

Ecumenism and collaboration

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About Candour

Candour is a monthly magazine about ministry and leadership. For more information, contact:

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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.

Contributions

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

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

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The next deadline (for the August issue) is **31 July 2009**.

Glen Innis Vacancies

July 6 - 13	Homestead/Cottage
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Dates: 24th and 25th August, 2009

Venue: Knox College

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For further information, including keynote speakers, local contributors, costs, travel subsidies and registration details, please go to our website <http://calvinrediscovered.wordpress.com/>

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Ministers' Information Forms are an essential tool for ministry settlement boards looking to make a call. They are also an effective way for ministers to record their achievements throughout their career – including any additional training they undertake.

Ministers are strongly encouraged to update their Ministers' Information Form every three years so that the information remains current. If you would like to update your Form please email Juliette on juliette@presbyterian.org.nz for a template. Alternatively, you are welcome to send additional information to PO Box 9049, Wellington.

The future of *Candour*

Amanda Wells

I'm not going to write about collaboration and ecumenism in this editorial, despite being Presbapanglitarian. That's because I want to share with you some ideas about the development of *Candour* on which I would value your feedback. While I might have a view on the best course of action, your views will determine the outcome.

I have spent a huge amount of time during the past couple of months working on our new website. I hope that you've had the chance to check it out. We have taken advantage of a shift forced on us (because of a withdrawal of technical support for our former website software) to make some design improvements to the site. It's like if the internal framing of your house needs to be replaced – you might as well change the external cladding because it has to come off and be put back on anyway. Most of the changes are attempts to address users' negative experiences. If someone emails and says they can't find this or that, the accumulation of this kind of feedback drives our thinking.

So the navigation of the website has changed slightly, and the search function has also been improved. Pages that people most commonly want to access can be quickly found by clicking the "find something fast" tab at the very top of a page, which reveals some one-click shortcuts. You can also subscribe to our RSS feed by clicking the icon at the top right. This is worth exploring if you spend a lot of time online – all you need is a free piece of software called an RSS reader (which is often part of your browser already; Internet Explorer 8, for example). You then subscribe to different feeds on different sites, and when you view your RSS reader it shows you only the new content on those sites, in a plain text format.

But some things on the website have stayed the same. *Candour* still has a password protected archive, which you can now access at www.presbyterian.org.nz/publications/candour/candour-archive (username=minister, password=candour). The *Candour* archive goes back to mid 2005, which is when the current pdf format started being produced. If you're looking for a particular article, try using the website search function first. *Candour* articles will come up in the search results, though you need to log in to see the actual content.

The subscription of *Candour* has grown a lot since 2005. While just over 200 people request a paper copy of the

magazine, over 600 are receiving it by email as a pdf. We remain committed to providing a paper copy to those who don't have internet access. But the work entailed to provide that laid-out, printed magazine seems out of proportion to the demand ratio. Providing a web-based magazine would better suit the online readers, while still allowing us to print and post copies as required. It would solve a problem complained of by online readers: because the magazine is laid out in two columns, annoying up-and-down scrolling is required if you want to read it on your computer rather than print the entire document.

So what do I mean by a web-based magazine? Each article would be on a separate web page and able to be printed separately (one other benefit of the new website is that the "print page" function actually works). It would look like other pages on the site, rather than being laid out magazine style, although including images/graphs and breakout quotes would still be possible. It would be possible to include "related links" (another innovation of the new website) to previous *Candour* articles and other parts of the website of relevance. Also we could switch on the ability for you to add comments, which could develop a dialogue around particular articles and ideas.

What would the drawbacks be? It would not be as easy to print out an entire copy of the magazine; you would do this by printing each article in turn. But perhaps you don't always want to read every article; this would allow you greater choice and a lower environmental cost, the latter being a directive given to us by General Assembly. For paper subscribers, we would merely print out and copy the website pages (as we do for the small number of people who can't receive *Bush Telegraph* by email).

I'd suggest that *Candour* is due a redesign whether we try this new model or not; the two-column layout is a decided barrier to online reading. To me, the duplication of effort in producing a labour-intensive print publication for a primarily online audience isn't a smart use of our resource, unless it is of particular value to you.

What do you think? I'd love to hear from you. Please email candour@presbyterian.org.nz

The August issue of *Candour* will have the theme "Interaction with contemporary culture" and the deadline will be 31 July.

Ecumenism's rise, fall and resurgence

Peter Matheson, Minister Emeritus, Dunedin

Today's generation can hardly imagine the excitement aroused by the ecumenical movement in the decades after the Second World War. In New Zealand, but also throughout the Christian world, it generated unbelievable bursts of energy and hope. It was far more than an enthusiasm for Church Union, though that was part of it. It signaled a whole new understanding of the Gospel and the Church.

For my father's generation, Auschwitz and Hiroshima were unmistakable and terrible signals that the Church in its previous form had failed. How could one explain the capitulation of so much of German Protestantism, the heartland of Luther's Reformation, to Hitler's programmes? How could one explain the way in which the Roman Catholic Church in Spain, Italy and Germany had bedded down with Fascism?

Theologically, both Protestants and Catholics agonised over these issues. Vatican II then opened up quite new perspectives on the Bible, on the Sacraments, on the nature of the Church - for lay people as well as clergy. I vividly remember being invited to celebrations at Holy

Cross College at Mosgiel at which at a profoundly moving human level my Catholic colleagues talked about the way in their old world had been shattered, often with initially traumatic effects. In Edinburgh, while still teaching at New College, the Dominicans invited us for the first time ever to share Mass with them. Scottish Churches House at Dunblane buzzed with new ideas of joint Christian outreach to a rapidly changing society. The Iona Community, going back behind the medieval period to a Celtic heritage, attracted pilgrims from all over the world. The Scottish Episcopal Church, once a bastion of prickly High Churchism, reinvented itself; and its candidates for the priesthood studied together with those of the Church of Scotland in New College. Remarkable!

I must admit that I giggled a bit at some of the manifestations of this new "ecumania". There was something precious about the way in which, in Scotland at least, leading ministers of the Kirk cosied up to Roman Catholic bishops and abbots. You had a suspicion they were

hoping to be bishops themselves in the future!! Yet at the heart of ecumenism was a rigorous critique, whether in Barthian, or Tillichian form, of what came to be seen as the nationalist captivity of the churches. In New Zealand, Helmut Rex opened the Church up to Bultmann; Albie Moore to Bonhoeffer. So ecumenism was about far more than church joinery. Pearl Bennett came back from the World Council of Churches Assembly in Evanston with a quite new vision of what the Church could be. For the Mac Wilsons in Christchurch, or the Jack Somervilles in Dunedin and so many others, ecumenism meant an opening up into the world, a critique of an otherworldly piety.

In Australia, Presbyterians, Methodists and Congregationalists came together in the Uniting Church, and fervently hoped that this would only be the beginning of a much broader Church union. Crucial to its continuing success was a splendid theological Basis of Union. As we know, we also came very close in New Zealand to a com-

prehensive Church union that would have included the Anglicans.

So why did all this turn to custard? Why did the various

churches retreat into strengthening their own identity, into marketing their own brand of Christianity? Many are urgently asking this question today, and I suspect there are no simple answers. It appears, however, to have been a world-wide phenomenon, so any monocausal explanation, such as attributing it to the Geering controversy, just won't do.

The decline in ecumenism does appear to coincide with a rapid decline in church numbers, and with a wider social disillusionment with institutions. This led some to drift into secularism, and others to embrace a more individualistic or charismatic understanding of faith and the Church. Within Roman Catholicism, there was a discernible move away from the ecumenism of Vatican II, while Anglicanism has recently struggled to maintain its own unity. It would be a bold person, finally, who would predict where our own Presbyterian community in New Zealand is heading.

It is impossible to deny the recovering world-wide interest in authentic spirituality

Yet it is impossible to deny the recovering worldwide interest in authentic spirituality, and specifically in Christianity. Obama and Rudd symbolise a new form of committed leadership. The evangelical movement worldwide, or significant parts of it, is striking out in new directions, not least in a commitment to environmental issues. Liturgical renewal is in the air. If it is true, then, that at

its best, the ecumenical movement focused on a parallel renewal of theology and of openness to the world, maybe in strange subterranean ways, God may be pointing us in that direction again. Resurgence is a big word. But Christ's Church is not ours to programme or channel, or brand, and sooner or later we slow learners will come to recognise this.

United we stand, divided we fall?

Margaret Galt*

Economists have a jaundiced view of collaboration, seeing potential cartels lurking behind even the mildest of discussions. They are even less likely to applaud any merger proposals because of their belief in the evil of monopoly power. Monopolist companies develop a "you will take it and like it" approach that diminishes both the supply and the demand for their product; and there is good evidence that monopoly churches actually do exactly the same.

