

CANDOUR

News and Views for Ministers

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Doing ministry differently

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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.

Creating different systems

Amanda Wells

No one disputes that the one person/one parish model is becoming less prevalent. Whether for reasons of finance, career patterns or the development of teams, churches are finding other solutions for ministry.

In this issue of *Candour*, contributors explore different models and provide some fascinating stories of what's happening in their context. Presbyterianism has always been about the priesthood of all believers, but many of our parishes are starting to live this out more literally. Perhaps the greatest obstacle is transfiguring the expectations people have of a minister into an acceptance of a different and less-simple system.

The problem with systems is that as soon as one becomes entrenched, it becomes institutional. Often I want to improve tactics or techniques to find the best way of doing something and consequently develop that "perfect system". But I'm always relearning that any system you consider perfect is by definition not — because it can't react to new information or circumstances. To systematise rules and procedures brings a concomitant inflexibility and inability to handle exceptions or left-field solutions. We've considered the sole minister/parish fit an ideal for a long time; maybe it's time to re-orientate that perspective.

This is the last issue of *Candour* for 2007. The next issue is February 2008, for which the deadline will be 29 January 2008 and the theme will be **What does it mean to be Presbyterian?** What does our identity as Presbyterian mean in our context? What's the theological background to this and how are we working that out in practice? I would love to get some contributions before Christmas.

Last month, the editorial committee had a planning teleconference for 2008. We've come up with a list of themes that seem both diverse and important, and that should generate some interesting articles and debate. The list below is in no particular order yet — if you're keen on writing about a particular topic, please drop me an email at candour@presbyterian.org.nz

Children's ministry

What does it mean to be Kids Friendly — for the congregation, for the minister? What's our theology of children's ministry? How do you find a children's worker? How do you train a children's worker?

Forming partnerships

How can you partner with other churches in your community or community groups? What tensions/benefits come from this? How do you maintain the balance between partnership and maintaining identity and distinctiveness? Look at the tension between getting grants and the strings that can come with them. What about partnering with other Presbyterian churches in other areas/similar contexts?

Pathways to God?

How do you invite people into faith; what works for different people? What appeals to some people more than others etc? Explore how things like Mainly Music or Alpha can connect people into church — how successful are they over the long term?

Prayer and spiritual disciplines

Rediscovering the spiritual disciplines in our context. Is there a hunger for discipline versus the total freedom promoted by contemporary society? Explore the theology of prayer.

Growing leaders

Mentoring and building supportive relationships for ministers; professional development; the role of lay people and clergy; youth ministry as a pathway into leadership. What other pathways are there?

What would a Christian society look like?

Christianity and politics — in an election year. What kind of community do we want? What's our vision for society?

Worship

How do we worship together? What is our theology of worship? Is worship for us or for those not here? Explore trends in music.

Small congregations

Are they a problem? Or an opportunity? What unique issues do they face? New expressions of being church; being missional as a small congregation.

GA08

Either pre- or post- depending on how issues progress.

The Greymouth Model

Lyn Heine, part-time lay preacher at Grey District Uniting Parish, West Coast

Greymouth District Uniting Parish is one of the longest established Uniting parishes in the country. We celebrated 35 years of being a Uniting parish in 2005. From a parish that used to have two full-time ordained ministers and some seven preaching places as well as local rest homes and hospital chapel we, like many others, were faced with the realities of a changing worshipping world. We had had a system of worship teams to assist with carrying out services in all of the preaching places since the 1980s, when Graham Hawkey had encouraged and assisted us to do this. So we have had people willing and familiar with either sharing or leading worship for a long time. Our smaller preaching places were good practice grounds for this and for gaining confidence in sharing and trying out tasks and skills. We have retained worship places at Rotomanu and Taramakau as well as our urban settings at our base church, rest homes and the hospital chapel.

In 2000 we had a full-time ordained minister who was due to retire partway through his time with us. The challenge and opportunity we were presented with was whether we wanted to use this “spare” time to try something different by way of a ministry model. We looked at various options in a series of congregational meetings, ranging from calling a new ordained person and staying with the status quo, to having an appointed lay minister, to operating a “modular” ministry model calling on ordained ministers to spend a certain amount of each year with us. What we ended up trialling and have stayed with has been a team of two lay ministers with two visiting or “modular” ministers coming for about four weeks each during the year. We continued to budget for a fulltime stipend that is used to pay the lay ministers plus the costs associated with the “modular” ministers by way of service allowance, transport and accommodation. For a good part of this time we have had our accommodation kindly gifted to us.

The first two lay ministers were Chris Auchinvole and Thelma Efford. Chris relinquished the position in 2005 when he was elected to Parliament and I have been the second person since then. Both Chris and I took the appointments combined with other paid work – Chris as

an export businessman and me as an occupational therapist/workplace support person. For much of this time I have also been the parish council chairperson. Thelma has been lay minister with this as her only paid work. Both sharing with other paid work and concentrating just on church ministry work have brought their own challenges. Both have challenges of balance in life, and how to manage demands as well as do the job we have been called to.

The balancing of lay ministry with other paid employment for me has meant questioning. Am I doing justice to the positions? What is the call I have? How can I best use the skills and knowledge I have gained in my “previous” and “other” life, and how do I see and explain this whole working life as ministry when it isn’t just with the church/parish?

The immediate response was to share the load

Having the lay minister as a sole paid position has brought other challenges. The temptation is to see it as the position of

leadership and responsibility both by others and yourself. There is a natural desire by some within congregations to have someone who will “tell” them what is right and wrong and how things should be done and to rebuild the pedestal. Certainly in the early days of the trial, it was quite common to hear the issue raised at meetings of “when” we had an ordained minister here again. However, it has been some time now since I have heard it mentioned or raised as a concern.

In saying this, we have nothing but appreciation for the ordained modular ministers who come and spend time with us. The usual way it happens is that a visiting minister comes for some four weeks, sharing and evaluating our parish life, taking services and study groups. Often they are ministers who have either served on the Coast or got some affinity for the region and ourselves. Most have been retired. They have greatly enriched us with both teaching and encouragement. Usually too, they have given us a report of how they have found us, which has been useful in planning. One of the risks I see in moving to a lay model is that of “dumbing down” our practice of faith and having these visiting trained ministers has countered that. Also I think that having that awareness

does encourage me to seek out ideas and knowledge to share with others.

