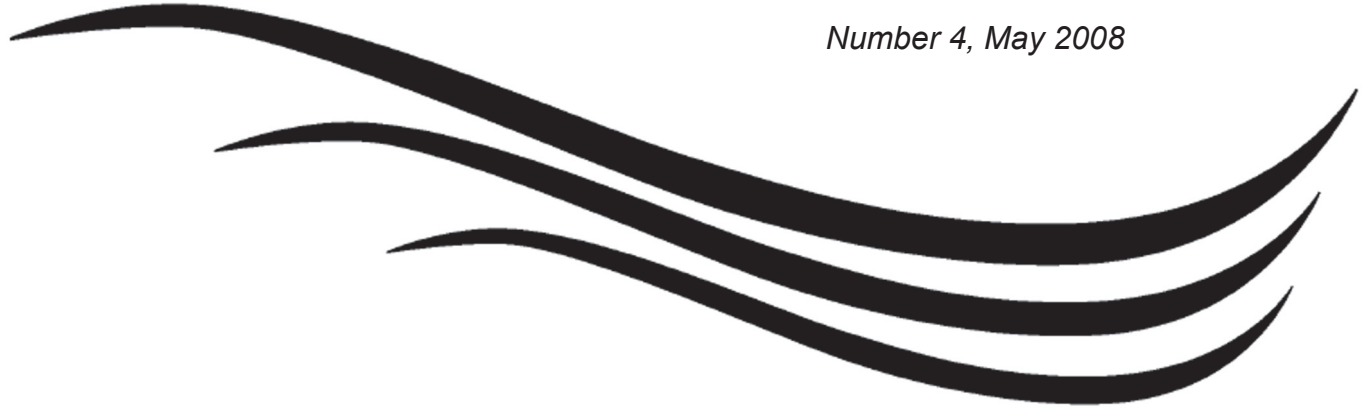


CANDOUR

News and Views for Ministers

Number 4, May 2008



Small churches

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Presbyterian Church
of Aotearoa New Zealand

Noticeboard

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

Amanda Wells
Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand
PO Box 9049
Wellington

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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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.

Are small churches a big issue?

Amanda Wells

How do you define small? Usually in relation to large. What is a small church? Less than 100 people on a Sunday morning; less than 50? Or are we talking about the size of the community in which a church is situated? If a community has 500 people yet 50 of them go to church, is that a small church? If a community has 15,000 people but 150 of them go to church, is that a bigger church or a smaller church?

For a while I thought this issue would be too small, so put added effort into sourcing more contributors; in the end, I had to add another four pages to *Candour's* standard pagination. Things don't always turn out how you expect. Small churches might be a difficult, complex, many-faceted problem and/or challenge and/or opportunity, but people aren't afraid to engage with it.

One thing neither small churches nor small towns lack is passion. More than 50 people came to the Standing out workshop in Gore; more than 50 attended in Palmerston North. The numbers of people attending throughout the country who actually come from smaller churches has also been notable. These people are keen and enthusiastic about bringing others into their worshipping community, and willing to try something new.

The flipside of small churches is that everyone knowing each other can create a more intimidating environment for a newcomer. The prospect of entering a club in which all members are thoroughly familiar with each other lacks appeal to all but the most confident. During the Standing out workshops, people are asked to think about qualities they want their church to exhibit. "Welcoming" always seems to be in first or second place. It can be hard for members to put themselves in the shoes of newcomers when the church and its people are so comfortably familiar. What is welcoming to strangers might be slightly different from what you surmise. For example, name tags are good the second time you meet someone and can't remember their name, but your initial label-less entry into a fully name-tagged room can make you feel startlingly out of place.

Try attending a mega-church for a while, and some of the advantages of smaller groupings will become immediately obvious. It's pretty disheartening to have someone ask if this is your first week when you've been coming for four years. You have to join a (smaller) home group

to get some sense of connection, and even then you can't always be guaranteed finding someone you know to sit next to on a Sunday morning. Demographic researchers are fond of saying that younger generations yearn for a greater sense of community; well, small churches have community in spades. Perhaps it's an asset that could be better promoted.

Small churches face special challenges with their buildings. With a smaller pool of potential donors, how do you pay for maintenance or horror-items like a new roof? What makes it even harder is the attachment that wider communities have to these often aging churches. Any whisper of a church being closed will prompt some local worthy to write a newspaper column about how the building deserves historic recognition and protection, and how shameful it would be for the building to be lost. Rarely is there any mention of who should pay for the upkeep and repairs; or recognition that a church exists to worship God. How can you communicate that it's the congregation, not the building, that is there to serve the community?

The appetite for change can be easier to generate in smaller groups. Losing one person a week might not be noticed in a congregation of 200, but will be hard to miss in a group of 50. Instead of this engendering a loss of hope, it can generate the motivation to take drastic steps.

Essays in this issue highlight the measures that smaller churches are taking to engage with their communities; from special services to community-focused outreach. Specific challenges, such as music, children's and youth ministry are addressed, as are opportunities for small churches to transition into new mission vehicles. Issues unique to rural areas are also canvassed, and we have a report of the recent trans-Tasman conference covering this topic.

The next issue of *Candour* will be on the theme "Worship", and cover ideas such as; how do we worship together? What is our theology of worship? Is worship for us or for those not here? What are current trends in music? The deadline is Friday 30 May and contributions are welcome; candour@presbyterian.org.nz

Being missional as a small congregation

Miriam Taylor, Awatere Joint Christian Venture, Marlborough

On our doorstep we have the Grassmere Salt Works and the Cape Campbell Lighthouse. These serve as visual reminders of Jesus' words: "You're here to be salt seasoning that brings out the God flavours of this earth; and light, bringing out the God-colours in the world." (Matt 5:13-14 – The Message)

How are we endeavouring to do this?

Rural Christians are generally good at seasoning their community with Christ-like love and values, so we see them involved in every community organisation. School boards of trustees, volunteer fire brigades, Lions, sports clubs, community settlers' associations.

Rural people are generally good at looking out for each other's needs. Here are some examples:

Ann's brain tumour had returned. Her family were arriving from overseas for a family celebration. Ann prepared the house. She commented to a Christian neighbour that the window cleaners from town refused to come out to the country. The next day she received a phone call from her neighbour to say that the Valley Window Cleaners (gathered for the occasion) were arriving to clean her windows.

A Pacific Island couple came to the area to work in the vineyards. Their financial position was shaky. They discovered that they were pregnant with their first child after 14 years of marriage. The church family took this couple to their hearts and a baby shower resulted in a flood of gifts, from a new baby buggy to baby booties. After the birth of the baby, members of the congregation visit daily to try and be the support that would be the norm back in the Islands.

Often when young mums arrive at the church for pre-school music there is a table laden with fresh vegetables – bundles of crisp silver beet, parsley, pumpkin, zucchini. A notice says, "Please take. With love from..."

Whilst our congregation are good at caring and sharing in the community, they have been quite shy about speaking of the Jesus who motivates them. The prayer chain has been instrumental in breaking down some of the barriers. When meeting someone with a crisis or need our people have become increasingly comfortable asking whether the person would like their situation to be placed on the

confidential prayer chain. It is a very busy prayer chain!

Together as a church community we enjoy opportunities to spread the light of the Gospel of Christ in a variety of ways. "Celebration" is the key word. We take every opportunity we can think of to celebrate! These celebrations take place both inside and outside the Church walls.

"A Celebration of Children" – our own "Praise Be" - was a great drawcard for families who had not entered the church before. With the exception of a clowning mime presented by two adults, the entire service was taken by the children. Children welcomed at the door, led the service, played the instruments and led the singing. The church was packed.

The church was also packed for "A Celebration of Marriage". Folk were invited to come dressed as if they were going to a wedding. They submitted photos of their own wedding for the power-point display. A young family acted as the wedding party and processed into the church to the wedding march. Various couples provided a panel discussion. Wedding vows were reaffirmed and the couple who had been married the longest cut the cake. The service was followed by a finger-food wedding breakfast.

"A Celebration of God's Creatures" (even soft toy replicas!) is a very non-threatening way to incorporate young families who come for weekly pre-school mainly music. A rural area is wonderful for this. A wide variety of God's creatures have come to church, from horses to honey bees in a display hive.

This year St. Andrew's Day is on a Sunday. We plan a wonderful Scottish celebration.

Easter, Christmas and Pentecost are opportunities to celebrate with party poppers, balloons, bubbles and streamers!

We believe that it is important to take church out into the community rather than expecting the community to come to the church. Twice a year we hold informal church services at outdoor venues, and annually we have winter worship in a woolshed. These are promoted as a family outing. The service is followed by a picnic and there are other activities offered, especially those that

will appeal to men. There is always an appropriate theme and usually the release of helium balloons feature as part of the prayers.

A service and safari held at Bluff Station in the south of the parish offered a two-hour four-wheel-drive safari into the back country after lunch.

The service at the light house was followed by a family scavenger hunt.

Kite flying is always a feature at outdoor Pentecost services.

Harvest thanksgiving by a vineyard provided an opportunity for a scarecrow competition. As vineyards have been established dams, have been built.... some of huge proportions. The men enjoy an excursion to check out the dam.