The best evidence for this comes from the low and declining demand for religious services in Europe (and European offshoots such as Australia and New Zealand). After the theory of "secularisation" had been discredited (ie the theory that as scientific knowledge grows, religious belief will automatically decline) academics have come to see the European pattern as the result of monopolistic Churches that are often protected by the State from competition. The graph shows clearly that church attendance varies according to church concentration, and New Zealand fits into the pattern.¹

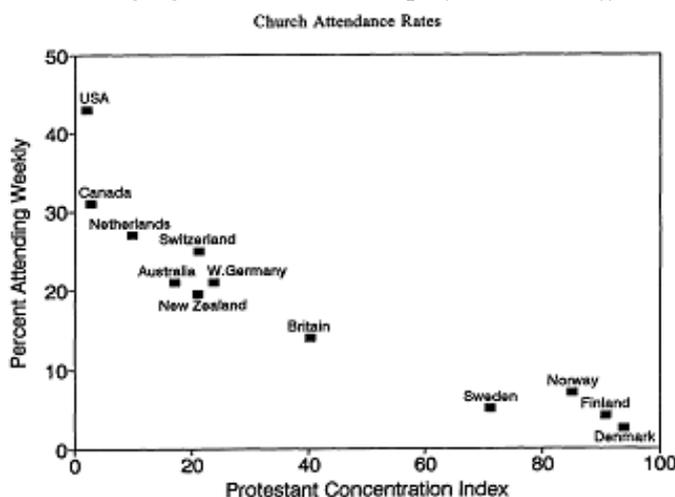
The various explanations of why this happens have looked at the way churches tend to change when they are dominant. There seems to be a pattern of clergy no longer

seeing religious observance as a key requirement, an increasing distance between religious views of the population and the beliefs of the church, and old fashioned and unattractive services. The flavour can be conveyed by small personal vignette buried in an academic footnote. Otto, an American Lutheran minister, was visiting the cathedral in Stockholm, Sweden, one of the many countries where the almost monopoly Church is supported by taxation, and there he

*"found himself in a huge structure, surrounded by a mere handful of fellow worshippers. At the end of the service, he spoke to the priest, who bemoaned the paucity of worshippers and described the large, professional staff attached to the Cathedral. Otto remarked, "but surely, the staff and their family alone should have made up a much larger audience." The priest replied, "Yes, but they work so hard all week. They like to take Sunday off."*²

Research has also shown that overturning a Church monopoly can lead to a dramatic religious revival. In 1984 the socialist Government in Italy decided the church tax would no longer automati-

cally go to the Catholic Church but instead the taxpayer could chose any religious or humanitarian cause. Suddenly every parish needed to persuade its members that they belonged and should direct their annual tax there. The result was weekly attendance at church services rose from 32 percent of the population in 1981 to 40 percent in 1999, including a significant rise in church attendance



¹ See for instance; L A Iannaccone, R Finke, and Rodney Stark, "Deregulating religion: The Economics of Church and State", *Economic Inquiry*, 1997, pp 350-364. Available online at <http://www.religionomics.com/iannaccone/papers/Iannaccone%20-%20Deregulating%20Religion.pdf>.

² *ibid* footnote 5.

by those aged 18 to 25.³ This was probably not the effect the Government had expected or wanted!

Of course most of the Church unions have reduced rather than eliminated competition, but the statistics of both the Australian and Canadian Uniting Churches suggests that being “united” has done little to encourage church attendance either nationally or for the Churches concerned. In both cases the United Church has lost members compared to the Anglican Church (their nearest equivalent). This is particularly true of the newer Australian Uniting Church, where relative membership has declined very dramatically and consistently over the time since union.⁴

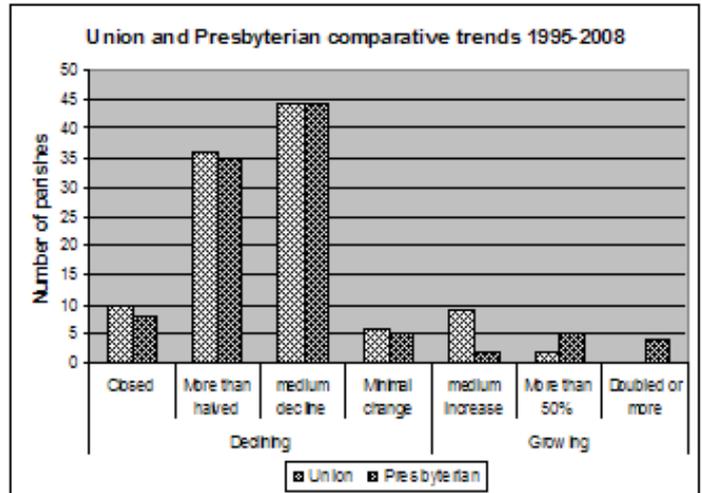
A similar, though more muted, pattern can also be observed with our own Union and Co-operating parishes. Between 1995 and 2008, union parish attendance dropped 37 percent compared to 28 percent for Presbyterian churches.⁵ This comparison is, however, a bit unfair as Union parishes are often in areas facing depopulation, and are smaller and so more fragile. To make a fairer comparison, each Union parish was paired with a Presbyterian parish that in 1995 was very close in size (using attendance) and which was, to the extent possible in a similar type of area (rural/urban, growing/declining).⁶ The graph shows how these two groups grew up to 2008. This fairer comparison still shows that Union parishes declined more, but largely because few of them grew significantly. In essence, being a Union parish did not stop decline but it did stop significant growth.

3 M Introvigne and R Stark, Religious Competition and Revival in Italy, *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion*, 2005 available online at <http://www.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=ijrr>

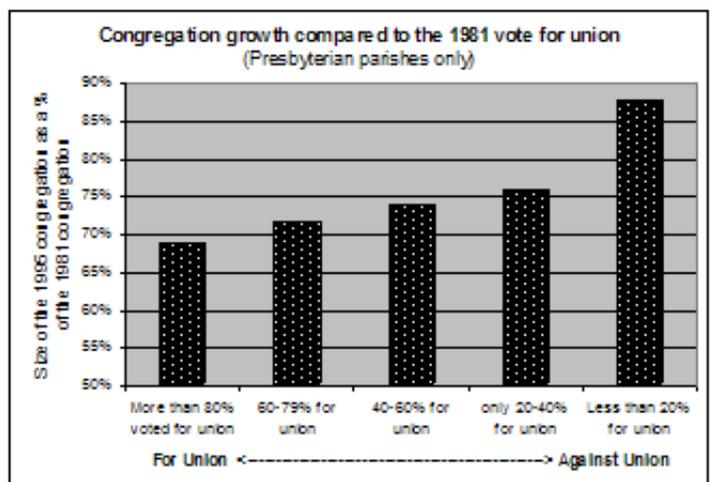
4 Specifically, in the 1971 census (before), the Anglican Church had 182 people for every 100 belonging to a Union church. By 2006, the Anglicans had 328 for every 100 at the Union church. This did not happen in one “king hit” at Union, but has been a persistent downward trend since then.

5 This is done on a “same store” basis – ie it looks at the same group of churches in both categories in both periods, so that a church moving between the categories does not distort the results. The status of parish was set by whether it was a Union or Presbyterian parish in 1995.

6 Clearly there is an element of subjectiveness in the pairing. To make sure the results were robust, two different pair matches were made, and the results from each were so similar as to be indistinguishable. In part this may be because most union churches were between 50-150 in attendance in 1995 so there were limited choices for the pairings.



There may be structural reasons for this pattern (perhaps the structured change in ministers, or having to deal with two hierarchies, or an ongoing sense that this parish is no longer really “mine”) but overseas research suggests that even being willing to contemplate Union may in itself weaken the hold the parish has on its members. This effect was first noticed in the United States in the 1920s and 30s, when about a dozen denominations voted on a Union proposal that did not proceed. In the subsequent decade a very clear pattern developed where those that had voted in support of Union declined, while those that had opposed it grew. The same pattern can be seen after our 1981 vote on union. Those parishes that enthusiastically voted for union had by 1995 lost 31 percent of their 1981 attendance, while those that had been adamantly opposed had lost 12 percent, with those in-between churches falling into a steady pattern.



Again there are probably complex reasons for this, but it does suggest that promoting Union weakens loyalty. It is like having competing companies – say BP and Shell – announcing that their products are so similar it doesn’t matter – which could be predicted to make the average motorist less likely to drive an extra mile to get

“the” brand. The message “we are all the same” can easily be interpreted as “the church down the road is just as good”.⁷

What then can be concluded from all of these statistics? First, it seems that the proliferation of new independent

7 This also suggests that two Presbyterian churches that are competitors in the same market (say a small town or suburb) are likely to stress their differences (possibly using theological grounds) so that the us/them barrier is higher. In fact, it would predict the greater the desperation of the competition, the higher the barriers are likely to be; ie the more likely each party is to be sure of their inherent rightness and the other’s inherent wrongness. The unfortunate implication of this is that protracted competition is likely to make it difficult to subsequently lower the barriers to achieve a happy merger.

churches should be welcomed as likely to both increase the proportion of the population at worship, and to make us change in response to our own benefit. Secondly, that there is no empirical evidence to suggest that showing a more united front to the world is likely to do anything other than weaken religious attendance. Finally, that institutional unity, at either parish or country level, carries with it a very significant risk of reducing the likelihood of real growth while failing to prevent decline. Unity may, therefore, be a costly achievement.