Also, too, in the early stages of “doing” this we received good support from Robyn Brown and Graeme Nicholas as national church encouragers/enablers. They would visit and take practical workshops as well as help us ask the questions that were needed to ensure we thought things through.

The overall effect it had on the parish and congregations was interesting. The immediate response was to share the load. The pedestal was gone and the ministry of all believers looked like a real goer. And even now, some seven years down the track, I think that there is still a strong sense of sharing the responsibility for what our parish is in the community. Because the lay ministry position hasn't been solely church, I think that has added value to other people's “vocations” and positions within the community. We take pains to commend the work done as part of community and other groups as being the face of the parish and God's work. We have long held to the thought that we are as salt and yeast among the world.

This attitude of coming on board has been helped along because of the moves we have made. Since the mid-nineties we, as a parish, have moved buildings twice. The first time was out of our old church, complete with steeple and organ and stained glass windows, because of earthquake risk. We moved into what had been a sheltered workshop with plans to expand the auditorium part of it and incorporate some of the old fixtures. This work was slow to progress and when the costing came in it was greeted with some horror. At just this time the Masonic Lodge came up for sale, as they were moving out to Shantytown. And that is where we are now. A good useful complex with plenty of car parking. So I think that this has contributed to the courage to try different things and to be part of the whole and know that what is essential to the faith journey can be taken with us.

Resilience and practicality are West Coast features of life and these have stood us in good stead. We are ready to give things a go and put some effort into it. We still grumble and moan, we still face growing older with some trepidation, we still complain about what the young people do and how they do it, but along with that we know that if we are to go forward as people who follow the way of Jesus, then we do actually have to work at doing it together. And as diverse and different as we are, this is what we are doing.

Yearbook 2008

Last month, each presbytery clerk received pages to correct for next year's yearbook.

The final deadline to submit any amendments and corrections to Assembly Office is 5 December.



**Dr David G. Benner
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Multiple congregations for reaching out

Garry Marquand, *Discovery Christian Centre, Hamilton*

Caught in the middle of a clash between ecclesiology and missiology! A civil war perhaps, marked by persevering offence and wide-ranging positions of defence - and some dust. We don't know what the top brass will think but this is a report from the field.

Let me name a presupposition first: that we want to see the Church grow. And in particular, that aspect of growth of new individuals and families becoming part of God's people across the congregations of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. We want to see people overtaken by the grace of God, people caught up in the wonder of worship, people connected in communities of faith, and people compelled to serve needy people.

If that objective is part of our missiological calling, then how do we go about it in New Zealand today? Well, our ecclesiology offers us some "received wisdom" here. Key features of this include, in brief form, the following.

1. That the provision of church buildings is essential to the task, and especially spaces/sanctuaries for Sunday worship. We believe them to be both convenient and conducive for the witness and work of the church, and we point to the testimony of history in this regard. Furthermore, having invested considerable resources in them, we feel bound to use them, and into them we long to get more people.

Now good theology would probably contest the idea that buildings are essential, but popular theology rarely does.

2. That Sunday worship is the central act of the local congregation. Into this event each week we invest the largest percentage of the resources of the church: in the time, energy and gifts of key leaders, and likewise in the involvement of many others. For many, the ultimate measure of success in mission would be the presence of new people in worship on Sunday morning.

There is no shortage of theology here, but I wonder whether much of it finds its roots in Christendom rather than in Christ and his kingdom

3. We also believe, at least ideally, that God's people should all meet together in worship on Sunday. Having everyone together not only fills up the building,

but more importantly witnesses to the inclusiveness of the Gospel and the unity of the church. Some, in order to move forward, have moved to two services on Sunday to keep the peace, but the "dividing of the body" has been the felt cost.

The sense of necessity in all meeting together has then forced us in culture and content to provide a blended, one-size-fits-all worship experience.

4. Further, that the conduct of worship on Sunday should be well led. Whether it be in terms of theologically well-trained clergy or in the excellence of musicians the drama of worship and the act of preaching should be of high quality. In the right sense, we pride ourselves on this in the Presbyterian Church.
5. That in understanding mission, local congregations are called to reach and serve their "local community". This is almost always understood in geographical terms. The helpfulness of this mindset is greater in towns and rural areas, but rests very uneasily in the urban context.
6. Finally, that any expansion of the church is best expressed in the planting of parishes. To each we then give independence; in governance (session and managers), in the responsibility of paying their own way, and in the work of ministry and mission (self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating). The Church has a long history in this approach.

This "received wisdom" of how the Church should go about the task of mission is widely held and often unquestioned. However, I have an increasing sense that this "wisdom" is actually hindering the work of mission in the realities of today's New Zealand. In an increasingly diverse culture, among increasingly diverse peoples, I sense that effective mission will require us to provide a different approach; one of multi-congregations. Briefly stated, this means the provision of one parish infrastructure within which will be found multiple congregations for multiple peoples, meeting one either one site or many sites.

The following describes our field experience of establishing and fostering this approach, and some reflections on the journey thus far.

Fairfield Presbyterian Parish in Hamilton, within which I serve, currently has six congregations that we refer to as faith communities:

Sunday @ Nine

A faith community that meets on Sunday morning with a service that is quieter, more contemplative and includes more traditional elements. (Note: we do not have a traditional service – our aim is for all services to be contemporary but culturally suited to different types of people.) All our Faith Communities are defined not just by the gathering for worship but also by their associated ministries.

10.30 on Sunday

Also meeting on Sunday morning with culture and content more suited to younger adults and families etc. Mostly a baby-boomer culture, but changing.

Connect

Catering for those of the 18-30s age culture, meeting twice monthly on Sunday evening.

Cambodian Christian Fellowship

An ethnic faith community, using both Khmer and English language, with their key meeting on Saturday evenings.

Desert Spring Ministries

Growing out of our Trust's ministry with needy urban Maori, with key meetings on Saturdays and at various times in their community garden.

These five are part of Discovery Christian Centre – one of the two churches of the Parish.

Gordonton Presbyterian Church

A rural based faith community outside Hamilton City, with their own building and a range of ministries.

This multiple congregational approach, explored for some years and formally adopted by everyone two and half years ago, was the outcome of considerable reflection about mission and about the reality of increasing diversity in Hamilton City. This refers to diversity in Kiwi culture, in different generations, in ethnicity, and in socio-economic divisions. Our choice was to sacrifice aspects of our ecclesiology; an ecclesiology that we felt

came out of a predominantly monocultural past, in the hope for greater effectiveness in mission.