A service held at Molesworth Station in the extreme west of the parish had a historical focus with opportunity to view the cob buildings.

A summer service at the beach is great fun. This year it was preceded by a bike-a-thon to raise funds for a water tank and educational materials for a third world community. An added highlight at this service was the baptism of four young people in the sea.

All these ways, and others give an opportunity to share the Gospel of Jesus in a non-threatening, non-institutional and fun way. There are always non church-going families who attend and so consciously or subconsciously they are on a faith journey of coming to know Christ as Saviour and Lord.

Our small church seeks to be missional in other ways. The clothing exchange offers good used clothes to the community. The overseas vineyard workers appreciate the boxes of clothes that are taken to them at the beginning of the frosty pruning season. They have also appreciated English lessons offered free by one of the church members who is a qualified ESOL teacher.

Monthly gatherings of the senior citizens provides fellowship, and weekly mainly music gives children and parents/carers opportunities to socialize together. Both of these activities are based at the church and so the building becomes familiar and there becomes a sense of ownership. As relationships are built so pastoral care is given.

This year the parish is getting behind the 2008 Alpha course. We are offering Christ in a very intentional way. It will be outside their comfort zone for some to invite their unchurched friends to the Alpha introductory dinner, but they are prepared to be challenged in this way for Christ's sake. Please pray for us.

The Awatere Christian Joint Venture Parish (Anglicans, Presbyterians and others) covers an area of East Coast Marlborough stretching from Dashwood in the North, Molesworth Station at the top of the Awatere Valley in the West, down the coast through the townships of Seddon and Ward, to the tiny community of Kekerengu in the south.

Though a large area geographically, it only has a population of around 1500, with 600 being in the main centre of Seddon.

There are five main centres of worship, with one of those being moveable – held in different homes in the Awatere Valley.

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Rural congregations face challenges

Laurie Ennor, stated supply, Malvern Cooperating Parish

Rural communities and churches have been seriously affected in the last 20 or 30 years by both rural depopulation and repopulation. Diversification and changes in farming over the last two decades have affected the church as well as the community.

“Rural” communities are traditionally closely knit, and relationships are important. Rural areas differ from one another because of location, different types of farming practised, and also population mix. Not all people who live in rural areas today are “rural” people. The advent of lifestyle blocks has been a large factor in rural repopulation, but the “lifestylers” are basically urban folk who live in the country. Some tensions are evident between the lifestylers and traditional farmers.

Small churches are rather like an extended family, with close relationships being a common characteristic. Both the Anglican and Presbyterian churches in Sheffield have only a handful of regular worshippers, most of whom are 65 or older. While rural people have coped with changes in their communities and farming practices, they seem to resist changes in their church, which is one reason the church has become less relevant to the community. Although there has been a decrease in the relevance or place of the church, many rural people still retain some association with it even if the current generation doesn't attend. However, there is a sense of “ownership” or attachment to a church because the building contains memories of special occasions and people.

Many of the Sheffield Anglicans and Presbyterians would like combined services to resume, but this does not seem likely at present. There are theological, physical (the building), and sociological barriers to the Gospel. Small numbers at services can be a disincentive to new people joining, as existing relationships are well established and newcomers are immediately visible. Rural churches still seem to have a “come to us” attitude, rather than actively asking people to come.

Bill Bennett in his theology of mission states that all Christians are “called to live out and declare the way of Christ within the context of our daily work”, but rural churches are finding that increasingly difficult today because of their small membership. The chief change in the rural church has been the reduction of ordained clergy. Alternative forms of ministry are being tried, but

the pattern of an ordained minister to a parish is deeply ingrained. One way for small rural churches to become relevant again to their community is to be able to speak out with an informed voice about contemporary issues such as globalisation, the environment and sustainability. They also need to model deep, meaningful relationships through good quality pastoral care. But do they have the energy or motivation to do this?

Reasons that result in the closure of a church include dwindling numbers, the health of the building along with the costs of maintaining it, and few or no people able to look after the property. Rural people jealously guard the viability of their church (and similarly their school), and feelings about closing it run high. They generally refuse to accept closure as an option, but rather tend to continue in denial because it is easier than to admit inevitable closure. Closing a church is full of pain and possibility. Congregations are not immortal and, like people, they die. The St James' people realise that their church will have to be closed but they feel that when this happens some folk will drop out of church altogether. Given this feeling it is difficult to be optimistic about the future.

Relevant and faithful preaching during times of transition ensures that the Gospel is proclaimed and heard during such uncertain and unsettling times. Change may be the way that God speaks. Churches should be encouraged to make decisions about closure as early as possible, rather than holding on until a crisis occurs. It is far better for all concerned to end on a high point, if that is possible.

For a small church like St James', a way forward may be a home group that may attract others who may not go to a Sunday service. Other options are more services at Springfield or revisiting combined services with the Sheffield Anglicans.

In the light of this research, the following points may be made about closing a small rural church:

When closure of a church is likely, people experience some uncertainty about the future. They may deny the inevitable closure and try to put off that occasion. It is better to make a decision about closure early on rather than waiting until a crisis occurs, like running out of money or the building becoming unusable. The traditional shape of the church as a building, minister and clergy house

is deeply ingrained. People find it hard to imagine what “church” might be like without a local church building.

There is the strong possibility of losing worshippers, and local people are rightly concerned about this. Observations from New Zealand and overseas are that some people will go elsewhere for worship (not necessarily in the same denomination), or will attend church less regularly or drop out altogether. Rural people have a high regard for relationships and so strive to maintain these.

Whatever happens to the building, it is a loss to the church folk and also to the community, even if regular attendance at services is small. Rural people hold on to past links with the church and still want the church to be there for them for significant life events, even if the church is not their denomination or if they do not attend.

Possible ways ahead need to be explored. A small rural church is very much like a home group. The Tas Valley people found the transition from church services to home groups reasonably easy to make. Some people find the closeness or intimacy of home groups threatening, while others who may not have come to church can feel very welcome and included. The latter is the experience of the Pigeon Bay people. Some folk look to combining with other churches in the area to try to retain a church presence. For the Sheffield Anglicans and Presbyterians this seems unlikely in the near future.

Can a church regain relevance with the surrounding community? To refocus for mission is difficult especially when numbers are small – but it is not impossible if the folk are willing to look “outside the box” to see God’s “new thing”. Churches could perhaps take a lead in speaking about contemporary issues such as globalisation, sustainability and care for God’s creation, rather than allowing secular agencies take the forefront of these discussions.

The final issue is pastoral – to create an appropriate liturgy and ritual for closing the church so that an opportunity is provided to close that part of people’s lives. A well planned and presented booklet with photos and some historical details could be a fitting memento of the church. People’s concerns about the future of buildings and contents need to be heard and dealt with sensitively and pastorally.

Is there a clear way forward for Sheffield and other small rural churches? If there is, it is not yet apparent.

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Breaking bread in the community

Nancy Parker, Waiareka Weston Presbyterian Parish, North Otago

Offering hospitality and welcome to our communities takes creativity and a willingness to break with tradition and to do things in a different way. For us in the Waiareka Valley there is an added meaning. The name Waiareka means ‘pleasant water’. Our valley is indeed a pleasant and beautiful place. Sometimes driving out to Enfield on a Sunday morning, I gasp in wonder at the winter sun glinting on the snow covered peaks of the Kakanuis. The frost, fresh on the paddocks and the wonderful greenness of the valley takes one’s breath away. At the western end of our parish is a small settlement called Ngapara. The name Ngapara means “the table”. Just west of Ngapara are three flat-topped hills called “the Tables”. The highest of these is Raki’s Table, meaning “sky table”. The names were given by the first settler to the district, Edward Bland Atkinson, who leased this country in 1854. Raki’s Table looks right down the Waiareka Valley to the Whitstone Escarpment, which is above Enfield.

At the northern end of the escarpment is Te ana raki which means “the dry cave”. In the early days, there was a massive limestone rock that stood out from the hill a short distance from Enfield. There was a cave in it which was small and dry. Travellers would frequently spend the night there. Inside the cave they could light a fire and boil the billy.¹ Shepherds herding sheep through from the Waitaki valley would also make use of the cave. Sadly, most of this rock was sawn up to build one of the early homesteads in the valley. In 1873 Edward Lees began church services in Ngapara using the flour mill as church and the bags of grain as seats.² This flour mill is still producing flour today from the grain grown in the valley. This rich history gives special significance to the metaphor of table fellowship in the valley where the Waiareka Weston Parish has its home. We dwell in the shadow of Raki’s table. The naming of Raki’s table expressed the right to bring together the Maori and the Pakeha. Today it is important for us to continue this tradition and the church and its people must provide a place of welcome, table fellowship and a place where people can shelter from the storms of life.

Offering hospitality and welcome to our communities takes creativity and a willingness to break with tradition. Our parish has been making new ventures in “breaking bread” with the community. The historic Totara Estate in-

vited Waiareka-Weston parish to join with them for their day of celebrating the harvest. We immediately wondered if it would be the right thing to do to close our morning service at the Weston Church and all go down to the Estate, beginning the day there with a harvest thanksgiving service. “Harvest Home” is celebrated on the Estate annually and the church now has a wonderful role within that celebration. The youth group is also involved. The young people, dressed in Victorian costumes, make and sell lamb burgers as part of the day’s festivities. Even I dress in a Victorian outfit. It has become a wonderful day of hospitality within the community.