**Dr Margaret Galt is an elder at Wellington’s St John’s in the City. While she is a Church Property Trustee, she points out that this article is written in a personal capacity.*

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Applications close on 18 September 2009



An ecumenical journey

Helen Bichan*

My earliest memory of interdenominational collaboration was at Pounaweia Student Christian Movement (SCM) camp when I was about six years old. My (Baptist) minister father was chaplain to the camp and our Dunedin manse was having some major plumbing done, so the whole family went to Easter camp. The SCM district committee often met at the manse and I got to know the names and denominations of the members (not that it meant much to me). My parents met in the SCM, so we learned early about John R Mott and the ecumenical vision of the SCM of their student days.

By the time I got to university, many students were having their first experience of ecumenical collaboration through membership of the SCM and/or Evangelical Union (the Christian organisations on campus). By then theological persuasion had become more important than denominational affiliation. We were aware of the denomination of origin of chaplains and others who contributed to the life of the movement and found it enriched the dialogue and led to many of us visiting other churches and becoming more open to a variety of approaches to worship and theology. It also underlined some of the inconsistencies – in particular, the fencing of the communion table by the Anglicans. We could do so much together but at what should have been the core expression of Christian unity, we were not welcome.

In the following years, ecumenism became identified with organisational unity and many efforts were made to bring this about. Others can recount that history but I'll present some vignettes from the flax roots.

Mangakino in the early 1960s was a dam-building town of about 6000 people until the government of the day mothballed Maraetai 2 and shifted workers to other construction sites. The population dropped to 1800 over the next six months. The churches shared responsibility for country services and Bible in schools, and were cooperative within the village. After the shut-down, collaboration with the Anglicans increased to the extent that when the Presbyterian minister was ill one Christmas, the vicar came and offered to lead communion for the parish so people would not miss out. In the early 1960s, this was unheard of. We also learned from Maori, for whom denomination did not matter on the marae and any minister could expect to be asked to preach or lead karakia (prayers).

Porirua in the early 1960s had established a cooperative venture with Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Pacific Island (Congregational, later Presbyterian) congregations centred on the Church of Christ the King at Cannon's Creek. We were excited by the prospects of serious ecumenical collaboration in a place with many challenges – not the least of being a dormitory suburb lacking the normal range of support services. The experience of ecumenical collaboration in this structured setting proved challenging. During that period, the Anglican Church decided to permit intercommunion but, for Porirua, it required a visit by the combined clergy and lay leaders to the bishop, who then wrote a letter to the vicar instructing him to take action. Porirua was a rich experience that emphasised the challenges of different traditions and individuals working together – but it felt more difficult than the informal and supportive collaboration experienced in Mangakino.

Tawa Union Church is a product of the ecumenical movement as outlined in the following article "That they may all be one". Within the parish, the denomination of origin is not the most important aspect of a member – and most of us do not know the denominational background of many other members. Each partner denomination has enriched the life of the parish through its worship and traditions. We continue to benefit by drawing on resources from the partner churches. Members still share the ecumenical vision, although they may experience tension over collaborating with other churches in Tawa when there are marked differences in worship style or theological approach.

Likewise, ecumenical collaboration may cause tension when partners at regional or national level make unilateral decisions about infrastructure, or ask for funding for new initiatives without consulting the other partners or treat CVs as a problem rather than an opportunity. There appears to be a retreat into denominationalism at a time described by some as "post denominational".

My own experience of ecumenical collaboration in tertiary education and several congregations has helped me to focus on the essentials that we share while appreciating the diversity of expression. Appreciating diversity is not the same as liking all its manifestations! In some areas, shared worship at Easter and/or Christmas may be as far as it goes. In other areas, churches also combine for activ-

ities such as local mission, foodbanks or managing urgent need. Critical to these relationships is an appreciation of the contributions others bring, a valuing of their strengths and a recognition that we need one another as different parts of the body of Christ.

The editor suggested I might reflect on experience in the Inter Church Bioethics Council (ICBC), whose members come from Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian churches. I think I know who is from which denomination now, but that is not the most important aspect of working with this group of people except when replacing retirees. At that stage, we seek to replace skills and ensure balanced representation of the member churches. This group of Christians share a commitment to addressing bioethics, including spiritual aspects, in relation to biotechnology. Where possible, resource material is made available to the partner Churches and representation to Select Committees or other bodies are made on behalf of the churches. The advantages of ecumenical collaboration include drawing from a much wider range of resources, having a variety of theological approaches and having different networks for collecting information and dispersing the results of our work.

Tawa Union's story: *That they all may be one*

That they all may be one is Edwin Smith's title for a booklet outlining "The Formation of the Tawa Union Parish" that was published in 1992 to mark the 20th anniversary of the parish.

Ecumenical collaboration began much earlier. The Methodists were first to establish a church in the district in the mid 19th century, when their Wellington-based missionaries visited families in their circuit. One hundred years later, St Stephen's church was opened in Elena Place in 1951. Presbyterian outreach from Johnsonville began in 1937 and services were held in various locations until 1944, when it was decided to worship with the Methodists in their chapel. At that time those worshipping at the Methodist chapel also included Congregational and Church of Christ members. As the population grew, the Presbyterians opened a church hall in the Linden area in 1952. From 1959, Church of Christ services had been held in a Tawa Scout hall until a manse and temporary chapel were established in the early 1960s.

By 1958, St Aidan's was a Presbyterian church (separate from St Columba's in Johnsonville). At this time Tawa-Linden was growing rapidly and the churches were stretched to accommodate those attending worship and

Similarly, in the life time of CASI (the Churches' Agency on Social Issues), the denominational mix brought a breadth of understandings that resulted in well-thought-through material on social issues being made available to member Churches. At times this challenged their thinking. It also took up opportunities to represent a Christian viewpoint in national fora, particularly in relation to Government policies.

In both these examples, the issues faced have major implications for the future. For the members of the ICBC (as it did for those on CASI), the importance of presenting a Christian voice transcends denominational differences.

In practice, there are many opportunities for ecumenical collaboration in new and creative ways. The vision "that they all may be one" continues to inspire. If the Churches cannot be seen as working together, then what have they to say to a fractured world?

**Helen Bichan is chair of Tawa Union Church Council and a member of the Interchurch Bioethics Council.*

youth activities on a Sunday. The Church of Christ and the Presbyterians combined to establish the Redwood Christian Centre at the south end of the parish – St Luke's was built by the Church of Christ on Presbyterian land.

The Plan for Union would have established The Church of Christ in New Zealand, bringing together the five negotiating churches. The four represented in Tawa developed a proposal to form a local union parish. When this was put to the congregations, the Anglicans indicated they would not take the matter further. In 1972 the other three partners inaugurated Tawa Union Parish. As noted at the time – it was a union made "not in weakness but in strength" within a stable, compact community.

Over the years, Tawa Union has experienced the ageing of its membership and reduction in numbers similar to trends in its partner churches. About 10 years ago it was decided to rationalise the buildings owned by the parish and the Church Council conducted a careful discussion throughout the parish. The decision was made to centre worship and most activities on one site, and the most central was chosen. Each congregation had developed its own style of worship – to an extent this related to denominational origins although each had members from

the other partners. These were brought into the Centre, which has also been physically enhanced to make it a better resource for serving the community. More recently, the Tongan Methodist Fellowship has become part of Tawa Union, which further enriches our experience of being church. We enjoy the diversity of different traditions and styles of worship with a wide range of theological views.

A longstanding feature of church life in Tawa has been ecumenical collaboration. In the past Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Church of Christ, Baptist and Salvation Army churches shared a number of activities – such as the combined churches' Christmas day service at Tawa

College (first held in 1961). Today the same group plus the Catholics and New Life churches cooperate in Good Friday, Advent, Christmas day and other combined services and maintain regular contact through the monthly meetings of the Ministers' Association and the networking of the church administrators.

The writer of Tawa Union's history concluded with a challenge to the church to realise its potential: "to be like a beacon proclaiming to the church at large that it takes a unified church to preach and practise effectively the gospel of reconciliation." The challenge today is how we develop new ways of expressing our unity in Christ.

The story of Mangapapa Church

*Stewart Patrick**

Mangapapa Church is a Methodist/Presbyterian Union Parish in Gisborne, and to tell something of our story and where we are today, I have drawn much from a booklet called "Our Story" that was written by one of our key people, Iris McCoy. Iris has been a member from the 1940s through to today, and a lay preacher for 42 years.

History toward Union, 1913 - 1967

In Gisborne in 1913, two small suburban churches were built about 0.6km apart in Mangapapa. Atkinson Street Methodist and Knox Presbyterian. Remember that in those days, most people walked to church or had horse transport. If they had possessed today's vehicles, the churches would have been further apart. The Methodist Church was pre-cut and erected in one day and people worshipped there the next day, Sunday 13 April, 1913.