It was also an outcome of the failure, despite considerable efforts over the years, to create a satisfactory one-size-fits-all worship service. The experiments and the blending of elements never went anywhere near enough providing a comfortable

place for the range of people with whom we were connecting. And even in our combining of our two Sunday services (of our more “churched”

people) over January, there was considerable non-attendance for church-culture/worship-style reasons.

Currently five of these six Faith Communities meet in church buildings, although the Cambodian group met for many years in homes. Church buildings are convenient, but we make no requirement that they be used. Only four of the Faith Communities use the traditional worship space. We have therefore not only freed ourselves from the pressure for every Faith Community to use the worship space, but also from the negative dynamics of a comparatively small number of people in a cavernous space. Allowing for the possibility that a functioning Faith Community can be quite small is freeing us to reach additional types of people and to meet in whatever place is appropriate to them.

We have purposefully called them Faith Communities, avoiding the term “congregation”, because of its association with gathered Sunday worship. This broadens our conception of what a Faith Community may be, and allows for the possibility of a faith community being defined according to some other key gathering. For example, those participating in the Desert Spring Ministries Faith Community maintain that much Kingdom ministry and growth happens in the garden.

Clearly we have also modified our expectations concerning who leads in worship, involving increased numbers of people in ministry and accepting thereby a lower standard of theological training and ministry expertise. On the other hand, we have experienced an increased variety in style and emphasis that has been really appreciated. In our spectrum of people, we have some who attend more than one Faith Community, others who do not attend worship on Sunday at all, and some who question whether worship should even be the central act of the local congregation.

The leadership of the parish comprises the session, made up of elders and key leaders of each Faith Community, and session only handles matters of governance – mission policy and directions. There is also a parish property and finance team. Practical day-to-day decision-making is in the hands of the ministry team for each Faith Community, and the key lay leader(s). This has worked well for us in not only increasing the number of people in significant leadership roles, but of allowing them to be more focused in their ministry and to do this without the burden of higher level governance issues.

These ministry teams are responsible for creating and overseeing worship services and other ministries culturally appropriate for the people group(s) they are seeking to reach. Only two of our Faith Communities define the people they are reaching in terms of a geographical context: Desert Spring Ministries in a particular suburb of Hamilton City, and Gordonton Presbyterian Church. The other Faith Communities are working within the context of relational networks within Hamilton City as a whole.

Financially there is considerable variation. Two Faith Communities are financially self-supporting and independent of the parish in that regard. Three contribute to parish finances to fund parish responsibilities (for example, stipend and Assembly Assessment), but operate independently with regard to expenses for their particular Faith Community. Two Faith Communities are currently funding the “Connect” initiative.

The structure also allows for the creation of new Faith Communities if and when the need arises, or the closing of any, without the complications, challenges and heart-ache of establishing or dis-establishing autonomous parishes. Interestingly, several of us have considered whether there might be some way of creating a Faith Community for those people who are seriously disillusioned with the whole culture and focus, worship and church-centred pre-occupation of the institutional Church.

Having journeyed thus far, how effective has the multi-congregational approach been in missional terms? It would be good to report that we have seen considerable growth in new individuals and families becoming part of God’s people. The reality is somewhat different, and summarised in saying that we are holding our own in four of our Faith Communities and growing slowly in two of them. And in all of them, we are still exploring what it means for each to be mission centred and engaging of the people we are trying to reach. We have only begun the journey and there is a long way to go, but we are encouraged.

Thus we report from the field where ecclesiology and missiology are in tension together. The multi-congregational approach is helping us make progress, and we sense that its principles and possibilities could be applied in many other contexts.

The Massey model: Six part-time staff

Stuart Lange, Massey-Riverhead Presbyterian, Auckland

Since February 1992, the Massey-Riverhead parish on the North-Western edge of Auckland has chosen to function without a full-time ordained minister. Instead, there are six part-time staff, only one of them an “ordained minister”.

The way this model developed has nothing whatsoever to do with money. It came about because back in 1991 the previous parish minister moved on and the parish invited a new member of the congregation (me) to be their minister. I declined, as only the previous year I had come up to Auckland to take up a full-time position as a lecturer at BCNZ. In the ensuing discussions there then emerged the concept of a multiple team of part-time ministry staff, with me reducing my time at BCNZ and working part-

time as the ordained component within a team ministry. I would be about one third time at the church and the rest of the time I would still be working in theological education. This whole proposal carried obvious risks of overload, from my point of view, but I felt a sense of call I could not ignore and which has sustained me in the years since.

No one spends much time thinking or talking about it, but there was also - in some of us at least - a sense of being willing to experiment with a model of ministry that was less clerical and conventional, and more flexible, and more reflective of the plurality of ministries and giftings that are in the New Testament. Neither the elders nor I were very interested in distinctions between “clergy” and

“laity”, and in the parish we never use that sort of language.

At first, the team ministry only had three members: me, plus a pastoral assistant at Massey (the larger and suburban church) and another at Riverhead (the smaller, semi-rural church). As the parish has grown in size and vigour, its staff team has multiplied: apart from me, there is a Massey pastoral assistant, a children and families worker, a youth worker, a church administrator, and a Riverhead pastor.

In some ways, there is nothing novel about the Massey model of ministry: many larger churches have such multiple staff teams. But I think what is unique about our model is that the only “ordained” member of the team has always been part-time, never employed on more than a 40 percent basis.

Over the years, and especially in the past few years, the Massey congregation has experienced fairly strong numerical growth. The church sees many new people arriving and quite a few coming to faith, has a good age profile, has become very multicultural, has developed some great programmes (both internal and outreach), has extended and/or renovated all its facilities and has secured an adjacent 10 acres. All this reflects much more important dynamics than the relatively unimportant details of how we organise our ministry. Such positive dynamics include a warmly welcoming atmosphere, a clear evangelical ethos, and a wealth of very committed and gifted people in the congregation. Maybe the church would have grown even more with a different model of ministry.

Within the team, my own role has been (1) overall church and team leadership (2) oversight of Sunday worship (3) some pastoral work, as I am able. On a day-to-day basis, we work very collegially, both within the staff team and with the elders and other leaders. I have no choice but to function in a co-operative way: as a part-timer, I absolutely depend on others to do many things I do not have the time to do myself. I try to visit at least some of the newcomers, and to do most of the crisis pastoral visits, but for regular pastoral care of the congregation I have to rely on other staff, the home groups, the elders and a pastoral care team. While I do the lion’s share of the preaching (I preach at Massey two to three times a month), two

others in the team also regularly preach, and the parish has a pool of another half dozen preachers. New arrivals in the church often do not know all the staff are part-timers. But because there are plenty of people involved in ministry, they soon realise that does not matter.