The thanksgiving service is well attended as we celebrate the abundance of God’s gifts to us. People bring gifts from their plenty for the local rest homes and food bank, and we sing wonderful new and old songs of the harvest as a community. The church provides morning tea after the service and then everybody enjoys the day of celebration. There is a swagger’s race, draft horse riding, pony riding, tours around the old Estate, butter making and numerous stalls and much fun and fellowship between church and community. We have been doing this now for three years and some of our church people came this year for the first time. They were so excited when they discovered how good this was. It had not occurred to them that this could be a way of breaking bread in the community

Three years ago when we were prayerfully planning other ways of sharing with our community, we decided Anzac day gave us a great opportunity. Though we have a little church up the Waiareka Valley at Enfield, we discovered that Anzac Day had not been celebrated in the valley for many years. There were names on the memorial gates at Ngapara, Windsor and Enfield that were never honoured and an honours board in the Enfield Church. We did our homework and a list of all those returned servicemen who came from the Waiareka Valley were personally invited. We involved school children also from the valley – the Sea Scouts to perform some of the ceremony and a young man to play the Last Post. Relatives of those who were lost at war read out the lists of names. The church has been packed to the doors for three years of these Anzac celebrations. The service lasts approximately an hour, with all the ritual of the celebration as well as a message of hope. This is followed by a morning tea to which many in the valley contribute, many of them not churched. It is a wonderful time of remembering, sharing and valuing

1 Stevenson 1947: 71,72

2 Scotter 1948: 48

who we are; a way of breaking bread with our community.

Last year we also decided to hold more than one Christmas Eve service. After all, we have three churches! Again we chose the Enfield Church. For two years now, both churches (Weston and Enfield) have been packed to overflowing on Christmas Eve. The services are followed by Christmas goodies and coffee. Again the church provides hospitality and welcome, sharing the good news of the season, celebrating the wonder of the birth of Christ as a whole community.

There are many other ways we break bread with our community. A seniors group, parents and pre schoolers' and a "Friday Nite Club" open to all 9-12 year olds from the local school. "Main Street Youth" also meets weekly in the local Scout Den. As chaplain to the local school, I bake muffins for the staff every Tuesday – again just another way of sharing the love of Christ and valuing those who serve in our community. Community funerals are also celebrated in our churches and at these times of sadness we seek to provide safe and comforting spaces where people can bring their grief. We try to enable them to celebrate life and appreciate who they are as people.

Our local Pippins, Brownies and Guides group have found the Weston Church to be a welcoming place. They keep their equipment in the church buildings, have a notice board to display their work and thoroughly make themselves at home. We want them to experience the warmth of welcome and hospitality and we provide parents' spaces to sit and chat as they wait for their children. There is also a video library they can use. There are many wonderful Christian videos for family viewing. The group has now grown to more than 50 young girls and I have been able to encourage them in many ways.

Even though all this activity sounds really good, we still have a long way to go in the area of hospitality and continue to explore ways in which we can recover some of the ancient practice of "breaking bread" with strangers and sojourners, and caring for the marginal. How we can accomplish that better in our context is a question we need to continue to ask ourselves. We must reflect on our own experiences of being a guest or a stranger.³

Letty Russell writes of the need for the table to be large enough and welcoming enough so many connections can be made around it and through it.

If the table is spread by God and hosted by Christ, it must

3 Pohl 1999: 177

be a table with many connections. The primary connection for people gathering around is the connection to Christ. The church is the community of faith in Jesus Christ. All ways of describing the church are indications of ways that God in Christ has shaped the lives of Christians through the power of the Spirit. Doctrine of the church in this sense is an interpretation of the experience of gathering in Christ's name and then the experience of life in Christ's service. Because Christ is present in the world, especially among those who are neglected, oppressed, and marginalized, the round table is also connected to the margins of both church and society, always welcoming the stranger to the feast or sharing the feast where the 'others' gather. Christ's presence also connects us to one another as we share in a partnership of service.⁴

This is an excerpt from School of Ministry Synthesis written in October 2007

4 Russell 1993:18

Halswell Union Parish

The Methodist Church of New Zealand is seeking to make a ministry appointment in the Halswell Union Parish. This suburban parish is situated in the rapidly growing south western part of Christchurch.

The Parish seeks a person (or couple), lay or ordained, who will work with them to develop ministry and mission.

Applications close 20 May 2008.

Initial enquires to:

Rev Nigel Hanscamp,
Director Mission Resourcing,
Private Bag 11 903, Ellerslie, Auckland.
Ph 09 525 4179
e-mail nigelh@methodist.org.nz

Using limited musical resources

Alison Fields, Licenced Lay Preacher, Anglican Diocese of Nelson

Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise - Psalms 98:4.

That sums it all up – the action, the intention, the inclusion. It is a command that requires action in response; we are called to “make” not to “consider making”. The focus is on making “a joyful noise” and not “a concert performance with technical brilliance but little soul”. Finally, the noise is to ring out to “all the earth” not to be played for “just the worship leaders and lead musicians”. The purpose of music in a church service is to unite people together to make a joyful noise in worship to the Lord. The reality for many small or rural churches is that limited musical resources can make this task a challenge. A mixture of attitude, approach, resources and technical knowledge can make a huge difference to music in rural churches, and to the way we worship.

Types of Music

Music should be chosen to suit the people in the congregation, the type of musical accompaniment, if any, and the theme of the service. Using a variety or combination of musical styles may help build a service that contains some point of connection for every person in the congregation. Every type of music can have a place in worship.

Music should complement the rest of the service, not drive it. The music should flow naturally as a part of the service and not stand separate and apart. Music that feels like an interruption does not benefit the service.

Traditional music – familiar hymns and well-known songs can provide stability and continuity. There is no harm staying purely with traditional music in some settings, but beware that this will not cater for everyone. If you do not inject new ideas or songs, then the music will eventually become predictable and stilted.

Modern music – contemporary or lively music can bring more energy and life into worship depending on how the songs are done and the attitude of your congregation. But you face the same risks with an all-modern music repertoire as you do relying solely on traditional music.

Well known music– selecting songs with tunes that are well known both inside and outside church circles can bring confidence to reluctant singers. Examples: Mil-

lennium Prayer (Auld Lang Syne), May the Lord (Edelweiss), Thexted (The World in Union), using Christmas tunes throughout the year with other words, or well-known hymn tunes matched with lyrics with the same meter.

Signature music – have something that is special or meaningful for your particular congregation or church that becomes your own signature music or anthem. Examples: Colin Gibson’s “These Hills Where the Hawk Flies Lonely” to the tune “Kaikoura”, or “I, the Lord of Sea and Sky”.

Themed music – whole services can be based on a particular topic or theme with the music emphasising and reinforcing that theme. Examples: Easter, Christmas, Pentecost, seasons, springtime, harvest, baptism, marriage, christening, new life. Take care to select songs so that the words or sentiment become the focus, not the music. This is particularly useful for moving the emphasis away from the sound of the music and onto the meaning of the words, and can assist if your musical resources are limited.

Using your instruments and voices

Small and rural churches often have limited range of people with musical skills, and some worship leading and congregational singing is done without strong voices to lead. The reality is that we need to work with the resources we have.

Musical instruments – any kind of instrument can have its place. Piano, keyboard, organ, guitar and bass are relatively common. Also useful every so often are things like flute, trumpet, recorder, bongos, tambourines, violin, spoons, anything – these usually don’t form the staple for your musical diet, but provide some of the interest and variety regardless of what else you have available (if anything).

New or learning musicians - if musicians are just learning, encourage them. Find easy music that they can play (such as songs with only three chords – there are a lot of these), ask them to play at the smaller services or youth group, or buddy them up with a more experienced musician. Partnering more experienced musicians with younger musicians can also have benefits beyond the Sunday services, in building connections and relationships within the congregation.

Musicians with a preferred style of music - if musicians have a preferred musical style, run with it but also try to introduce some variety. Celtic or Country and Western may be fine for the individual musician, but to keep interest and relevance for the rest of the congregation, try to incorporate other musical styles, even if it is other parts of the service.

Singers – churches usually have a range of voices and abilities. If you have a good singer, that is great. If not, find ways to share the leading of singing, using individuals or groups, or find ways to have singing without a lead voice such as staying with songs or tunes that are well known so that no-one has to actively lead. If you have a lead singer with a preferred style of music, then try to introduce variety in the service in the same way you would with a musician in this category.

Without lead instruments or voices?

If you are in the position of having to run services without a lead instrument or voice, there are still viable options.

Unaccompanied voices – the church has an extensive history of worship with unaccompanied voices (the term ‘a capella’ literally means ‘as in the chapel’, which was singing without an organ or instrumental accompaniment) and it can be effective! Try selecting songs with tunes that everyone will know and can sing along with, such as Amazing Grace, Millennium Prayer (Auld Lang Syne), May the Lord (Edelweiss), Lord of the Church (Londonderry Air), or use well-known hymns and songs that don’t necessarily require a strong lead voice.