A few months later, Knox Presbyterian Church was built, with members from each congregation helping the other to get their building up. At that time, Mangapapa was regarded as being out in the sticks, so over the years closeness developed among the residents. There was only one school, they all knew one another, and the members of the two congregations were friends and often relatives.

How did Union happen? It was this way. Knox Church was losing its minister and would be financially pressed if they had to support another. The women of the two churches often met socially and of course this problem was discussed, and someone said "why shouldn't we

share a minister between us?" This was the age of ecumenism and church union was all the thing, with five denominations pondering how this could be achieved. The Anglicans, Churches of Christ, Congregational, Methodists and Presbyterians spent hours at meetings trying to form a base acceptable to all. Methodists and Presbyterians were jumping ahead and blessing the union of any of their people who were agreeable to becoming Union Parishes. You can have little idea of some of the heart-burning for those died-in-the-wool of their denominations, but eventually the two congregations were granted permission to unite. Of course, there had been many meetings of both groups but we realised we were off on a venture in uncharted ways.

Ours was the first Union Parish in the district and many folk outside our own congregations had misgivings, and dire warnings about disagreements ahead, but we seemed happy with the new arrangements, and looked forward to our joint future. Time would tell the story. We had already been courting each other for two years, with combined services now and then; the women's groups combined, and on 1 February 1967, we became Mangapapa Union Parish, located on the larger Atkinson Street Methodist Church site.

Spiritual renewal in the 1970s and 80s

In the late 1960s, one or two of our members were involved with an Anglican healing group and from them we heard of new books coming off the presses telling of a spiritual

renewal that was moving here and there in the world. We found that the Holy Spirit, instead of being an amorphous part of the Trinity, was as alive now as in Biblical times. A few women from our parish began meeting with people from other churches who also were interested in what we learned was termed the “charismatic renewal”, and from this developed a meeting where many women (all good, committed Christian women) learned there was more to the Gospel than we had realised. It was in this meeting that the first “Life in the Spirit” seminar was held. Participants included an Anglican vicar, a Presbyterian minister and a Roman Catholic priest - men who wanted to check out the movement. We were all dumbfounded that we, long-time Christians, were so ignorant of the whole work of the Holy Spirit. This was an important part of our history, because those involved brought back into our parish the news of the spiritual renewal moving through New Zealand. We wanted our parish to be part of it.

One of the richest results of the spiritual renewal was the discovery that we all - young, old, male, female, migrant or Kiwi – were likely to be gifted by the Lord, and our leadership quickly saw the benefit when these gifts were used among us. Testimonies revealed those with the ability to communicate; others grew in a love for the Scriptures along with teaching ability - whether in junior church, home groups or in the pulpit. We found people who listened with wisdom - and here were our councillors. It was a glorious time as the Holy Spirit was allowed to move in the parish. We also saw how what are termed the “motivational gifts” (which are our natural talents) blossomed when offered in service to the Lord.

It wasn't all peaches and cream, however, as there is “sandpaper ministry” that comes when Spirit-filled people must work closely together – people of differing types and backgrounds. Looking back, some of us laugh and wonder at the way the Holy Spirit ignored any prejudice and personality clashes we felt must surely keep us from mixing too much with certain folk. We were enmeshed in the Spirit's service so that we just had to get along together. Oh, the hurts and angers and repentances and forgiveness we had to share with each other, but the result was worth it. We learned to love each other. There was no alternative if the Holy Spirit was to feel it worth hanging around this lot.

Lay team leadership years 1980s and 90s

By 1983, when the Rev Niven Ball moved on, Mangapapa Union Parish had developed along the lines of “everybody a minister”, and prophecies were coming forward that suggested the Lord was going to do a new thing with this parish that might not include an ordained person.

Well! You cannot believe the clamour this idea produced. It was unheard of for a parish to run the show on its own... we'd fall flat on our untrained faces, etc. As by this time we'd been without such a guiding hand for months, and numbers were growing and, above all, the offerings were increasing.. we were permitted, unwillingly, to go ahead as we were.

We were placed under the care of an Interim Moderator (an ordained person from one of the other parishes who would chair meetings, conduct Holy Communion and thus add to his workload). I recall one meeting when we were told that we just could not be permitted to continue in this unconstitutional way.

One of our parish councillors Bruce Mounsey (who was later to be appointed full-time “facilitator” of the parish) replied - very gently – “that if they insisted that we call a minister then we would, but we really did feel that God was asking us to stand on our own”. Talk about a soft answer turning away wrath. (I'd held my breath during this little interchange of ideas). The result was like a miracle. We were given permission to carry on. You must understand that tradition had enmeshed itself around our parent Presbyterian and Methodist oversight and they honestly did not believe that people without a theological-hall training could cope, not even if they were mature, long serving, Bible-centred Christians - many with professional training in other fields - let alone people using their normal down-to-earth, God-given sanctified common sense. You see, we could afford to pay a minister and our denominational heads could not fathom why we would choose otherwise.

Under lay team leadership through the 1980s and 90s, Mangapapa Union Parish grew in numbers. The old buildings were added to in 1987 to accommodate the growth, with Sunday morning services averaging 145 adults and 45 children by the mid 90s. One of the obvious trends in this time was people coming to the church from a variety of denominational and non-church backgrounds. Mangapapa Union Parish Church became more of a “Gisborne Community Church” in many ways, with people from all over the city and rural district attending.

Leadership of a team of leaders 2005-

Around the time of the new millennium, the church needed to look at its structure, as growth had plateaued and the way forward under a flat team leadership structure was not conducive to further growth. (This has been shown to be the case in Brethren fellowships of similar size, with flat leadership structures).

We found our parish council had become too large over the years for effective decision making and developing/implementing a strategic plan. With the church members' agreement, we pruned parish council back to around 12 key and active people (the five elders, plus seven elected), renamed it the leadership team and ensured new people can be chosen and elected as required, as a rotation policy allows.

We also simplified our everyday church name to Mangapapa Church. Our constitutional church name remains Mangapapa Union Parish, but we believe that name can be confusing to those in our mission field, the un-churched people of Gisborne in 2000 and beyond.

From 1995 to 2005, Bruce Mounsey was employed as the full-time facilitator of the church. When Bruce and Colleen moved to the United Kingdom, the church acknowledged the position needed to change emphasis to that of leader of the leadership team of the church. I was appointed to the position in October 2005. I had been in the church since 1994 and had held volunteer positions of youth leader and elder in that time. We do believe that growing future leadership from within the church is the best way to go.

Our elders team is primarily the support to the appointed leader, and spiritual oversight of the church and its teaching, and pastoral care.

With a focus shift from managing to leading, we are renewing our vision for the future of Mangapapa Church. A major emphasis has been our focus on understanding our current church health and making strategic decisions to improve that health in the areas we can measure. "Natural church development" annual surveys of our church folk, followed by the appropriate changes and resources applied to identified areas, is the basis of this approach. Good health leads naturally to growth, and after a dip in the first part of this decade our worship attendance numbers have grown over the past four years, to average 155 adults and 63 children attending the 10am Sunday service. We have been well over 80 percent full in our 10am service for some time now, and we face major decisions in regard to our aging buildings complex. Planning is well underway for a staged development of a new worship centre, function area and children's/youth and community work complex.

Union parish/parent Churches relationship

With each new appointment Mangapapa Church Union Parish has rotated the Church parent body oversight. From 1995 to 2005, we were under Presbyterian over-

sight, and from 2005 we have been under the Methodist Church oversight. How do we see this oversight working for us? Being an isolated region with travel to synod meetings (in Palmerston North) being five to six hours by road, it is just not practical for us to attend every meeting. We keep in touch with regular reports and attending in person at least twice a year.

How do we see the future of our Union Parish connections? We appreciate and respect our roots within the Methodist and Presbyterian Church, but we also believe the critical points for the future of synods and presbyteries, and the institutional Church, are these;

Howard A Snyder, (former pastor and missionary to Brazil, now Professor of History and Theology of Mission at Asbury Theological Seminary), writes in his book; '*Radical Renewal – The Problem of Wineskins Today*';

In raising the question of structure, we must remember that the church is primarily a charismatic organism rather than an institution or organisation. Therefore structures created for the church's life must fit an organic model. They must be charismatic in the sense of being grounded in God's grace (charis) and the Spirit's gifts (charismata). Structures ought not to be a mishmash of programmes and organisations that clash with the essential nature of the church itself. (Snyder, p.136, 137)

The whole question of church structure takes on increasing urgency today. As social acceleration increases, only those churches that are structured flexibly and Biblically will keep up... The church will increasingly have to choose between a charismatic, and an institutional or bureaucratic model for its life and structure...

The megatrend (is) from hierarchies to networking. Whether this is good or bad for the church depends on whether it is structured according to a charismatic or an institutional model. Biblically, it is clear that the church should be structured charismatically and organically, and any church so structured already is largely prepared to withstand future shock. But churches that are encased in rigid, bureaucratic, institutional structures may soon find themselves trapped in culturally bound organisational forms that are fast becoming obsolete.