As in any long-term ministry, the role of the team leader has helped give the church a continuity of emphasis and direction. Every few years or so, staff members come and go - though one other member of the team has been with us for over 10 years. The capacity to add extra staff members as we require has given a useful flexibility to the church in its mission, and helps keep us all fresh in our perspective. Every new staff member brings his or her own giftedness into the mix. They also often bring a spouse and family into the church as well. I have a particularly capable and energetic off-sider at Massey. As we look ahead, and as we consider some developing needs and mission opportunities, we can readily see other staff members being added to the team to meet new needs.

My experience of team ministry over the years has confirmed that excellent trust and rapport among staff mem-

bers is crucial. One cannot be too careful in assessing that *before* someone is appointed. If in doubt, do not appoint. Once on staff, team members have to be loyal to one another, and

open, and to discuss any difficulties with each other rather than with others. I have found a happy staff team a great blessing.

There have to be good channels of communication, both formal and informal. The weekly team meeting is indispensable. Team members also have to be able to communicate with each other at other times, whenever necessary. Our functioning as a team was enhanced when we built a large open plan office. We also had to remind team members to take their phone and leave the room when they wanted to have a prolonged phone conversation.

In a team situation, clear delineation of responsibilities is important. Job descriptions are important. Problems can occur when staff members are vague about their own responsibilities, but take too much interest in their colleagues’ responsibilities.

In the first few years of our team ministry model, I sometimes sensed some minor strains, mainly I think because

I have no choice but to function in a co-operative way

some people in the congregation were probably still operating with expectations reflecting a conventional pattern of full-time ministry. Some not in leadership may also have wrongly assumed it was all just a temporary arrangement based on expediency. It probably helped when, back in the mid-90s, we asked the presbytery to change the basis of my role from an “appointment” to a “call”: we realised it was a bit destabilising that the eldership had to review the model every two years.

For me, living with two ministries (the parish plus BCNZ teaching) has not always been easy. Direct clashes - in things such as funerals - have never been much of a problem: you can always ask for a funeral to be on a certain

day, or can have a colleague conduct it. The issue has more been the combined pressures - especially time pressures - of two sets of responsibilities. But, by the grace of God, and with various careful strategies, it has been possible to sustain it. Each ministry also stimulates the other: I am aware of hundreds of people in church history who have combined a preaching/pastoral ministry with a teaching/training ministry.

Overall the Massey model has worked very well, especially in more recent years. The advantages have far outweighed the disadvantages, and it has been a great privilege to be involved in it.

Local Shared Ministry at the grassroots

Chris Bedford, transition minister at Ellesmere Cooperating, Christchurch

Local Ministry Teams, or Local Shared Ministry as it is known in the Methodist and Anglican churches, is a concept that has been with the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand for several years. Although there is information about it on the School of Ministry’s website (www.schoolofministry.ac.nz/LMHomepage.htm), I haven’t seen any writing about it in Presbyterian publications. Maybe I look in the wrong places.

“Local Shared Ministry” is the term agreed on by the Uniting Congregations of Aotearoa New Zealand for this form of ministry. It is used in the rest of this article in preference to the rather less defined term “Local Ministry Team” as found in Presbyterian regulations.

Local Shared Ministry is a model with considerable future possibilities, and they are worth considering. Sadly, the Presbyterian Church hasn’t, to my knowledge, invested in training ministry enablers, and I have been fortunate to have been involved in excellent Methodist training events in 2006 and 2007.

It’s a growing form of ministry especially in smaller rural churches, many of which are co-operating ventures. Anglican churches have put significant energy into developing this form of ministry.

Local Shared Ministry was first developed for Presbyterian and Methodist churches in New Zealand in the Bay

of Islands Co-operating Parish, Northland, about 10 years ago. Finding themselves with insufficient ongoing income to pay a minister, they made a strategic decision to invest ministry in the local people. They understood that they had within themselves all the gifts and abilities to be the people of God in their area. Later they decided to sell their manse, and develop some units on their church property for the use of needy others. Adventurous and innovative.

Local Shared Ministry may be regarded as second-grade ministry because we persist in our belief, maybe unspoken but real nonetheless, that anything other than a parish with a fully stipended minister of word and sacrament is less than the ideal. The idea for Local Shared Ministry usually occurs when a parish realises that it doesn’t have the financial resources to support a clergyperson, or when it cannot find a minister. But there is more to it than saying “oh dear, we can’t afford a minister. Let’s take on Local Shared Ministry” and expecting that to be operating within a couple of months.

For Local Shared Ministry to be effective, the congregation must accept that ministry is the role and work of everyone, not of one special person. Some congregations leap at the concept with enthusiasm and passion; others may have initial difficulty accepting local people as ministers.

Key features of Local Shared Ministry

Ministry teams are involved in the whole range of parish ministry, each team member serving in areas appropriate to their ministry gifts and abilities. Team members are chosen after a prayerful discernment process, when local members are invited to indicate the names of suitable people in a secret “prayer ballot”. The team members are commissioned at a special service. If the parish includes an Anglican component, as a number of co-operating parishes do, certain people will be ordained to take communion and baptism.

The ministry team is appointed for a specific term – usually three years - and then the discernment process is undertaken again. The ministry team is supported by an enabler, usually a clergy person who is contracted to that parish for a specific number of hours. Their job is that of a trainer and coach. They may or may not take a turn on the preaching roster. The parish is fully represented at regional and national church courts.

The strength of Local Shared Ministry is that the witness, worship and ministry of the parish is the expression of a whole lot of people. Many more people in the congregation discover their ministry gifts. It is indigenous to the local community. It is ministry by the people committed to long-term life in the local community. Especially in rural areas, it takes a long time for people to become regarded as “locals”. Clergy never achieve this. They are always seen as transients, who come for a while and then move on. Members of a Local Shared Ministry team are already locals, known and accepted for who they are.

A parish where Local Shared Ministry is working well is Hinds Co-operating Parish, in South Canterbury, which has Anglican and Presbyterian components.