Pre-recorded music - the use of CDs, tapes or DVDs can be viable, but needs to be carefully managed. The use of music where the congregation becomes an audience rather than participants is of little value if that music is intended for bringing people together in a corporate act of worship. If used as a seamless backing for well-led singing, it can be effective.

CDs of backing music for congregational singing are available such as “Dear God, we need an organist!” (details at www.ccn.org.nz/music.htm) containing organ backing for common hymn tunes. Another useful set of CDs covering a range of musical styles is “No music group? No problem!” (Published by Kevin Mayhew UK) containing backing tracks for over 200 worship songs on a set of CDs, including organ hymn tunes, modern songs with different instrumental backing (piano, guitar, drums etc), available with words for singing. Pre-recorded backings for hymns and other songs are useful as they are participatory: they provide the accompaniment and you

provide the live voices.

Some churches use backing tracks (instruments only, as above) to sing to, and others use full versions (instruments and voices) to sing along with. Full versions can be useful if your congregation has few voices or no lead voice, but be careful that you still feel that it is your worship session, and that you are not merely trying to join in with someone else’s. Some CDs are not designed for congregational worship but are more for listening (because of timing or pitch or complexity of the songs), and these can be utilised in other parts of the service, as outlined under “Creative ways to incorporate music” below.

For the technical side of using music on CDs seamlessly within a service, contact other rural churches who already use this form of musical accompaniment. Some churches have found innovative and simple ways to utilise CDs such as using a couple of CD Walkmans to queue up the songs.

Working without music – Shirley Murray has identified that silence and meditation are more effective than poor singing, especially if your resources are slight. And that hymns can be read instead of sung during a service. She suggests reading through the words of a hymn sensitively and guiding the congregation through what is being said. Use more than one voice, or use a response form as in the reading of Psalms.

Creative ways to incorporate music

There are various options for including music in worship in addition to congregational singing. If you do not have musicians or singers in your midst or want some additional variety, the following options are ways of including music elsewhere within the service:

- quiet music on CD played before and after the service or during communion
- quiet music on CD during open or reflective prayer times
- music on CD in conjunction with Powerpoint images during reflection or meditation times
- reading Psalms or other poems antiphonally as a congregation (one group calls and another answers)
- have a lone voice sing quietly and unaccompanied during prayer
- use other devices (art, symbols, tactile items) during worship to provide contrast and interest
- inviting children to be involved in an aspect of the service. Songs with actions work well, regardless of the kind of musical backing (if any!)

Transitioning small congregations

Cameron and Jacqueline Sinclair, North East Valley

Our passion over the past 20 years or so has been to help grow Christian community in small groups – in West Auckland and latterly in North Dunedin. Our understanding of community is the frame around the transitions we have been involved in and it gives a perspective on the purpose and challenges of change as we see it in small congregations

Our experience – and the experience of many worldwide – is that Christian community finds its roots in small groups. So a congregation may grow large, but also has in a real way to stay small, to ensure that members are connected in small community groups meeting during the week.

In January we went to a reunion of 90 relatives, descendants of Ernest and Florence Sinclair: a big, happy, healthy, family celebration. But only a big and healthy tribe because each individual is connected into the family by being actively part of a particular small family to which he or she belongs. It would be a very dysfunctional family if we only met to celebrate in large gatherings without each having a small family grouping to contribute to and receive from, where we know and are known, love and are loved, and do the work of family. The same principle applies with people who only meet on Sundays because, similarly, the family life of God's people can only be worked out in the small, in specific relationships with a specific group of others.

If you have not experienced community in a well-run small group, you will not be convinced. (Not all small groups foster Christian community: those in the '70s and '80s had a different function, centred on Bible study.) But rate the members of your congregation as to how well they measure up in achieving the "one anothers" of the New Testament – love one another, bear one another's burdens, admonish one another, confess your sins to one another, and so on (we have a checklist if you need one). These are the family rules for the children of God and make sense within committed, personal, relationships; they can only get lip service in most Sunday worship meetings.

Small groups help members directly engage in the five faces of mission and richly support them in their Christian walk. They are supported as they learn to listen to God's word, pray, and identify their place in ministry. In-

stead of being passive feeders of a spiritual diet provided for them on Sundays, people are far more likely to become self-feeders.

Bill Beckham has seen the balance of large and small as the two wings of the church: the large group celebration and the small group community¹. Both are needed for the church to soar. The concern of many in the West over the past few decades has been the impoverishment of the small community wing in many congregations. M Scott Peck puts it this way:

*"Currently the Church is not only not the Body of Christ, it is not even a body, a community. It must become a community before it can serve as the Body of Christ."*²

Around the world many of the largest congregations very deliberately work on their small community wing and expect their members as a matter of course to take their place in a small group. One book that we have found very helpful in explaining this paradigm of church life is *The Seven Deadly Sins of Small Group Ministry* by Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2002)

Opportunities and challenges are often sides of the same coin in small congregations:

The challenge: the focus of parishioners is on finances (or the scarcity of) and the worry of the church closing.

The opportunity: this model allows a group that has been focussed on survival, to put such worries aside, to wait on God and seek a renewed vision. In our setting, North East Valley Presbyterian has become a redevelopment unit. This model, developed by the former MRT, is just for this purpose. The parish steps back from being an independent charge, is released temporarily from some of its financial commitments, and in the time allotted gathers new vision and builds community as it reorients itself to mission. Decisions as to the future use of plant and so on are left until there is a mission perspective to frame future plans.

The challenge: a very small congregation, perhaps on the brink of closing.

The opportunity: such congregations are in a special place for transition. If we accept that a healthy church

needs a balance of the small community wing and the large celebration wing, many of the large congregations in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand are also in need of transformation towards this goal. Small congregations, unlike many others, often have the advantage of knowing that they need to change.

Less is often more when it comes to transition. Small churches can have an essential ingredient for change: urgency. If you haven't got urgency, the authors of *Leading Congregational Change* say, you have to create it for successful change.³

The challenge: there are few or no programmes operating in the parish.

The opportunity: to focus on forming small groups and grow a structure and a culture that supports their growth. Community is a fragile plant. The organisation and programmes of a larger parish work to choke the life of small communities. For church members with many meetings and responsibilities, gathering with a small group can seem just like another meeting; and just as busy people can flag family meals when life gets too fast, so church members can easily see the group meeting as the most dispensable part of church life – especially if church leaders give the signal that group membership is optional for busy people.

The challenge: there is very little energy for more than the Sunday service.

The opportunity: for outside resourcing by presbytery or another church to lead a process of revisioning. Vision and leadership need to be introduced from the outside: for existing members to be resourced, or for resource people to come in – like missionaries – and form small community groups, while leading a process of change. The role of the resource people is to empower the local people over time to form and own their own vision.

Herrington and others in *Leading Congregational Change* provide a detailed process for this by the establishment of what they call a vision community; a small diverse group that reflects the make up of the congregation. The members of this become change leaders as they involve the whole congregation in the transition.

The challenge: members of the surrounding secular society suffer from culture shock when attending the Sunday service. Over the years we have run small groups, there has often been too great a cultural barrier between the people being reached by the small groups, and the worship services. Neighbours were becoming Christians, being baptised, growing spiritually, but often struggling to

find a spiritual home with the middle-class congregation. *The opportunity:* to see the small groups as the key way of relating to the neighbourhood: the group becomes the point of entrance into church life. We see growth coming primarily from the small groups as people develop relationships of trust with friends, neighbours, and work-mates.

From our first Sunday in North East Valley, we changed the style of service with permission from the leaders. We have a breakfast/café service where visitors can fit in at whatever level they feel comfortable – which might be just to sit and have a coffee. We have had to work hard to encourage members to be sensitive to those from outside the church culture. To greet and protect visitors from unwelcome advances, our welcomers have adopted an approach like that of the maître d'. People are welcomed, shown the breakfast bar, invited to a table, and allowed to sit undisturbed if that is their wish – as in any café.

The challenge: “We can relax now – we are paying a minister to do the work!”

The opportunity: to model a ministry of empowerment. In our notice sheet (copied from Titirangi parish 20 years ago) we print:

Ministers: all the congregation

Assistants to the ministers: Cameron and Jacqueline

The challenge: sung worship consists of a mix of hymns played on a great old organ and '70s choruses. Do we go with one or the other exclusively?

The opportunity: If our worship was to reflect the culture, we realised that post modern music would be appropriate and to nurture a whole life attitude of worship. We consider every genre of music, including that from our Presbyterian tradition. We encourage listening as a form of worship and for all generations to learn about tolerance and respect for different styles of music. We have noticed our 80-plus group tapping their feet to Van Morrison – and the young ones (some of them!) are learning to enjoy the blast from the past, as our organist pulls out the stops for the last verse of the hymn.