(Snyder, p. 194, 195)

From these thoughts, we believe the priorities for the organisational structure of the synods/presbyteries, and

the institutional Church, are;

The local parish/church - “the People of God” gathered in a place – is the number one priority.

Sound administrative and network support systems for the parish.

Mission resourcing support appropriate to the needs of each parish.

Releasing lay people in parish ministry, according to spiritual gifts (*Charismata*)

Our common ground (in regard to our Methodist heritage, and consistent with our Presbyterian heritage also) is our seeking to bring the relevance of John Wesley’s work, the principal elements of his message and method, into the contemporary Methodist church. These principal elements being; (Snyder, 180 -184)

His message...

A clear proclamation of personal salvation through Jesus Christ

A consistent emphasis on the Spirit-filled life

An active and involved social consciousness

His method...

He did not confine himself to the institutional Church

He created new and workable structures for koinonia (fellowship)

He preached the Gospel to the poor.

One of the precious attributes of Mangapapa Church (Union Parish), is the blending that has taken place. We are young and old worshipping together. Methodist and Presbyterian, and people who wouldn’t even know nor worry what denomination their parents may have been. With all this, one of our challenges ahead is defining for new people just what healthy church membership means in Mangapapa Church.

It has been an exciting journey to date and we look forward expectantly to the future.

**Stewart Patrick is the leader of Mangapapa Church Union Parish, Gisborne.*

Co-operating parishes: A ministry of reconciliation

Bert Schoneveld, Mackenzie Cooperating Parish, South Canterbury

In August last year I was invited to work in a transition ministry in the Mackenzie Cooperating Parish. My brief had numerous aspects to it. One of the main ones was to help the parish rationalize its buildings and to work through the strong denominational separateness that persisted, despite it having been a cooperating parish for 37 years.

To help me decide whether I should come, I asked them to formulate their vision for the future.

The vision

They came up with the following:

“To establish a united parish working to develop pastoral strength and relevance for the spiritual needs of the communities in which we live. We will strive to make our church welcoming and fulfilling and able to add new dimensions to the lives of the people.”

Perhaps what caught my attention was the notion of a “united parish”, since all the reports I received were to the contrary.

The motivation

Fairlie is a community of less than 800 permanent residents and Tekapo, also part of the parish, numbers less than 400. Perhaps the numerical size of a community is irrelevant. However, in a small community there is a greater opportunity for the various expressions of the church to work together, since people are forced to do so on a business, voluntary service and social level. By contrast, when the denominations persist in remaining apart it does not reflect well particularly when they purport to be working together as is the case here. So when I read that they were looking to the day when they would be united, my wife and I decided to take up the challenge.

I believe strongly in the “ministry of reconciliation”. Paul gives a clear picture of what that ministry is like in 2 Corinthians 5. Of all the ministries described in Scripture and practised by the Church, it is the one that ranks least in practice. Yet in Jesus’ total lifelong ministry, it constitutes the sum total of all his other ministry. From the cross Jesus cried, “Father forgive them....” For me, the image that epitomises Jesus’ ministry is a bridge. In the ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation, Jesus bridges the

divide between God and the world, and when anyone or any group says “yes” to this, they are also empowered to become bridge builders. Denominationally, the churches are ignoring this and so we continue with the divide.

Here in the Mackenzie, the divide between Anglicans and Presbyterians has been perpetuated for 37 years.

The things that divide

One of the major obstacles is the liturgy. A framework for a common liturgy has been proposed but even having a defined thread to the liturgy arouses anxiety in some members of the congregation. To help the congregation see what another parish is doing, we took a bus with about half the congregation to the Hinds Anglican/Presbyterian Cooperating Parish to experience for themselves how another similar parish is tackling some of the same issues. This proved to be a very fruitful exercise. The Rev Rachel Judge very ably led the two congregations and enabled the process of sharing experiences and current practices at Hinds. This experience helped to boost confidence in those from the Mackenzie parish to believe that they too could follow a path that would lead to better cooperation and greater unity.

Some steps being taken

Part of my work is to exercise the ministry of reconciliation.

One way we are doing this is to create opportunities for discussion. As I write, cottage meetings are being held throughout the parish at different times so that as many

people as possible from across the denominations can come together to talk about the issues of who we are why we are here in these communities and how we can be more effective in our common life with both the message with which we have been entrusted and our resources.

Our hope and prayer is for a constructive outcome. One of the possibilities is that we might reconstruct the smaller church building so that the beautiful stained glass windows and the wooden paneling might be incorporated into a new building - to be built on an agreed-to site with a view to unifying the physical aspects of the Fairlie part of the parish.

At Tekapo we already have the Church of the Good Shepherd, which is shared by the Cooperating Parish and the Roman Catholics. The vision there is to build opposite the existing church on land belonging to the Anglican Church to provide facilities to enhance what is currently on offer. For it to work, the two denominations and the two parts of the parish will need to show the kind of grace that transcends denominationalism and parochialism. Only then will it be possible to pool all the very considerable resources.

The objective

When I finish in February 2010, I do not expect that everything being dreamed of will be realised but I am hoping and praying that there will be a determined direction with leaders who have decided to make it happen and keep it going.

L'Arche Kapiti: An ecumenical community

Marg Schrader

Sitting in a suburban Paraparaumu lounge, I am amazed at the wonderful variety of God's children. I am surrounded by a woman from Japan, who grew up with both Shinto and Buddhist backgrounds; an American guy who is training to be an Episcopalian minister; three Catholics, all from the Philippines; one of our house leaders from Switzerland, who grew up with no religious training at all but who has a deep love of life and of creation. Then there are the core members, all of whom live with intellectual disabilities.

Young and old, some Christian and some not, people with disabilities and those with PhDs all in community

together. This is the L'Arche (The Ark) community; an international group whose identity statement is:

We are people with and without intellectual disabilities sharing life in community.

Mutual relationships and trust in God are at the heart of our journey together.

We celebrate the unique value of every person and recognise our need of one another.

L'Arche grew out of the Catholic Church in France and is now an international organisation, but I am their pastoral minister. It is a truly ecumenical task and I love it, even

though they don't ask me to celebrate the Eucharist!

People come from all around the world to live and work with us for six months or more. Last month I sat with the assistants at their formation time and asked who God/the sacred/the divine is for them. It was a most holy time as we recalled our own sacred history and told our stories and listened with great warmth and openness to each other. We discovered more of the creativity of our God.

Night prayer is one of the cornerstones of our life together, when we read and pray and sing together. The core members take great delight in leading this. Stephen always makes sure we pray for the Armed Forces and those who are hungry, we have lots of prayers for our families and for those assistants who have returned home overseas.

Easter is always a special time for us. We had one of those "God moments" at our Lenten open night of prayer, which is our window to the community. Our theme was "Journey towards Jerusalem with Jesus". We had set the road through the living room right through to the wall of the prayer room, with cloths and sticks and boulders. Arahata, one of our houses, was to bring the big cross. We were all prepared, chatting as we waited, when all of a sudden there was a deep hush and Kim walked in carrying the cross and slowly wended her way along the road and very reverently laid the cross against the wall. Worship had begun.

Foot washing is very central to our community life. On Maundy Thursday, we gathered in the lounge and listened to the Gospel story; the bowl was then passed around and

we washed each other's feet and laid hands on each other's head and prayed.

Peter, one of our core members who lives with Downs syndrome, very tenderly washed the feet of one of our assistants, a woman who had had a really hard time. I have never seen anyone do this more tenderly and as he prayed for her he very gently stroked her face. None of us sophisticated leaders could have done that, we just don't do that in public, but he did it so unselfconsciously. Some of us were in tears. She said it was one of the most wonderful things that had ever happened to her.

Michele, our most loved community leader, is leaving us, so for our last open night of prayer we used Ecclesiastes 3. "For everything there is a season..." We broke up into pairs and played charades: one couple acted and we all guessed. "A time to be born, a time to die." "A time to weep and a time to laugh." And then we chorused "and God is with us" after each couplet. A wonderfully fun night, where we truly embodied the scriptures.

I have met Jesus in more ways than I can count, and discovered more of what he was saying as he spoke of the poor and the children being the ones who lead us. Do you or someone you know want to come and join us? The work includes cleaning and cooking and bathing as well as all the fun, delight and spiritual growth of community. There may also be a space for some of the special people with intellectual difficulties. It is a wonderful opportunity to discover more of the unique giftedness of each person no matter how disabled they are, or what faith they are, and to be ministered to by their amazing love.

Anglicans and Methodists sign Covenant

*Terry Wall**

Ecumenism is alive in Aotearoa New Zealand. The Holy Spirit continues to provide energy in response to the prayer in John's Gospel "that they may be one" (John 17:21). Evidence of this is to be found in Union and Co-operating parishes the length and breadth of the country.