A key resource for Local Shared Ministry is Roland Allen’s book *Missionary Methods - St Paul’s or Ours*. First published in 1912, and based on his experience in northern China, Allen argued that churches should be self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-governing, and adapted to local conditions. He saw importance of ministry as the responsibility of the local community.

There are five keys to the development of effective Local Shared Ministry

1. Preparation of the congregation. There must be teaching about the various aspects the church’s ministry and how everyone has a part to play. Locals must be helped to understand that Local Shared Ministry is not second-class ministry. The better the preparation the better this

ministry will work. Experienced leaders from the presbytery or synod must take this work seriously and do it thoroughly.

2. Care in the forming of the ministry team. There needs to be agreement as to what the components of the ministry team will be, and provision for training of those chosen. People need to be given the opportunity to indicate by way of the “prayer ballot” those who they think will be suitable for various aspects of the ministry. In a prayerful service of discernment, those names are privately written on pieces of paper, and an agreed team of two or three people (usually including an enabler or someone deputed by presbytery or synod work to with the congregation) consider the names and bring a recommendation to the parish council.

The more public ministry that team members can undertake, such as taking funerals, the more it will be accepted in the wider community.

3. A well-trained ministry enabler. They must understand the concept well, and gain the trust of the parish as a whole and the ministry team in particular. The key task of the enabler is teaching and training the local ministry team. They also help resolve any difficulties that may arise in team relationships, and the relationship between the ministry team and the parish council. They must constantly bring the parish back to their mission and help them reflect on how they are meeting it.

4. The closer the working relationship between the ministry team and the parish council, the better. Parish council makes the parish policy and the ministry team carries this out in the most effective ways. The team does not make policy and its members are not necessarily all on parish council.

5. Local Shared Ministry needs the full, on-going support of presbytery and synod.

Local Shared Ministry model is a template that can be dropped into any situation although it is recognised that each church will differ in some details according to local situations and needs. Local Shared Ministry can be a starting place for ongoing effective local ministry.

Local Shared Ministry is about “equipping the saints for the work of ministry” and is a form of ministry that will enable the church to serve Christ more effectively in our fast changing world.

‘LMT lite’: An alternative solution

John Roxborough, Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership

There is no magic bullet for small congregations (or any others) but “LMT Lite” might answer a few prayers

If our purpose as a church is the provision of worship and the facilitation of ministry and mission, then we recognise that while some of our ways of doing this have run their course, at the same time others are coming to birth. As we look for “new expressions” of being church, we need to identify mustard seeds of faith that need nurture as well as new ventures that require significant capital. Both require people of faith wisdom and passion to see the vision and make it work. All involve continuity with those who have laid the foundations on which we and other generations will build.

There is interplay between levels of initiative at parish, presbytery and General Assembly levels. Assembly can provide frameworks, facilitate planning, and coordinate resources around projects that require a scale of commitment that is difficult locally. It also has a role in ensuring the rest of us hear the voices of the small ventures that have a viable future.

We all need to share stories of what is possible and how it can be done. Presbyteries can facilitate parishes exploring options and help the wider Church decide which projects to back.

People need time to work out their own salvation, and are more likely to gladly release resources when they have come to see for themselves that their future is about letting go, not holding on. Christian congregations can see their “dying” as leading to the hope of resurrection – a stewardship of resources that includes the realisation that they can do something to help provide for worship, ministry and mission in new situations.

We need to be positive about this. Some congregations who were large and strong yesterday have a future that is about letting go, not struggling on. The churches that

are vulnerable are not so much those who, though they are fragile, keep adapting and reaching out. The vulnerable are more likely to be those whose era of success is strong in their memory and who expect the glory days of whatever era to continue or return. “In the 1950s/70s/80s we knew how to be church and if the 1950s/70s/80s or whenever ever come again, we will be ready!” “Classic hits” Presbyterianism has its place, but it is more a source of inspiration than a model for the future.

Facing reality requires continuous intentional intergenerational transfer of power

At the same time some small congregations may be more viable over the long haul than they appear. Very ordinary congregations can see themselves as

seed-beds of new leadership and discover that they have the capacity to maintain worship and mission in their community.

For all sorts of congregations, as for presbyteries, facing reality requires continuous intentional intergenerational transfer of power. Without this we really do have no tomorrow. We should not feel guilty about trends due to demographic and cultural changes over which we have little control, but if our situation is worse than these factors account for because we have failed to actively hand power to younger generations in the church, then that is something to address with urgency.

One of our options for small congregations has been Local Ministry Teams. They are not just about keeping going with less; we also need to see them as being about developing new generations of leaders. LMTs as they were set up in 2002 are working well in a number of places. Protocols with partner churches in the Uniting Congregations of Aotearoa New Zealand mean that we now have a fair idea of the pitfalls and possibilities and what we need to do in cooperating ventures. Some Presbyterian parishes have worked with their presbytery to call people into a local team and appointed resource ministers as coaches. We are learning to do this more efficiently. It is a model of ministry with a strong theological rationale. Done well, it grows faith and develops leadership that feeds into the wider Church.

However, a number of parishes are finding that the overheads of setting this up fully are too high, and “vacant” congregations and their interim moderators continue to struggle to find a ministry they can afford. Time slips away while we get our heads around the various options and the biological and economic clocks of church membership tick relentlessly.

LMT Lite

Another model to work with is to take the basic idea of a Local Ministry Team, with the interim moderator as the resource minister or coach. This takes the theology and values, and many of the benefits of LMTs but has less of the overheads. We could do worse than call this “LMT Lite”.

Like any form of LMT, this offers fresh possibilities for freeing up resources of people and finance while maintaining worship and ministry. It gives time to test whether a congregation is a mustard seed of growth, a seed bed of new leadership for themselves and the wider church, or whether the time really has come to face releasing assets into other forms of ministry. If people are willing to share in leadership, learn on the job, and allow an interim moderator to be a teacher and coach for ministry they can do, a “lite” version of the LMT model may have quite a lot to offer.

How might it work?

The congregation and the interim moderator stop trying to find a ministry settlement involving calling another minister. Shelving this question for a period will save time and energy in itself.

Members of the congregation take responsibility for worship and ministry using the existing framework of authorisation for elders to be trained to preside at the sacraments.

The interim moderator takes the role of resource minister – coaching the team in worship leadership and ministry, not doing it for them, as much as he or she has time for.

The parish pays the parish of the interim moderator say 10 percent of stipend and allowances in return for one day a fortnight of ministry and team coaching.