References

- 1 We heard this years ago. Reference to it can be found in a number of places on the web, such as <http://thresholdmike.blogspot.com/2006/10/neighborhood-life-groups.html>
- 2 Peck, M. Scott. *The Different Drum, Community Making and Peace*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987.)
- 3 Herrington, Jim, et al. *Leading Congregational Change*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000)

Children's ministry in small congregations

Jill Kayser, Kids Friendly Coach

“We’re only a small congregation with limited resources” is a common complaint I hear when sharing the Kids Friendly vision with churches around the country. But the longer I do this work, the more convinced I become that effective children’s ministry does not depend on numbers but on vision. Larger “successful” congregations invariably have prioritised and invested in children’s and youth ministry. This has resulted in growth that enables them to employ someone to “drive” this ministry. However, an employed children’s minister is not always a panacea and can in fact jeopardise the whole-church approach to children’s ministry advocated by Kids Friendly.

“Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18). And many of our small congregations are immobilised by the fear of “perishing”. But the Scriptures also say “record the vision and inscribe it on tablets, that the one who reads it may run” (Habakkuk 2:2) and I have witnessed small congregations catch the Kids Friendly vision, run with it and be re-energised by it.

When I work with smaller churches, I often find they are disheartened by the lack of children and “stuck” with how to become more Kids Friendly. I try to help them build (and promote) a vision that builds on their strengths and recognises the unique advantages of being small.

Belonging to a community is central to a child’s faith development and is engendered through welcome and friendships. Smaller and more intimate congregations and Sunday Schools can build stronger intergenerational friendships. It is easier to welcome and learn the names of each other in smaller congregations and intentionally greet each other across generations. Sharing each others’ celebrations and burdens is also easier for small congregations. And there is a greater propensity for parishioners to be involved. Not all children respond to large, action-packed programmes and recruiting people to be a friend to love the children rather than a “teacher” is also less intimidating.

Some smaller churches are discouraged at having to prepare a lesson for only two children. When one church I worked with expressed this, we agreed that if there were more than three children, then they would be “taken out” half-way through the service for a pre-prepared lesson. Kids Friendly provided a template and material for pre-

paring a number of lessons that could be used as required. If three or fewer children attended church, they would be invited to enjoy a specially prepared activity pack (contact Kids Friendly for samples) on a rug with books, crayons, paper and soft toys at the front of the church. Some smaller churches struggle with resources for their children’s ministry but larger Kids Friendly churches are willing to share their experience and resources. The team at St John’s Rotorua have developed an excellent “home grown” curriculum for small churches struggling to resource children’s programmes. (Available from Kids Friendly).

Some ministers fear and resist having a “children’s time” when they are never sure how many or what ages the children will be. But a time with the children is important to build relationship and help children feel included. A child-friendly ritual can mark the start of this time, for example, lighting the candle or watering the tree of life. Discuss with children each time why you do what you do. This can be in the form of a question namely “who can tell me why we light the Christ candle?” or “why do we call Jesus the light of the world?” or with a statement: “we are now going to light our Christ candle to remind us that Jesus is like a light to our world because he shows us how God wants us to live and love. Who wants to help me with this very important job?” Include a statement from the child that the congregation can respond to, for example, child: “We light the Christ candle”; congregation: “Christ is the light of the world.”

Children’s time is an opportunity to share the stories of our faith. For those who have data projection, there are wonderful story resources on the Internet (see www.sermons4kids.com and look for Henry Martin’s Powerpoints of Bible stories.) If you don’t have data projection, invest in a really good children’s Bible with great illustrations (see the Barnabas Children’s Bible www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk). When you tell a story, make it no longer than five minutes and get down to the level of the children. But if storytelling really isn’t your thing, then just have a chat with the children about their week. When Mark Chapman at Clevedon Presbyterian has a weekly catch up with children, he ends by asking them: “Who’s special?” to which they all raise their hands. He then says: “yes, you are all special. So let’s hear you say: ‘I’m special and God loves me’”. Which they do with great gusto as they head off to their children’s programme.

Singing a children's song can also be awkward if there are only a few children so why not consider playing a children's song on CD while having the children help the adults collect the offering. You'll probably find young and old will join in unprompted. The Warehouse has very reasonable children's Christian CDs packed with all the old favourites that young and old can sing along to. You might also like to have some instruments or scarves or ribbons that children can use to join in with the singing. And if your children are a bit older, find out if they play an instrument that they could share in church or join the choir for a special occasion or season.

No matter the size of the congregation, it is vital that all children attending church are welcomed by name and effectively involved and engaged for some part of the worship service.

And, of course, effective children's ministry is a two-way process. God ministers through children. He called Samuel to a prophetic ministry. He chose a young shepherd-boy, David, to be Israel's king. Effective children's ministry nurtures, equips and gives children opportunities to minister. This is relevant to all congregations and can sometimes be easier to plan for and manage in a small congregation.

As one seven-year-old suggested when asked how her church could be more Kids Friendly: "Children could do a reading or say a prayer. Children could make butterflies for adults and children to write our prayers on and hang on mobiles from the ceiling for God to see. Children can do beautiful art for the walls of the church and teach adults songs. Children could learn from adults by helping them with the offering and greeting. Children and adults should greet each other and learn each others' names. Children can make really cool name tags for all the people of the church." (For more ways to involve children in church contact Kids Friendly to order the resource "A Kids Friendly Sunday")

Whether it's dance, drama, singing, playing musical instruments, reading, praying, sharing Scripture and stories, assisting with the audiovisual system or serving communion, intentionally involving children in ministry within the church develops in them a sense of belonging within their church family that will last a lifetime. As my nine-year-old son Blake says: "I can't miss church cos I'm too important so they'll miss me."

I recently saw an acronym for "bringing" children to Christ or Christ to children. The writer suggests that each and every one of us is capable of and has a personal re-

sponsibility to: Bless children with Jesus' love, Relate to children at their level, Involve children in worship and in a caring community, Nurture children in the way of Jesus and Grow children as leaders.

But effective children's ministry in secular New Zealand has to be more than what we do on Sunday. While Sundays are important for providing good Christian education and involving children in a nurturing and loving church family (and we always need to be ready and doing our best for children who do come), churches wishing to touch the ever growing "unchurched" have to create other opportunities to minister. Churches need to find out who their community of children are and identify their needs and ways to respond to them.

Pohutukawa Coast talked to their local school principal to find out more about their community. They discovered a disproportionately high number of children with single parents and decided they could minister to them by hosting a candlelit dinner for single parents while their children were entertained in the hall.

Small congregations in small communities are often able to better connect with other agents serving children, for example, Plunket, kindergartens, schools, and earn their trust so that they can work together to effectively respond to their needs.

Some of the small churches I work with have few children attending church, but overwhelming numbers of children and families involved in outreach programmes such as Mainly Music, playgroups or holiday programmes. These "new congregations" offer wonderful opportunities for our churches to minister through pastoral care and friendship evangelism and to explore new ways of "doing church". The census tells us that over 50 percent of New Zealanders are "spiritual"; so how can we, the church, create opportunities for spiritual exploration? One church decided to offer a more overtly Christian Mainly Music on Sundays. Children and their families participate in the first 10 minutes of the worship service and then continue their worship in a programme of stories, songs and crafts. Thirty percent of the families invited responded in the first week and this group continues to grow. Another church developed an intentional pastoral care plan and prayer group for all their Mainly Music families.

A church discouraged by the stagnant numbers of children attending church launched a Kids Club on Sunday mornings where parents could drop their kids off. Their numbers went from seven to 28 children attending within one month. These children also participate in Kids Friendly

all-age worship before leaving for their programme.

Managing the many facets of children's ministry in a small congregation is a challenge but it can be done through a team approach. One church developed an effective team of committed volunteers, each responsible for one portfolio of children's ministry including Sunday School, pastoral care of families, outreach, and administration.

While supermarkets and mega shopping centres fulfil the needs of many shoppers, there will always be those who still prefer to shop at the local butcher, baker and greengrocer. There are also many who value their local church, often within walking distance with parishioners that they and their children will recognise in their suburbs and schools.

Small churches need not become extinct. On the contrary, I believe that a small congregation committed to embracing new ways to "be the church" and to knowing and serving its community is very valid. So if you're a small congregation, focus your energies according to your resources (financial and human) and build a vision undergirded by prayer to love the children of your community.

For more information or resources contact Jill Kayser, Kids Friendly Coach, email: jill@sthelierschurch.org.nz, telephone (09) 585-0959, (027) 210-3784

Questions for churches to ponder

Do we genuinely welcome children as fellow disciples with as much to give as they receive?

Do we have contact with children beyond Sunday? What more could we do to engage with them?

Do we know who our community of children are and can we identify their needs and ways to effectively respond to them?

Are we willing to invest our time and finances to share Christ's love with children?

Are we prepared to change in order to welcome and include children?

Do our worship services engage children and invite their contribution?

Is our church building and worship space a welcoming, safe and inviting place for children?

Do we have a vision, written plan and budget for ministering to children?

A tribute to small congregations

Pamela Tankersley, Moderator

As Moderator I have now visited most of the presbyteries in our church. I have met with folk from very small congregations and observed that some are really sad and dispirited, some are stubbornly holding onto a model of church from the last century that is not sustainable in a contemporary world, yet there are plenty of others that, though small, have some great things going for them.