In 2002 the General Synod of the Anglican Church resolved to invite the Methodist Church to enter conversations with a view to promoting the visible unity of the church. The Methodist Conference resolved to accept the invitation, and each Church appointed a

team to participate in dialogue. In the conversations, we were reminded of all that our two churches have in common. There is the founder of Methodism, John Wesley, clergyman of the Church of England, who as evangelist developed a renewal movement within the Church. There is also his brother, Charles, whose hymns gave poetic expression to the proclamation of the love of God.

Within New Zealand, the two Churches have often had parallel and close relationships. There was co-operation between the two Churches in missionary work among

Maori in the years before the Treaty of Waitangi was signed. In recent years both Churches have embraced the bicultural journey in the context of the emerging multi-cultural society.

In the light of these conversations, the idea of the two Churches entering into a covenant relationship commended itself. Covenant-making has deep roots in scripture, Methodists have renewed their covenant in Christ annually, and Maori and Pacific people have related to the idea of entering into a sacred covenant of commitment.

Both Churches endorsed this approach and members of the dialogue undertook the theological work necessary before proceeding. This was presented to the Methodist Conference. Subsequently the Anglican General Synod agreed to entering into the covenant relationship in May 2008 and the Methodist Conference agreed in November 2008.

It is held that within the commitment of a covenant relationship, the remaining theological issues that keep the Churches separate will be able to be addressed in a robust manner. These focus on the theology of ministry and the question of interchangeability of ministries. The covenant provides opportunities for combined worship, perhaps focused on commemorations of the witness of Charles and John Wesley, and eucharistic hospitality. While the remaining theological issues are discussed in dialogue, the covenant relationship will encourage joint action in evangelism and in the service of social justice.

A national worship event was held on Sunday 24 May - Wesley Day, during which the Covenant was signed by

leaders of our two churches. This worship event began in the Lotafala 'ia Tongan Methodist Church, where the Methodist Church leaders invited the Anglican Church leaders to sign the covenant; and concluded in the Te Karaiti Te Pou Herenga Waka Maori Church, where the Anglican Church leaders invited the Methodist Church leaders to sign the covenant. These two churches are opposite each other in Orly Avenue, close to the Mangere Town Centre in Manukau City. Bishop John Bluck, who has had wide ecumenical experience, working for both the Anglican and Methodist Churches, as well as the World Council of Churches, was the preacher. Following the worship event, all joined in a hakari (feast) provided by the people at Te Karaiti Te Pou Herenga Waka

The signing of the covenant marks a significant step forward in relationships between the two Churches. It draws on the work for ecumenism of an earlier generation. It is consistent with the proposals of the 1996 International Anglican-Methodist Commission in its report *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion*.

The covenant is an expression of mission-shaped ecumenism that takes our context in this land seriously. We can celebrate it as a step along the way toward visible unity. It is a demonstration that "the Churches share a real but incomplete communion." It is an expression of a deep resolve to continue the journey, to engage with the questions and share the vision of unity in diversity.

**The Rev Dr Terry Wall is the convenor of the Methodist Church's Faith and Order Committee*

New ways of partnering

Peter MacKenzie*

I remember the frowning look on some of the ladies at church (in the late 1970s) when I told them that I was going flatting ... with girls. Back then there were very clear ideas about living arrangements and how relationships were formed. Men and women married, then they got to know each other. People at the time had a clear idea of roles as well - although the concept was shaken up by the equal rights movement.

When the Church Union movement was at its height (through the 60s and 70s), the marriage model of relationship was dominant. It is little wonder then, that the

Union parishes reflect a pattern common to society. While I often object to anthropomorphic analogies, there is still something quite helpful about describing group relationships through our individual experience. Our understanding of partnership for groups is clearly founded on our understanding of partnership for individuals. Those understandings are constantly changing as society changes.

Many of our Union/Co-operating parishes (CVs - Co-operating Ventures) were formed when the predominant model was legal marriage. So parishes came together and shared all their resources and committed themselves for

life - “for richer for poorer, for better or for worse”. Of course, there were no ideas of pre-nuptial agreements back then, and in CVs we have a poor record of keeping property schedules and capital ratios. So today, when there is a need to re-configure a CV, there are a lot of hassles over how the assets of the former parishes should be split between their denominations. As we know, there is no such thing as an easy or simple divorce.

These days we have many more models for relationships - and that is being seen in our approach to congregations joining together. Using the previous analogy, parishes are moving away from marriage to simply living together. There are an increasing number of parishes (particularly in rural areas) that are finding ways of working with other congregations in unique forms of partnership. They are also broadening the partnerships beyond the five “negotiating” churches of the 1970s Plan for Union. In many ways, it is exciting to see this broad development of the ecumenical spirit. However, there are cautions to be added to the mix.

The Uniting Congregations of Aotearoa New Zealand has discovered that where the foundations to a congregational partnership are not clearly understood at the beginning, they become even cloudier when divisions occur. There is a need to be clear on what might happen at the end of the relationship. For instance - a Presbyterian congregation may begin to share its buildings with a Pentecostal congregation then, as it seems fit, move to share worship. New converts might be baptised into the Pentecostal ethos and in 10-20 years time there may be few (if any) Presbyterians left. But the property is held in trust for the Presbyterian Church and those who are part of that faith community would be astounded that they could not use “their” buildings as they wish to. It is a reminder that the partners to the relationship are not the individuals, but the denominational congregations.

A clear agreement at the beginning, with a dissolution clause, will help. Regular acknowledgement of the agreement and timely updating will provide a jog to the institutional memory. One of the key questions that will need to be asked fairly soon is, “Who is looking after these new relationships?” While UCANZ has a mandate from five churches (Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Christian Churches [formerly Churches of Christ] and the Congregational Union), there is no official guidance on wider ecumenical participation. Indeed, there are a number of ventures that have avoided the UCANZ umbrella, even though they are Co-operative Ventures as defined by the Guide to Procedures in Co-operative Ventures.

I believe that new ventures will continue to be formed - but not with the old model. They are more likely to develop in rural areas, tend to be relationship-based, and not be focussed on the necessity of being united on all things. Like a modern relationship, there will be room for each partner to maintain their own identity (theology, name, property) while still sharing together in something bigger. There is a subtle shift in theological outlook (or Biblical interpretation) from “being one in Christ” to “accepting each other through Christ”. It will be exciting - and rather daunting. The two biggest dangers (in my opinion) are; (a) Church courts hindering progress by failing to see the possibilities and (b) congregations failing to learn from the history of denominations and ignoring the Church courts. The partnership model has to be both intra- and inter-denominational.

At a recent meeting of the leaders of the five churches involved in UCANZ, there was general consensus that clarification of what was meant by parish oversight is needed. There is a broad divergence of thought that stretches from episcopacy to congregationalism. It is hoped that understanding our different approaches might bring some sense of common ground in dealing with parishes.

At that meeting, the results of the UCANZ survey were also presented. A full report is available on www.UCANZ.org.nz. The survey was completed by over 1000 people from just under 60 percent of UCANZ parishes. The age profile mirrored that of the UCANZ parishes - predominantly older and largely mono-cultural.

There was general affirmation for the ecumenical nature of co-operative ventures (with, however, some expressing dissent) and a sense that, at parish level, there were few denominational barriers that could not be overcome. Frustrations were expressed at the lack of progress toward a United Church and at the continued multiplication of paperwork caused by answering to multiple Church courts.

One factor that struck me, as I analysed the responses, was the inability of some in the church to see much further than their own vestibule. Many of the problems that people attributed to being a co-operative venture are equally applicable to denominational churches. These include the rising compliance requirements, the flood of quasi-church literature (and pleas for money), the need for increased accountability, the challenge of funding wider Church work, and the desire to have a younger congregational profile.

We are all facing the dilemma of how to take the Gospel into our increasingly post-modern world. Our grandpar-

ents lived in a world that seemed to be converging toward the truth, while our grandchildren will be living in a world that diverges into many truths. That challenges the very precepts of our theology - and I am not sure that we have successfully thought about that as a Church. In that diversity, I continue to see a place for Co-operative Ventures where like-minded congregations can share together an aspect of their faith journey. But the nature of post-modernism is to question the intrinsic nature of institutionalism - and so I see a far less structured gathering of faith communities that will seek to strengthen each other on the life journey. They are unlikely to use the term ecumenical

for their activities, for that is a remnant of an institutional language. They will tend to become more disconnected from the wider Church and be reluctant to simply follow the rules. And they will celebrate their uniqueness - at the risk of losing the proclamation of Pentecost that we share in a commonality through Christ.

All this seems quite awesome - meaning it is huge, amazing, mysterious and pretty frightening to contemplate.

**The Rev Peter MacKenzie is the Executive Officer of Uniting Congregations of Aotearoa New Zealand*

Working together for a more just society

*Trevor McGlinchey**

The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS) has been operating since the 1960s. It began as a gathering of Christian providers of services to older people and expanded to be an independent Christian voice advocating for positive change for poor and vulnerable New Zealanders. The Council's perspectives are based on the experiences of its wide range of social service practitioners and it works in three main areas; housing and poverty, child and family, and services to older people.

