that the fall is part of us from the very start. We are the fallen ones, albeit redeemed by grace. A more modest approach might acknowledge that it is only grace that sustains us (and heaven help the fool who boasts it is theirs to own). A certain humility (even silence sometimes!) might give us more credibility in the eyes of a (rightly) cynical world.

The second theological point is that, when confronted with the kind of obscenity the Capill case exhibits, our primary identification ought to be with the victim, not the perpetrator. The life and death of Jesus challenge us to set aside identification through tribe (the Christian team and our like-minded friends) and rediscover that the Divine has thrown in its lot with the unjustly crucified.

Defence of Capill is stupid. The plea that he be "safe" in prison is offensive. Not that we would have him violated. But the Christ lives in the body of those he raped and abused. And we are the body of Christ.