I want to talk about the best of these, and highlight the advantages of being small. I do so remembering the Apostle Paul's marvellous theology of the Body – where he reminds us that the Body of Christ is made up of many parts – some more useful than others, some more attractive than others, some more important but each to be valued as part of the whole. A church that values only large, growing, missional congregations and denigrates all others is in

defiance of this theology. What do these small churches do well, that we might take note of? I want to consider how they

- encourage participation of all members in the life and leadership of the church
- offer warm hospitality and encourage a sense of belonging
- maximise their mission capacity
- link with history
- use their assets as tools for mission

Small congregations that are vibrant in their worship are ones that are highly participatory. When you look at our last set of statistics and count the worship leaders and lay preachers per member in smaller congregations, the ratio is enormous. As small congregations often do not have full time ministers they must “do it themselves” and are very supportive of each others’ journeys, with many getting an opportunity to grow in faith and in leadership. Take the Bay of Islands Union Church in Paihia. No one is a passenger or spectator in that church of 40 members – they are all participating. Other cherished values are loyalty, faithfulness, and commitment. The folk that I am talking about are often puzzled by a contemporary attitude found in bigger churches that sees people shopping around for a worship style that suits “me”; and if it doesn’t continue to satisfy “me” then I’ll move on. For small church members, belonging is more about what one can give than what one receives. And the financial statistics will show that they are extremely generous in more than just time and energy.

One of the lovely aspects of a small congregation is the high degree of pastoral care that is offered - not usually by a professional team but simply for and with each other, as in the best of families. Everyone is known and everyone belongs - and if someone does not turn up one Sunday, then their absence is noted and some gentle action taken. High occasions are celebrated and sadness is shared. And yet this is not an exclusive club – it extends not only to families of the members but to new comers, who are welcomed with open arms. Hospitality is a core (Biblical) value. For instance, experiencing the warmth and hospitality of Lawrence Presbyterian Church is a great gift to all who pass their way.

So what about the missional capacity of a small church? Often these are churches whose life was once the centre of the wider community. It’s really hard for them to grasp that that they are now on the margins. But their church buildings are still situated at the heart of a town, or a suburb, and the opportunity for serving that community is well taken up. The trick is to find a community-serving niche that can be well managed and to seek out partnerships with others who are also, as the prophet Jeremiah directs “seeking the shalom of the city in which God has placed us”. Tuatapere’s support of the local market in their car park (on a Sunday) in order to build the capacity for the town to attract tourist dollars is a good example, as is the dream of Greytown Union Church to maximise its historic church’s position by creating a bookshop or art centre to offer Christian spirituality to those who browse in its streets in the weekends. But its often the small mission opportunities that are significant in bring-

ing God’s grace: the women in one of our tiniest churches, at Whangarei Heads, spend time each week on their knees in the playgrounds of the local school, working and engaging with the children to make their garden a source of beauty.

In small churches, history and tradition usually play a deep role. How good it is to treasure the wisdom and strength of the past generations. Many small congregations see themselves as standing on the shoulders of generations of faithful worshippers – and are conscious of the responsibility of this heritage. I love the little church at Matawhero in Gisborne, beautifully maintained not only as a tourist destination but also as a retreat centre. It seems unthinkable that what is the treasure of a past generation should now be dispersed.

However, some congregations, with much courage, have reframed their attitudes to perceive these assets as a legacy for future generations, but not in the place where the church has always stood. I was really impressed to see one small congregation in our presbytery (St James in Bulls) offer some of its underutilised financial assets to a city church struggling to find sufficient funds for a new building project.

While I will not deny that many small congregations are in decline, please do not think this is so for every congregation. With encouragement, many can enter into a process of change. Have you not been impressed by how the very old can teach us about change, simply because their lives are full of change? I listened with amazement to a small congregation in Drury (South Auckland) pick up my concept of seeing the church being Christ-centred and community-facing and consider how the local community’s needs might be an important part of their plans for a future. They recognised very clearly that the future was open for them, with God’s grace.

In my travels, I have used Jeremiah’s letter to the exiles as an underpinning text. Jeremiah (29:11): “‘For surely I know the plans I have for you,’ says the Lord, ‘plans for your shalom and not for your harm, to give you a future with hope.’” If we are going to go into a hope-filled future, we need all the assets we have to maximise our mission: of course large, growing congregations have a big role in this, but so do the small ones. Let’s not consign them to the past, but learn from them too, and go with them into the future.

Youth ministry in small congregations

Steve Millward, Presbyterian Youth Ministry

A church can be small, yet have a big impact. A church can be small in numbers, but big in vision and heart. The opposite can also be true. Our country, New Zealand, is a small country, and our culture and context can influence us to equate smallness with insignificance, smallness with the victim mentality, and smallness with ineffectiveness. However, we need to be more influenced by what the Bible¹ and life teaches us. Both teach us that process and growth are what are really important because most things start small (with the notable exception of the blue whale), so let's not make the excuse we can't do anything here because we are so small!

If we win the battle here, we will be encouraged to take the next step to resource a youth ministry or any other ministry that is started in the context of a small church. Our goal is to grow as big as we can in our given context because lost people matter to God.

Leadership is pivotal!

This will greatly determine our level of resourcing..

Look to Christ! This is bedrock for Christian leadership. Get a vision that has an overarching goal of leading people to Christ. Volunteers want to know who is leading and where are we going.

Limit what we do and do what we do well. This keeps us from burnout.

Law of motivation. Encourage, praise, explain regularly why we are doing what we are doing, and celebrate success.

Love winning. Jesus triumphed (Col 2:15) and Paul sought to win as many as he could to Christ. 1Cor 9:19-23. Winning helps with resourcing.

1 Jesus chose 12 disciples from a tiny nation to reach the world. David chose five small stones to slay Goliath. Jesus gave us the parable of the mustard seed. God asks, "who despises the day of small things?"

Exciting! Even funeral services were exciting with Jesus.²

Adults. One does not need to be a teenager to reach teenagers. If one did, then one would need to be an alcoholic to reach alcoholics, and on the list would go. It does help to know some of the struggles the person/s we are trying to reach, but that is not the bottom line: loving people and believing the Gospel entrusted to us is what ultimately counts. Brett Walker told a group of us that the new youth pastor they had employed was 50-something and he was brilliant. Brian Krum at Faithfest08 spoke of involving parents and grandparents who have a heart for Youth.

Ask. There are people who are just waiting to be asked to help. It is part of our natural Kiwi reticence to wait to be asked, so look for people to ask to be involved.

Desire. The people to involve are those with a desire to help; those with a desire to see people become followers of Christ. They are there in every church. Leighton Ford call's them the overwhelming minority.

Determination. Let's get that bulldog determination into our spirits that we can do this in Christ's power.

Excellence. Doing things well attracts people and resources.

Energy. We need the power of the Holy Spirit in all we do. Acts 1:8

Relationships. It takes time to build relationships where youth and their parents trust you and your leadership team. It is important to put some time into parents/caregivers of the youth you are reaching out to. They

2 Former youth co-ordinators that I know have told me a major reason youth couldn't connect with Sunday morning services was the lack of excitement. A young family who were non churched and began attending our Church for about a year before moving out of the area told me the Church I had encouraged them to go to, one in our denomination, simply had no life, so they were checking out other churches. This is intentionally in the footnotes so no one can read it and then stone me.

may become your next youth leader/helper.

Report back. To get resources and keep them flowing keep reporting back to the minister, the elders, and the movers and shakers in your church. This also keeps us accountable.

Safety. Police checks on all youth leaders are necessary. The temptation is to compromise on the standard of those involved in leadership, especially when the pool one is fishing from is small. Don't give in to it. If youth say they feel uncomfortable around one of your leaders, it needs to be dealt with.

Strategic. Some events punch above their weight, so put more energy and resources into them.

Simplify. Keep it simple because that keeps the wheels oiled.

Hope! Keep offering the hope we have in Christ, the hope of glory. It keeps the morale up.

Intergenerational. In Nehemiah they worked together in families. This is a key in a small church and is sound in any setting.

Partner with a bigger church. Partner with PYM youth co-ordinators. Partner with Connect (4-6 July) and the Faithfests (www.faithfest.org.nz) and be refreshed and inspired with new networks and ideas.

Passion. Get on fire for Jesus and light others up. Passion helps the cause no end.

Perseverance. May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance. What you are doing in Christ counts for all eternity and we will be rewarded.

Rural conference encourages churches

Chris Bedford, Transition Minister, Dargaville Methodist Church

Excellent organisation, simulating workshops and speakers, inspiring worship and beautiful countryside are a recipe for success. That's what 80 Kiwis and Australians got at the 7th Trans-Tasman Rural Church Conference in Marlborough and Nelson from 7 – 11 April. There was a complete mix of clergy and lay people. The 24 Australians from all parts of the Uniting Church in Australia provided great input from their practical church experience in situations quite different from those in New Zealand.

The Trans-Tasman Rural Church Conferences have been held every four years since 1984, alternately between New Zealand or Australian venues. The conference in 2012 will be in the Atherton Tablelands of Queensland.

These conferences provide an excellent opportunity for people interested in rural church life and witness to get together for mutual support and stimulation.