The Council members are the Anglican Care Network, Baptist Churches of New Zealand, Catholic Social Services, Presbyterian Support Services Inc and the Methodist and Salvation Army churches. Each of these organisations appoints two denominational representatives to sit on Council. The denominational representatives are usually chosen for their knowledge of the social services and their understanding of the political and policy framework that affects the provision of these services.

The Council's mission is to "...work for a just and compassionate society in Aotearoa/New Zealand. We see this as a continuation of the mission of Jesus Christ". In its most recent strategic plan, which was completed in late 2007, the Council set the following overarching strategic aim;

The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services seeks to grow robust communities, neighbourhoods and a society that is able to offer every member support, dignity, freedom and opportunities to grow. A robust society is based on a commitment to collective responsibility and the common good, and an understanding of how our hu-

manity is based on our relationships to each other and our communities. Through prophetic engagement NZCCSS participates in the work of God by addressing the causes of poverty and exclusion in our society, and challenging unjust structures.

In order to begin the work of encouraging the growth of robust communities and neighbourhoods, Council recognised that it needed to grow its own community knowledge and commitment. In order to begin this work, member Church leaders were invited to attend a meeting in late 2007 to discuss how we could work together to further develop the knowledge and desire of our church memberships to participate in building a more just society.

From this initial meeting, a plan to implement a national education programme on social justice and compassion issues was developed. The educational programme "Let us look after each other – Aroha tētahi ki tētahi" was focussed on five key social justice issues and promoted the following concepts

We believe a just and compassionate society can be achieved by more action to;
Support families and communities in nurturing and protecting our children as taonga
Provide older people with a range of choices for their homes, support and lifestyle
Utilise our nation's prosperity responsibly to eliminate poverty
Enable access to good affordable housing for everyone
Support community organisations to grow the spirit of aroha tētahi ki tētahi

With full engagement from all of our Church leaders the Council undertook to develop posters, brochures and collate statements of support from the Church leaders around each of the five key issues. These were released throughout 2008 in the lead up to the General Election. They were distributed through the church networks to approximately 1,800 parishes and to 430 Christian social service delivery sites. Copies were also provided to sitting MPs and to the chief executives of Government departments responsible for a range of social services. Church leaders were engaged in the development process by seeing, feeding back on and signing off each of the publications.

The website www.justiceandcompassion.org.nz was also developed to support the education campaign and the ongoing work of NZCCSS. The “Let us look after each other – Aroha tētahi ki tētahi” material is still available from this site, as is additional information generated by NZCCSS along with links to information from other organisations.

This education programme was timed to be completed around the time of the General Election and the information generated was used to inform questions in candidate meetings around the country. NZCCSS has received positive feedback on the “Let us look after each other – Aroha tētahi ki tētahi” education programme, from parishioners, ministers and Church leaders. While with the benefit of hindsight it is possible to see ways of improving this type of programme, Council believes that a greater knowledge of New Zealand-based social justice issues has been developed in many church communities.

After the election, the impacts of the global economic crisis began to loom high on the horizon. NZCCSS invited its member Church leaders to a meeting to discuss this crisis and the accompanying recession. Somewhat serendipitously, the day of the Church Leaders’ meeting coincided with the Prime Minister’s Job Summit. At this meeting, Council and Church leaders worked together to develop a response to the crisis that was beginning to affect New Zealand Society. This response was spelled out in the “Together we can...” statement that was released after the 27 March meeting. This statement is available on the www.justiceandcompassion.org.nz website.

The “Together we can...” statement provided a multilevel response; firstly it gives a message of hope from Church leaders – through supporting each other in our families, our parishes and our wider communities we can get through this time. This global financial crisis provides us all with an opportunity to take a break from consumerism and to reflect on more meaningful values for our lives and

our relationships. Secondly, Church leaders supported the generosity that will flow from our parishes and our social service organisations to people in need during these difficult times. Finally Church leaders provided government with some initiatives that they may wish to consider in order to support families who are most affected by the recession.

Since the Hikoi of Hope, a cross-denominational group of Church leaders had been meeting with the Heads of State on an annual basis. NZCCSS had, on behalf of this wider group of Church leaders, requested a meeting with the Prime Minister. This request had not been responded to until the “Together we can...” statement was sent to the Prime Minister. Immediately after the statement was sent to John Key, an invitation to the wider grouping of Church leaders was received. This group decided that the statement would be the single discussion point presented at this meeting.

After an hour long meeting focussed on the needs of families and children during the recession period, Church leaders were invited to meet again with Mr Key and Bill English with further developed plans and recommendations. The Church leaders accepted this offer and the Council of Christian Social Services is working closely with Church leaders’ social justice advisors in further developing the range and depth of the recommendations from the “Together we can...” statement.

Many of these initial ideas may not be finally presented, as after a longer analysis they may have proved not to be the best options. Church leaders will be meeting with their social justice advisors and Council in the near future to consider the range of ideas and analysis that is currently being developed. With their input an agenda for the next meeting with the Prime minister and the Treasurer will be finalised.

The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services has been energised by its engagement with its member Church leaders. Rather than finding theological points of difference, Church leaders have engaged extremely positively on developing ways of jointly influencing for the positive development of a just and compassionate society. Council hopes that with the continuing support of these leaders, greater progress towards addressing the causes of poverty and exclusion in our society will be achieved.

**Trevor McGlinchey is the Executive Officer of the New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services*

The Lost History of Christianity: The thousand year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, African and Asia – and How it Died by Philip Jenkins, Harper One, 2008

Reviewed by Nathan Parry

Each year seems to throw up a seminal book for my faith and my ministry. In 2008 it was *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an ordinary radical* by Shane Claiborne (Zondervan, 2006). Entertaining yet challenging reading; a book I've lent to many within my congregation. It's definitely geared to a younger audience, and will go out of date soon with its references to the Bush years, but has awesome potential to transform lives and open believers up to the costly call of discipleship.

So far this year, my seminal book has been *The Lost History of Christianity*. It is quite a scholarly tome requiring some knowledge of the Council of Chalcedon and the various opinions on Christ's divine vs. human nature, but I do still have a queue of congregants waiting to borrow it.

Church history is my secret vice and I often read it for fun. However, while I did know the churches covered in this book (Nestorians, Jacobites and Copts) existed, I knew very little about them.

The first part of the book mainly focuses on the Nestorians and details their meteoric and dramatic growth and expansion at the same time as Mahayana Buddhism was spreading through Asia. By the mid-600s, this Church was deeply embedded in Iran and Iraq, had a strong presence in Arabia and India, and had churches and bishops established in Sri Lanka, Tibet, Central Asia, Mongolia and China. It extended from the border with Rome in the west, to the Pacific Ocean in the east – and it even reached China and Tibet before Buddhism.

The decline began about 1200, and only in the last 100 years of modern history has the Christian Church spread further across the globe than it did in this period. I found this an incredibly inspiring read, and would encourage the squeamish to stop at that point.

Next the book goes on to look at the decline and eventual annihilation of most of these Churches (as well as later Catholic missions in Japan and China). It's a gruesome and sobering record of slaughter, rape, the disfigurement of monks, the burning of books and the destruction or conversion of church buildings. This account takes us right up to the genocides of the 1900s and the impact of

the second Gulf War on the Iraqi churches.

Except for short periods, unlike in Europe or Africa, the Church in Asia never managed to convert the rulers under whom it lived. We may curse Constantine and Christendom for their legacy in our Western faith, but the only place in Asia where Christians have lived in relative peace for the past 1000 years was in Hindu India. Taoists, Muslims, Buddhists, Communists, European Christians – all were tolerant at times, but not all the time. History has not been a fun place to be for a disempowered minority.

The challenge for us as Presbyterians would be Jenkins' assertion that Western Chalcedonian Orthodoxy (to which Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants belong) only became globally dominant because the other, and for many centuries larger, non-Chalcedonian versions of Christianity were virtually wiped out. However, he mitigates this with two fascinating points:

1. One is the story of Rabban Bar Sauma, a Nestorian monk from China, who took a student and attempted a pilgrimage from Beijing to Jerusalem. When they got to Iraq, the Mongols were waging war against the Egyptian Caliph who controlled the Holy Land, and so they could go no further. Instead, he was sent to Rome by the Arghun Khan to try and forge an alliance with the Pope against Egypt.

Bar Sauma did not succeed in this quest, but did manage to utterly astound Catholic Europe by the mere fact that his Church existed and had spread as far as China, but also by the inconceivable situation that his theology was found to be orthodox despite him being outside of communion with Rome!

2. Next is the New Testament Canon, which was developed separately in the East, but which is virtually the same as the Western Canon (apart from omitting Revelation and a few minor epistles). This is despite being developed by Churches that were antagonistic to "Roman" Christianity and that were not under any influence from the Roman emperors. Notably, they acknowledged the same four Gospels as authoritative, again despite the fact that writings from three other non-canonical Gospels appear in early Islamic writings and were thus known and being read in the East at least as late as 800AD.