The arrangement is set up in discussion with and under the authority of the presbytery, subject to review after a fixed period.

Of course, this is what is happening anyway in some parishes – the key difference is accepting that this is a

positive framework for realising our purpose of providing worship and ministry. We can just do it without having to get there by a process of getting exhausted trying everything else first.

Benefits and Costs

This requires no Book of Order change that I am aware of. It works with who we are and what we have got. Letting go of struggling to find some other solution is a benefit in itself. The financial savings and costs are quantifiable.

Of course, this is not going to save a congregation that was once large and has become small but is struggling to maintain a large building. It is likely to help rural and some urban congregations where the leadership is there to be encouraged. It can be seen as freeing up the interim moderator as well as the parishes involved. It is important that it be seen as an opportunity to grow younger leadership and transfer responsibility to them.

It is not an option where the congregation has lost the capacity to take responsibility for its own future. It is an option where there is an interest in being a local ministry team but the resources are not quite there to make that happen and the overheads of setting up a full LMT are daunting.

It requires the interim moderator to walk a fine line of moderatorial leadership and facilitating the ministry of others. It also requires the parish of the interim moderator to let their person go on a longer-term basis, but one in which they know what the time demands on their minister will be, and they are compensated financially for their contribution in this way.

A further benefit is how all this works towards developing the ministry of the whole people of God, creating a church in which our ordained ministers of word and sacrament see themselves as those who equip others in ministry. It connects strongly to the purpose of the church being about worship and mission. It relates to values of being flexible and experimental about how worship and mission is to be provided. It encourages people to take responsibility for their own future. It helps us affirm that the journeys that our congregations are on will take us through different territory towards the same goal.

If this has a sense of loving life and letting it go, that is not a bad principle to connect with. It might even be fun.

Variations on the ministry theme

Robyn McPhail, Kaeo Kerikeri Union, Northland

Quite a number of years ago I wrote something in *Candour* that some people seemed to think was foolishness from a fresh new minister. “Close small rural churches? No way!” It was an instinct on my part that then became articulated in the phrase: “a church is viable if it has a mission in its community.” This was a challenge to the so-far unquestioned assumption that viability was to do with the financial balance sheet; if a church can’t afford to fund a minister, it should merge with a church that can. I continue to say that if there is group of people in a community, who have love for Christ and a passion for sharing the Good News in their community, then there is a viable church. The task is to enable them to be church in their community in a sustainable and faithful way. That is, how can the wider Church resource small local congregations in terms of these words in the Uniting Church in Australia’s baptism service:

I charge you, the people of this congregation, to maintain the life of worship and service that this child and all the children among you may grow in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the knowledge and love of God.

With God’s help, we will live out our baptism as a loving community in Christ: nurturing one another in faith, upholding one another in prayer and encouraging one another in service.

The Rakaia Presbyterian Parish began developing a means to maintain its life and mission more than 10 years ago. We first tried it out in practice, and then in 2001 formalised a Local Ministry Support Team, with team members from within the parish and a resource minister who was contracted from a neighbouring parish. Leaders and members of the parish felt huge relief that they no longer had to spend all their time fund-raising to pay a resident minister and they felt their energy was much better utilised by doing the work and mission of the church themselves.

This took place prior to the regulations that now allow for Local Ministry Teams with one or more members ordained to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. The new regulation means that an entirely parish-based team can itself assume responsibility for encouraging and supporting the mission of the parish and carry accountability to presbytery. In our Rakaia model, I as the resource minister had to provide the accountability link.

The main driver for us doing things differently in Rakaia was that we wanted to find a way to continue to exist in our communities of Lauriston and Rakaia. It’s just a 20 minute drive to Ashburton and some might suggest that the small number of people gathering Sunday by Sunday at worship might join a church there and in fact enjoy a larger group. But that would mean pulling out of our local community. It was seen to be wise as a small church to get into a closer working relationship with the other churches in the two communities, and that has certainly happened. But we knew that to form sustainable partnerships across denominations, we needed to have a sustainable life in ourselves. We needed to know what we existed for, to believe in it, and to be clear about purpose of being Good News to our community when pressure comes on to follow a particular line in theology or approach. This is a parish that has decided that relationships matter most of all and that’s what being Christian means for them.

It was also more than 10 years ago that the Tutukaka Coast Community Church was set up as a Local Ecumenical Project by the Northland Uniting Church Council and the Anglican Diocese of Auckland. A group of local people met for worship in the Community Hall at Ngunguru and they worked to maintain their life and mission as a Christian faith community by means of a local ministry team, with a co-enabler provided by each regional church body. What strikes people about this church is their energy and commitment, and the way the people are involved. This is Local Shared Ministry and it is clearly not a hospice model of ministry, that is, palliative care for the last phase before burial.

This church belongs to its local community: church members are all local residents and individuals are involved in community groups and local issues (for example, potential development of the Ngunguru Spit). Their strength is their community connection, which was greatly enhanced when church and community worked together to install their own church building. Nearby Helena Bay had a church building to spare and it was shifted onto a site that belongs to the District Council. The whole community remembers that project and individuals recall their part in it.

Members of the LSM team are called from within the congregation and have a distinct role in relation to the facets that make up that particular church’s activities and

priorities. Their role is not to do all the work of preaching, pastoral care, education, administration, etc, but to enable it to be done. They are the encouragers of others within the team and the congregation, each team member facilitating a certain area and ensuring resources are available for those who want to be involved. Their task is to “equip the saints”.

Team members, in turn, need to be well equipped. The role of the ministry enabler, or resource minister, in any team situation is vital. At Tutukaka, training is provided by enablers to the team as a whole and is very specific to their needs and mission focus as well as being a means to keep building strong relationships. Tutukaka Coast’s team stands out in the way they relate so well to each other, with a real appreciation of each other’s traditions, which are more than just Anglican and Presbyterian. These two in particular are combined in a team that has some members priested or licensed by the Diocese and some members ordained or commissioned by the presbytery-equivalent, Churches Together in Northland. This church has found its identity together and holds on to its commitment to be an inclusive and welcoming group of people. As a congregation, they are very accepting of everyone who comes to worship. With a core who relate together with respect and warmth, it is unsurprising that this opens out into a congregation that has a very pastoral approach to its life and to its place in the community.