This year's conference was organised by an interdenominational team in Marlborough and Nelson. The conference theme was "Changing Seasons, Changing Times."

Instead of locating in one place, this imaginative group planned a moving conference that connected us with the wide variety of forms of agriculture in the region, and encouraged us to think theologically about the land the environment, and practically about issues of being the church in those communities.

The journey not only took in the sights and aspects of each region and its ministries but also allowed ample time for networking and individual discussion and exploration as we moved around by bus. Beginning in Marlborough on the East Coast, we looked at the unique agri-business ventures and ministry challenges. This was complemented by the cultural adventure of staying on the Omaka Marae on the outskirts of Blenheim. The two nights on the marae helped bind us together as a group. Then we moved through to the Nelson Lakes National Park and looked at conservation issues, high country farming and living and working in an isolated community. The last days were spent at the Teapot Valley Christian Camp on the Waimea Plains, where there were workshops/conversation groups and plenary sessions.

Tuesday was field trip day. One group went to Havelock and the surrounding Marlborough Sounds.

First stop was the Sanfords Mussel Processing Plant. Want a great job? Get on the mussel opening line, and for 2 hours at a time you'll be opening mussels at the rate of up to one every two seconds – up to 10,000 a day for the fast openers. The mussel plant provides employment for 200 people of all nationalities, many of whom live locally.

Local vicar Dale Pomeroy connects industry and mission in a beautiful setting. He and his parish team provide ministry to Christians of all denominations in a huge Marlborough Sounds area. Small wonder that former boat builder Dale takes his launch for much of his pastoral work.

It was interesting to learn of the move from services in churches to informal worship and fellowship gatherings in private homes. This is a move that is happening in many other rural communities as well.

Then on to visit the Harper farm at Mahau Sound, where the group learnt about organic cheese and honey production, and a high quality hospitality business. These amazing people spoke of sustainable life and faith in a remote area - and provided a high quality lunch.

Last stop was a visit to Nautilus Estate Winery, on the way home from Havelock. Grape growing and wine production is a huge industry in Marlborough and we learnt some of the challenges of producing and marketing high quality wine. The wine tasting at the end of the visit was a bonus!

At the end of that field trip Ian and Jan Tregove of Spalding, South Australia, spoke of what had particularly connected with them on the day's tour.

Jan said: "The thing I appreciated the most was hearing the passion that Dale Pomeroy has for ministry in such a disparate place. His passion for the people and place was inspiring and encouraging; it just overflowed from him in everything he said."

Ian added: "As a farmer, I particularly responded to the visit to the Harper's farm. It was wonderful to see three generations working together – a mother, sisters and a brother all with a shared vision and desire to make good things happen together. It's impressive to see them starting new enterprises to make the farm viable. They are a very special family."

Jan was also impressed at the passion our guide at the winery showed for his work, and the positive way he related to the people he worked with.

She returned to her earlier comment about Dale Pomeroy and said, "the way Dale brought his boat building skills to his ministry was great. He's bringing necessary changes for missional reasons. He's not frightened to get things done, but he seems to be keeping his people on board with the changes as he goes."

A second group went to the Awatere Valley and Flaxbourne district. They visited Burkart Fisheries at Ward, which exports live crayfish, supplied by a network of local fishermen. At Robrian Olive Estate the group learned about the planting of different olive varieties through pruning, harvesting, pressing, blending, bottling and marketing to a niche market as Flaxbourne Olive Oil. Sampling was enjoyed by all! Then it was on to NZ's only saltworks at Lake Grassmere, producing 6000 tonnes per day to supply the New Zealand market. At Trelawne Farm near Seddon, Guy and Jane Lissaman told of how economic necessity drove them to move from sheep farming to grape production. They now have 64 hectares of grapes and 90 hectares of crops such as lucerne and wheat. Final stop in this full-on day was the Awatere Joint Venture Church at Seddon where Anglicans, Presbyterians and other Christians work together for creative witness in this rural district. The variety of activities of this district and the challenges of being a positive witnessing church in this district were issues that particularly caught the attention of people on this field trip.

On Wednesday morning we travelled up the Wairau Valley with its wall-to-wall vineyards, and pondered the impact of mono-culture on this hitherto diverse farming district.

At the rugged inland district of St Arnaud, on the shores of Lake Rotoiti, we met a Department of Conservation ranger, a high country sheep farmer, and the leader of the local community church. They presented us with a colourful picture of a varied district where Christians seek to care for the land, and provide a practical, vigorous Christian witness to the local community.

By the end of the day we were settling in to the beautiful Teapot Valley Christian Camp near Brightwater for the keynote addresses and the variety of workshops that were offered by Conference participants.

Highlight of that time was the address by Mark Gibson, a Methodist minister from Christchurch. Mark spoke of

his faith journey to embracing “a green faith” that takes in God’s relationship not only with people but with the whole of creation.

He said that the ecological crisis we are experiencing is at root a spiritual issue. We have mistreated the creation God has given us, and in Christ we are called to be partners in re-creation.

He linked his concern to the story Jesus told of the wise and foolish builders, and suggested that the reference to the man who built on poor foundations is starkly relevant to us.

You can get a full copy of Mark’s paper to the Conference by emailing him at stmarks7@clear.net.nz.

Workshops occupied much of the time in the final day and a half, as people wrestled with such subjects as how to apply statistics information to the local church scene, the practical account of how three churches in the Mapua district came together, pastoral care in local shared ministry situations,

the theology of ecology, what means to be “church” in the rural community, evangelism in rural situations, and music in ministry in small rural churches.

Pockets of people engaged in vigorous discussion were always found after the workshops, evidence of the high level of engagement that took place.

A report of this conference would not be complete without reference to the wonderful stories told by Father Phil King Turner in the morning worship each day. Drawn from his personal life experience, Father Phil connected the day-to-day experience of rural community life to Christian discipleship. They were moving and memorable.

This conference scored very highly for both content and organisation. It provided both inspiration and information, and a great opportunity to connect with others involved in rural churches through Australia and New Zealand.

Remembering Frank Nichol

Maurice Andrew, Minister Emeritus, Dunedin

Frank Nichol died on 19 April, just three weeks after his 83rd birthday. He was surrounded by his family and his minister, Susan Jones. It was nearly 23 years after his stroke. (“Why NOT me?” he wrote.) During this time, he was supported by his beloved wife Beth, who herself died only seven months previously. Her valiant support was frequently necessary, and “who would true valour see” need only look to Beth.

Beginning in this way makes clear that in many ways, Frank’s life was divided into pre- and post-stroke periods. This is not to say, however, that the first period did not remain fundamental; nor is it to say that his friends and his former students forgot the significance of the pre-stroke period.

In my estimation, much of this significance was based in Frank’s concern for students for the ministry, a concern founded on his gratitude for his own time as a student both at universities and at the Theological Hall, Knox College. He himself was resident in Knox College for six

years and had to be directed by the Rev H J Ryburn to leave for his seventh year of study. So Frank knew about student life and aspirations.

One of the first things I remember about Frank when I began teaching at the Theological Hall in 1972 was that he had already spent much time trying to devise courses for students that both complied with Church regulations and also met some of the demands of students of the 1960s for changes. Frank had already had two terms as acting principal before he was appointed officially, beginning in 1972. When Frank wrote to me, he hoped that I would be able to accept him as principal. It had not occurred to me to do anything else, but although Frank did not have any doubt that he ought to be principal, he did want (justifiably) to be accepted by his colleagues. I can only remember one occasion when he gave me some sort of “direction”. It was in connection with a function that I did not want attend. In an oxymoronic mixture of reticence and definiteness, Frank said, “You’ll be going.” I went.

Frank had, however, already been Professor of Theology and Christian Ethics since 1963 – hence the reference to the ‘60s students. Frank was going through his own turmoil. I was not at the Hall myself then, but I have the impression that, although he was not exactly a Barthian, his theology was aligned in that direction. Now, however, he was not so sure, and at a time when he was supposed to be giving lectures in a new position. He was stimulated by some of the theological currents of the time and was keen to discuss them with both staff and students, but often did not think it appropriate to give formal lectures. Some of the students found this frustrating.

Ironically, some of the students themselves wanted fewer formal lectures and more seminars with papers and discussion, with credit being given for assignments. When they were given opportunity to make more contributions themselves, however, some found it was only more work, and that they did not have time for other things they wanted to do. So it was not an easy time for Frank to begin and not easy to carry on through the ‘60s with all its sociological as well as theological changes – to say nothing of having teenage children at home.

None of this means, however, that Frank lost his commitment to the Church and its ministry, nor to all the students, whatever their theological alignment. I have a clear memory of a time when a group of conservative students were particularly unhappy (and unhappy rather than rebellious). Frank gave a lot of time to a series of meetings with them where we were open with each other and learned to know each other much better. I at least grew from them and I think some of the students did too. Frank also freed the timetable to give the students a community hour on Wednesday mornings, and this gradually grew until Wednesday mornings came to be almost entirely taken up with a weekly communion service and with pastoral groups that formed the basis for “life in community” that became an integral part of formation for ministry.