The last part of the book looks at the early origins of Islam before it matured and became more defined, coming to the conclusion that early Christians did view it as a Christian heresy and not a separate religion. He gives what would be some quite controversial evidence to sup-

port this, but also points out that mosque architecture, prostration in worship, the veiling and seclusion of women, and the rules around Ramadan were all copied by this nascent movement from Eastern Christians.

In the east, Christians and Muslims worshipped in very similar buildings and in very similar ways. The main difference was that Christians prostrated themselves in front of an icon, a practice that Muslims regarded as idolatrous and which in turn inspired the iconoclastic movement within Christianity.

Importantly, Jenkins also analyses why some Eastern Churches have managed to survive nearly a millennia of pressure and persecution (for example, in Egypt and Syria – though he also points out that they could be wiped out in our lifetime by a single change in government), while others vanished. He gives some examples of Crypto-Christians that managed to maintain their faith underground for between three and eight centuries; and concludes by attempting to develop a theology of extinction. He resists the easy way out of dismissing them as not being “proper” Christians.

Why would our God of history allow Christ’s Body to suffer and die out at different times and in different places? Could this also be the fate of the Church in the West? His answer to that is “possibly”, but comparing our situation to the historic Eastern situation, he does not think that this is a fate we will be facing any time soon.

Be Fertile with your Infertility, Christine Bannan and Winnie Duggan, Bateson Publishing Limited, Wellington, 2008

*Reviewed by Gareth Jones**

The market is inundated with books on the scientific, clinical, ethical and theological aspects of infertility, and so any new entrant into this crowded market place has to fill a niche that has been largely ignored up to now. And this is precisely what *Be Fertile with your Infertility* succeeds in doing. Written from the perspective of those who have been through the infertility mill, it sets out to provide resources to help others cope with the demanding and at times overwhelming pressures of infertility itself and even the technologies aimed at overcoming it.

As one reads this book, one is brought face-to-face with the human dimensions of the many different experiences of infertility. The authors advocate the place of ceremonies and rituals to help those involved come to terms with primary and secondary infertility, becoming parents after

IVF treatment, the dashing of hopes at the failure of an IVF cycle, miscarriage, the disposal of embryos, the decision to discontinue further IVF treatment, and the ultimate acceptance of childlessness. Examples are given of how real people have responded and the sort of ceremonies they have found helpful.

While these ceremonies may not be for everyone, what shines through so clearly are the personal stories and the struggles they have endured as they have faced up to the emotional, spiritual and ethical dimensions of infertility. The aim is to assist people move forward and to deal with the depths of grief they encounter, a grief little appreciated by those lacking first-hand knowledge of life without children or grandchildren. No punches are pulled as the people we encounter in the book (both male and female) ask penetrating questions, to which few - if any - have satisfactory answers.

This is a practical book, with down-to-earth suggestions for the ceremonies that have been found helpful. The honesty that shines through these stories is penetrating, and the poetry is poignant and very often beautiful. The questions raised, such as the meaning of embryos lost during IVF, would tax the foremost bioethicists, and yet they emerge here as an integral part of the response of those who have lost embryos in the longing for children.

As I was reading this book I was also going through the latest Vatican pronouncement on the reproductive technologies. While *Be Fertile with your Infertility* is hardly on the same level, the responses of the infertile whose stories grace these pages should be required reading by theologians and policy makers who seek to frame the public debate on the place of IVF and its many ancillary procedures within society.

This is a book that can be confidently recommended to all, but especially to those who deal with infertility, whether as patients, health professionals, counsellors, or clergy.

**Gareth Jones CNZM is Professor of Anatomy and Structural Biology at the University of Otago, a bioethicist and member of Advisory Committee on Assisted Reproductive Technology (ACART)*

We Celebrating People by John Hunt*

Reviewed by Sally Carter

Recently, I attended the launch of the Rev John Hunt’s latest book, *We Celebrating People*. It’s the final book in a trilogy - the first two books are *We Spirited*

Reviews

People and We Well People. The celebration itself was a model of the book's title. Gentleness, hospitality, honesty, humour, hugs, music and applause made space for acknowledging both the joy of completing the book and the struggles that went along with its birth.

We celebrating people draws us into the gentle rhythms and sacredness of the everyday that are typical of Celtic Spirituality.

It offers prayer, reflection and ritual for both our daily lives and for the significant milestones in our lives. From our morning shower to the putting out of the milk bottles, the cat or the rubbish in the evening; from birth to death, from the first pay packet to the last – the whole of life is wrapped in the care of God who tenderly and graciously affirms our essential goodness.

This little book helps to release us from our striving to please God; our wondering if we will ever be “good enough” in God's sight. Simple actions, such as lighting a candle, drinking a glass of water, pausing before we eat, and looking up at the night sky, bring us in touch with God's generosity and closeness, reminding us that we are already “good enough” and giving us courage to live out lives of integrity and hopefulness.

This is a book of tenderness and integrity, helping us to see the best in ourselves and others. It offers small miracles rather than dramatic gestures. It is a book to be visited often; a calm place in times of busyness; a true place in times of transition; a steadying place in times of loss. Opening this book is an invitation to celebrate with God in all the times of living and loving.

To end with, here is a prayer from the book that I hope will nourish your spirit as John's book nourishes mine.

“O God, you look upon us with tenderness, with compassion, sometimes even with delight! Help us to look upon ourselves in the same way”.

We Celebrating People can be purchased through Epworth Books, Ecclesia Books or from the author.

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The church of pecha-kucha.

I wonder about the new virtual social communities that my children and their friends immerse themselves in. Bebo, Facebook, Twitter and the like. Do these media-rich, complicated social networks manifest themselves in some real, tangible way in the lives of the people involved? I am interested, partly out of curiosity, but particularly as I scan this virtual landscape, for some insights into emerging manifestations of both human and faith communities.

I came across a kind of answer a few weeks ago through an email invitation to attend an event that had a sort of liturgy, involved people in providing a testimony of a type and was introduced by someone who had an almost evangelical fervour about him. This is pecha-kucha.

To quote the background to this phenomenon:

“Mark Dytham and Astrid Klein, two Tokyo-based architects have turned PowerPoint, that fixture of cubicle life, into both art form and competitive sport. Their innovation, dubbed pecha-kucha (Japanese for “chatter”), applies a simple set of rules to presentations: exactly 20 slides displayed for 20 seconds each. That’s it. Say what you need to say in six minutes and 40 seconds of exquisitely matched words and images and then sit the hell down.”

Imagine being invited to an event advertised only through email networks, at which there was standing room only, where you paid \$10 at the door, where you lined up to buy your tickets with a couple of hundred dynamic, young creative types, and where you spent two hours listening to people’s stories? The meeting was introduced with someone telling us that this was one of the fastest growing social phenomena in the world. The event was now involving tens of thousands of people in dozens of counties and hundreds of locations. The data projector is set to 20 seconds per slide, and then each presenter, after a few seconds’ introduction, pushes the start button and speaks for 20 seconds to each of their 20 slides. Eight presenters, a 10 minute pause for a coffee or drink from the bar, and then eight more, and it’s finished.

While I doubt that anyone else at the event is going to see its ecclesiological ramifications in quite the same way as me, I do think that this growing phenomenon gives us some insight into that strange realm of community we find in the nexus between virtual and real life. The event I attended had moved a long way from its architectural design school origins and followed a quite specific form.

This included an eclectic mixture of 16,400 second accounts; for example, people’s journeys, how their art expressed their world views, and their quite personal reflections on developing a work-life balance.

Pecha-kucha is an event under copyright, so if you want to run an evening with this name you will have to get permission to advertise it in this way. No doubt you will need to pay some kind of assessment to a central office and have your plans checked for their orthodoxy. Some advice from one of the many blogs written about pecha-kucha reminds presenters that:

“Admittedly, it’s pretty unlikely the audience is interested in all the presentations. Take into account that we go because we like to see passionate people taking the chance. The incredible thing about pecha-kucha is that once is over, it leaves you in a creative mood no matter what you’ve seen.”

I have just read *The Missional Leader – Equipping your Church to Reach a Changing World* (Roxburgh and Romanuk). The point is made that we have moved beyond the era of the great organisational strategic-plan-for-everything scenario. The authors believe that leaders need to be courageous in allowing a space for honest listening and speaking, which will lead to the “identification of actions that the communities believe will move them towards becoming a missional church. People will experiment through action.” The authors discuss how change unsettles us and tends to turn us and our churches into reactive, self-preserving entities. As leaders, while we need to declare our interest in preservation, we also need to be courageous in opening up opportunities to discuss ideas that establish new possibilities for our congregations’ futures. We can’t expect our congregations to change and grow unless we are also prepared to do the same.

Why then not a pecha-kucha-like night for the congregation? Find 10 people, 20 slides and give them 20 seconds each to talk about their experiences of church life, and their hopes and ideas. It could be the start of something new.

Thanks for your support