The Bay of Islands Uniting Parish, a Methodist/Presbyterian Uniting Congregation, began its team ministry some 15 years ago. The parish comprises the communities of Moerewa, Kawakawa, Paihia and Russell. What they value most is the whole experience of working as a team. They currently have five team members – pastoral, worship, education, outreach and tourism, and business – that is, individuals who are called and commissioned as co-ordinators of the parish’s key areas of responsibility. Each team member has a team to work with so that no-one needs to feel burdened or that they have to do it all. The team is an integral part of the parish, because small numbers in the parish means that everyone feels they are part of the parish team and that they are making a contribution to the parish (including the 96-year-old who counts the money at Russell). As with Rakaia and Tutukaka, there is nothing “set apart” about the team and the decision-making authority continues to rest where it always has – with the parish council or its equivalent.

Team meetings are held once a month to share highlights, issues and what each person wants help with. The ministry enabler has a role in checking in with the team at these meetings to facilitate their working relationships

and to provide training and connections with good training events. Among the opportunities offered by this team method of ministry have been getting involved with study through the Methodist Church’s TELM programme and through the Ecumenical Institute of Distance Theological Studies, regular Northland training Saturdays and events in Auckland and interaction with others in similar situations. Another big plus has been the opportunity for individuals to discover their gifts. The calling process of praying, discerning and then submitting names on paper during a service of worship draws people into roles they would never have imagined. People are naturally reluctant to put themselves forward for a particular role, but when gifts are seen by others and encouraged by the church family, then one gives it a go. “Those whom God calls, God also enables.”

You may be familiar with the observation that, after a period of vacancy in a parish, people are saying: “it’s really good we’ve got no minister and everyone is doing something.” But when the new minister comes, they sit back and leave the minister to do things. We need to be training ministers to be enablers of the people in the parishes so that they will continue to contribute, at a sustainable level, as part of a parish team.

One of the big challenges the team members face is the need for them to move out of their comfort zones. In a small church that is responsible for its own life and mission, people are regularly taking on new things. Some find they need to develop the shadow side of their personality. Personal growth is a significant benefit of team ministry, along with a discovery of the importance of prayer, individually and together as a group. To pray, believing that God answers prayer, believing in the God of miracles and the God of surprises, is crucial to the ongoing sustainability of a parish like the Bay of Islands. Before the recent calling service they were down to two team members and people were wondering and worrying: who’s going to be called; everyone’s so busy. But when the calling took place three new team members were found, and so the parish moves on into the next phase of its continuing life.

We seem to me to be a long way from the old theory about closing churches. Hallelujah!

Thanks to Dorothy Knight in Mid-Canterbury and Win Blyth and Beverley Deverell in Northland.

A Southland perspective on NOMs, LOMs and LMTs

Alastair Taylor, North Invercargill Presbyterian, Southland

The 2002 General Assembly made a significant shift in policy regarding four strands of ministry. Most of the Southland Presbytery welcomed the change of policy, but some saw it as a significant watering down of the quality of professional standards for ministers.

Three congregations have received presbytery approval and officially ordained Local Ministry Teams; two city congregations and one in a small-town, rural Union parish. Two years down the track, we are in the process of reviewing two of those teams. The other team has served its term and three new members have been appointed

with an Anglican vicar as ministry enabler. They have enabled smaller congregations to continue on with a new form of ministry leadership, when they are no longer able to fund full-time ministry. The calibre of leadership provided has been from good, experienced lay people using different gifts; all of them were or have become elders. The presbytery regarded that as important in terms of accountability to session and presbytery. Some teams have all been voluntary, with only travel and out-of-pocket expenses reimbursed. Others have included a part-time salary, usually for someone who preaches three to four Sundays a month.

The provision of resource ministers has been complex. Some have been reluctant to pay 10-15 percent of stipend to a minister. Some have only budgeted for a supervisor of the team. One has employed various short appointments to resource the parish. We have few retired ministers available and the few full-time NOMs are really overcommitted in their own parish and with presbytery responsibilities. One of the challenges for resource ministers is to limit their ministry to resourcing the team rather than doing the ministry. The Rev Roy and Mrs June McKenzie from Gore have given very good training to the Knox LMT and the congregation in various dimensions of preaching, funeral and pastoral ministries.

There are a number of other parishes being led by unofficial Local Ministry Teams. The process of selecting and forming teams is complex, in terms of the dynamics of session and congregational perspectives as to who are the

appropriate people to be elected. In small parishes with only four to six elders, some ask why not make the whole session a LMT, but others contend that confuses the role of the eldership and session. In some churches there has been a tension about authority: do the LMT need session or parish council approval for every decision made by the team? To develop a culture of trust between LMT and elders is vital. The temptation for jealousy and power struggles around leadership goes on regardless of the strand of ministry.

To develop a culture of trust between LMT and elders is vital

While LMTs have enabled some small congregations to continue, in an urban setting the question remains as to whether

options such as amalgamation can give suitable critical mass to develop new ministries. Most LMTs have not produced significant numerical growth in the congregation, but neither have other strands of ministry.

The academic requirements for Local Ordained Ministers have slowly become clearer now that the minimum of Bible College Ministry Diploma Internships have been phased out. The two-year diploma-level equivalent is in line with the changing role of the Knox Centre for Leadership. The distance-learning process is still a long process for people in part-time employment and part-time ministry. Discerning whether a LOM or LMT is appropriate in particular congregations is complex too. The unrealistic expectations of some congregations for chaplaincy-style ministry can put huge burdens on part-time ministries. The outstanding example has been Karl Lamb at Te Anau, with the journey from part-time lay pastor to full time LOM and recently to NOM. Karl's leadership and ongoing distance learning has transformed a congregation with a history of conflict into a genuinely missional congregation having an impact in the local community.

Perhaps the much more fundamental issue bedeviling mission and ministry in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand is the making of disciples. If we took spiritual formation and discipling seriously, then we might have many members who were involved in ministry teams engaged in mission and making disciples. I wonder if we have ignored the 2002 policy statement on the mission of the whole people of God.

Being ‘church’ in a new age

Alan Goss, minister emeritus, Gisborne-Hawkes Bay

Existing paradigms, or models, of what it means to be church are no longer meeting people’s needs. These models fitted the ethos and understanding of their own time but are no longer relevant in a fast-moving secular culture. New paradigms or models are needed and my experience with the Sea of Faith Network throws up some possibilities. This involves the dismantling of the national structure of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, with its system of graded courts, and replacing it with a simpler, more people-centred alternative.