Frank was always rightly distressed when people implied that he was only an academic. He once said to me very evangelically, “I love the Bible and the Church” – the two were very much the chicken and the egg for him. He pointed out too that when the same criticism was made of the Hall that when ministers took on other employment, it was usually to the “helping professions”, and not to academic ones. Not that he wanted people to leave the parish ministry. He always encouraged people to go into it; indeed so much so that some good ministers had to remind him that there was also a valid ministry in chaplaincies and other spheres.

Frank was a committed member of presbytery, including being moderator at a time when he had plenty else to do. As principal, he served continuously on the Assembly’s Theological Hall Committee for 15 years. It was sometimes hard going and I realise now that I did not give him as much support in that work as I could have – we were rather inclined to leave it to him. He had his stroke while at a meeting of one of the THC’s sub-committees. (He went to all of these sub-committees too.)

Frank was also a committed member of Opoho Presbyterian Church. He was not a member of session, but spoke at congregational meetings and was concerned about what the parish is and does. Just two weeks before his death, he voluntarily wrote an editorial for the newsletter. He led the first service after a vacancy with a combination of affirmation for the foundation laid in the past with challenge for the future. At one of his last services, with the wounded theologian in front of the children, he wrestled with them to see that they could minister to his disability. Frank also put in many years of work into the Church Union Committee, into a board for ecumenical theological study, and into discussions with the Roman Catholic Church. He kept up warm and creative relations with a number of rectors of Holy Cross College and with teachers of theology there. He supervised the post-graduate study of at least two prominent priests of the Roman Catholic Church – as well as many others. He thoroughly enjoyed social gatherings with the staff and students of both colleges. He took part in the many collegial and friendly conversations we had in the Senior Common Room.

None of this meant, however, that Frank saw the Church as isolated from society. We were not preparing for our ministry but the Church’s ministry where we cannot bypass the cross.

At one inaugural lecture, he stated that he would not want to see the Theological Hall called a seminary if that term implied withdrawal from the world. He saw the Church as playing a part in a drama with all sorts of other “characters” of society in both positive and negative aspects - “faith is involved with the muck of the world as well as its glory”, “armed with rough towels for invigoration” – these are characteristic phrases.

Practically everything Frank wrote was directed towards church members both as individuals and in society. It was not surprising that his book on prayer was mainly about intercession, so much so that some readers regretted that there was not more on other aspects of prayer. Frank put a lot of effort into preparing a do-it-yourself theology for the students: selections from theologians of different

points of view with encouragement to make your own additions. Students found this both stimulating and demanding. Some never quite warmed to Frank, partly because he did want you to think, but possibly too because he could be rather disdainful of some attitudes and views that he considered impossible; in my experience, however, this lessened as he grew older.

The students could also find that Frank was good fun: his rhymed songs about every exit student at the final social function became an institution. Some of them were a bit close to the bone, but they were missed after he retired. (I was not nearly so much fun.) There were all sorts of sides to Frank as well as the minister and professor. He was able to service his fine old Daimler car himself; he liked messing around with cameras and electronic gear; he bred budgies! He had a sharp appreciation of music. He led a series of Holy Week services including Britten's "Variations on a Theme by Frank Bridge"; they had a mordant quality, fitting the time exactly.

Appreciation of music was something Frank shared with Beth, including most other things since the time they were students. Beth was also librarian at the Hewitson Library. They both gave academic and pastoral help to Maori and Pacific Island students; it was reciprocated by the attentiveness these students paid Frank after his stroke. A characteristic feature of Frank and Beth together was their friendships, not only with people all over the world, but also with former students and their spouses. Even if they did not see them often, these people were so alive in their memories that I came to think that I knew them all. They did not continually bore you with it, but they were intensely proud of their children (even Chris!) and their grandchildren.

Their home in Signal Hill Road was the scene of many recreating social occasions. Gisela and I sometimes spent Friday evenings with them (why was this the most relaxed time?). Sometimes Frank invited a group of diverse students to a discussion in his home – perhaps with a visiting lecturer. There were occasions when almost everyone was in Frank and Beth's magnificent front room. The large table would be covered with different kinds of dessert that were gratefully consumed.

Much of this necessarily had to change post-stroke. What did not stop was Frank thinking. Most of his writing continued to be for the Church and individuals, though he made a notable contribution to a festschrift, and I would not be surprised if material is found among his papers that he did not think worthy of publication. As time went on, Frank became more and more convinced of the validity

of the Church's traditional language. He admitted that it was unfashionable, but it became real again to him. God's love was real to him as the person he was and others are.

Frank spoke ever more of the goodness of God: "God's overflowing goodness towards us is the most important thing about us." This also expressed itself as the God of fellowship. Further, the God of fellowship continues to remember us after we cease to be. Death is the end of anything like our earthly and temporal existence, but "God continues to remember us, and his memory is not like ours, weak, fragmentary and muddled. God's memory really does 'keep us alive' before him and he continues to love and enjoy us into all eternity." Eternal life is remaining in God's memory.

This conviction was based in another: that to know God is to be known by God, to be drawn into relation with God. For Frank, this meant that theology is more like a hymn, a prayer, even a love song than a sober description. This means that the most central and characteristic activity of the Church is her worship, addressed to God.

*E Frank, haere
Haere ki te wa kainga
Haere ki te kainga tuturu o to tatou ariki,
o Ihu Karaiti
Haere, haere, haere*

Local Ordained Ministry (LOM) Assessment Times

At a recent meeting of the National Assessment Workgroup (NAW) it was decided that LOM applications will be processed during two weeks every year:

- The last week in February
- The first week in August

LOM assessments are conducted by Presbyteries together with members of the NAW. Normally two members of NAW join the Presbytery members conducting the assessment.

NAW needs to be advised of pending LOM applications at least eight weeks prior to the week in which a Presbytery would like the assessment to take place.

The reason for designating the weeks in February and August for LOM assessments is due to the volume of requests that NAW receives for LOM assessments.

The steps that Presbyteries ought to follow to prepare for the LOM process can be found on the Presbyterian website. Just follow the link for Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership.

For further enquiries, please contact Rev Geoff New (co-convenor NAW) geoffnew@xtra.co.nz

Money and politics

I have just been reading an article written by the mayor of New York, Michael Bloomberg. He was responding to the pressure he had been under to offer himself as an independent candidate for this year's presidential elections. His comments could easily be adapted to fit our own New Zealand context.

“Watching the 2008 presidential campaign, you sometimes get the feeling that the candidates — smart, all of them — must know better. They must know we can't fix our economy and create jobs by isolating America from global trade. They must know that we can't fix our immigration problems with border security alone. They must know that we can't fix our schools without holding teachers, principals and parents accountable for results. They must know that fighting global warming is not a costless challenge. And they must know that we can't keep illegal guns out of the hands of criminals unless we crack down on the black market for them. The vast majority of Americans know that all of this is true, but — politics being what it is — the candidates seem afraid to level with them.”

Though there are some strong and historically important parallels between the way that many modern democracies and the Presbyterian Church are organised, we thankfully do not have to endure lengthy and costly campaigns by those who would seek to fulfil some national role. However, I do wonder whether plain talking, “levelling with our congregations”, is as difficult for us as it is for our politicians.

A few days ago I was out in the storeroom and found that someone has nicely stacked all our church yearbooks going back 100 years. I find that in 1907, there were 71,000 adults attending worship and in 1957 there were 110,000 adults turning up on a Sunday. Our latest statistics tell me that the number has now fallen just short of 30,000.

Some of the responses I have experienced around our Church in talking about these kinds of figures seems to me to be similar to the way we deal with the shock of significant loss — anger, denial, resignation. What is more complicated for me, and perhaps more troubling is the fact that while there is a decay in church influence and support, congregational wealth is accumulating at unprecedented speed. I wonder if others join me in considering that these realities have some profound association with our faithfulness and beliefs. I am concerned that trying to formulate an effective national response to these challenges may create more divisiveness for a church that

has already been pretty bruised and battered over the last few years.

The basic plan that I, along with the Council and some of our national staff, have been working on could not be simpler: the release of assets to support those congregations committed to a plan for growth. The proposed means for doing this will focus on asking that a very small proportion of our congregations' accumulated wealth be released to support those congregations who have developed a commitment and plan or project for outreach and growth. By focusing on the values of partnership, accountability and transparency, we may be able to overcome the fear and anxiety that can accompany such processes. Or maybe not.

I know what it's like to depend on investment income return to support a stipend, and how vulnerable congregations in this situation are to fluctuations in interest rates and investment returns. A long time ago, before modern banking systems, such income was described as “usury” and was once considered a heresy by the church and still (theoretically) forbidden in Islam.

I am sure that there is a great body of work written on the theology and ethics of our contemporary economic systems, but judging from recent stories of mortgage sales and the like, the benefits investors enjoy from high interest returns may not be entirely without its victims. Whatever the arguments are here, one thing we do every Sunday is stand to offer ourselves and all we have to God. The confession that Jesus alone is Lord is the affirmation that sets all other things in their right order and priority, including the parochialism that poses a threat to our commitment to unity as Christians and as a church.

The challenge for us collectively to provide the resources that each congregation needs to grow as a worshipping community will take time but is possible. In meeting this challenge our church will be transformed.

Thanks again for your support