The local group

The local group or congregation will be the prime unit, the nucleus from which everything flows and around which everything else is built. Each local group is responsible for the ordering of its own life and is financially independent; it will determine whether or not to employ full or part-time leadership (ministry) and support causes and projects of its own choosing. Local groups will be invited to act in a network relationship with other groups up and down the country and not be constrained by rules and regulations imposed on them from above.

A national body

This is elected at a national conference. Its main function is to offer support to local groups via a newsletter, worship or programme resources, a written constitution and the arranging of a national conference (Assembly). Conferences will focus on inspiration rather than organisation, in keeping with the network’s aims. Organisational matters are kept to a minimum.

Membership

Membership will be open to all those willing to explore religion and spirituality, especially from the Judaeo-Christian perspective. Insights from the other traditions are not excluded. All views will be accepted and alternative positions welcomed. Church will be an open forum, “a safe place to say unsafe things”. It will be more participatory and more democratic; there will be no binding vows, creeds or confessions and all distinctions, for example communicants vis-à-vis adherents, will be abolished.

Worship

Worship is our human response for the gift of life in a vast mysterious universe and is expressed in the coded call, “Let us worship God”. All the main elements of wor-

ship remain, although the content will change in light of different social and cultural conditions and new ways of understanding the world. Groups might construct their own liturgies and draw upon other resources such as poetry and various written, visual and audio materials. The celebration of festivals such as Easter and Christmas offer renewed scope for creativity, especially in regard to our relationship with other living creatures in the natural world and our care for planet Earth.

Ministry

As a different concept of being church emerges, so will the role and function of ministry. “Parish ministry”, in its pastoral aspect, might be replaced by forms of chaplaincy similar to that of industrial and hospital chaplains. “Ordained ministry” and matters such as selection, training and deployment will be re-evaluated, with standards of training maintained at the highest possible level. Ministry will be founded upon faith, hope and love. It will become less “churchy” and more secular and connect more with our highest aspirations of what it means to be human in today’s world.

Property and finance

Proceeds from the sales of surplus and redundant institutional church buildings will be the basis for trusts and foundations supporting projects and causes approved by the national body. A small secretariat will administer these funds.

Name

Denominational brand names like Presbyterian and Methodist are becoming increasingly irrelevant like the denominations themselves. A new name, or names, will emerge approved by the members at large.

Conclusion

The Presbyterian Church is presently governed and administered by a series of graded church courts. These courts are a way of sharing and controlling power and have had a long and honourable history, but all power structures must be allowed to die. Jesus challenged the religious and political power systems of his day and paid the price. His Kingdom was a “secular” kingdom in that all worldly divisions of power and privilege are annulled and freedoms restored. People do not want or need authority; they will respond to whatever they perceive to be authentic.

THE INTERCHURCH BIOETHICS COUNCIL

New Member Required

The Interchurch Bioethics Council (ICBC) responds to issues in biotechnology important to the church membership and the community generally. There are currently eight members from the Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian churches, with between them expertise in science, ethics, theology, medicine, education and cultural issues.

The ICBC makes considerable use of outside experts and participates actively in conferences and seminars. Five meetings of the ICBC and two teleconferences were held during January 2006 –July 2007. Other work is carried out by e-mail. Members are expected to have a good understanding of Treaty of Waitangi issues.

The ICBC makes representations to government and other relevant bodies on issues at the interface of science, theology, ethics and culture. The ICBC also provides study material and speaks to church and community groups regarding issues in biotechnology. Current issues being studied include 'Pre-birth Testing: Who Gets Born?' and 'Real Urgent and Personal: Why the Churches Should Care About Climate Change'

The ICBC meets about four times per year for a full day in Wellington. All costs of travel to and from meetings are met by the ICBC. There are no meeting fees. Discussions also take place by e-mail and audio-conferences throughout the year, and considerable reading is expected.

We now seek an additional member, and at this time we are particularly looking for a member with affiliation to the Presbyterian Church.

Applications for membership of the ICBC close on 30 November 2007 and should include a brief CV outlining church affiliation and relevant experience and expertise. Please state what you believe you can specifically contribute to the work of the ICBC and give the names of two referees who may be contacted, preferably by phone or e-mail.

Applications and requests for further information should be forwarded to:

Dr Audrey Jarvis
Chairperson
Interchurch Bioethics Council
Wesley Broadway Methodist Church
PO Box 1887
Palmerston North

Phone/Fax: (06) 358-8663
Cellphone: 021 406 265
E-mail: jarvis.ab@xtra.co.nz

Men, God and the church

Chris Bedford, transition minister at Ellesmere Cooperating, Christchurch

In mid-October 2007, our church hosted a church parade for the local Masonic Lodge. At their request, and not quite my usual cup of tea. During the service I interviewed two Lodge men from our church and asked them what they enjoyed about belonging to the Lodge. One of them said that it was the opportunity to be involved with other men doing something worthwhile. The other said that he joined the Lodge a number of years ago because he admired a number of local Lodge men who were “involved in the church and the community – they were men of faith and men of the world and I admired them”.

In July 2007 seven men associated with our church went to Vanuatu as a workparty to put the roof on the new staff residence at the Talua Ministry Training Centre. When the word went out that we were interested in making a workparty, we received eager responses. Only one of the team is actively involved in the church, the others are very much on the fringe. They knew they were doing Christian work. They knew it was a church group. They attended worship and devotions at Talua, and were impressed by the Christian commitment of the students they met and stayed with. Each of them in some way said something like “I’m not much into church, but I’m glad to be involved with this.”

They were talking about their own faith, but most of the way we do church doesn’t have space for the way these men connect with God. In the early 1980s, I was minister at Ngakuru, south of Rotorua. Big rural area. We wanted to build a ponga wall around the church property. Quite a big job. We got a permit to take pongas from the Mamaku Forest. The word went out that we needed help – and we quickly had more than 20 men with trucks and chainsaws. One astute elder said to me, “Y’know, we don’t see these guys at church on Sundays, but by their actions they are actually saying some important things about their religious belief and the value they place on the church in the community.” He was right on the nail. Many church building projects have found themselves strongly supported by men, yet once the project is completed, many of them quietly disappear. That was the experience at Morrinsville in 1984. While the new church was being built there were lots of men. When the job was completed most of them disappeared.

My wife and I host dinner parties from time to time. We’re a dinosaur couple who don’t have a dishwasher

– by choice. At the end of dinner parties we usually say “Men do the dishes!” Without fail, it is a time of laughter, really interesting conversation, and deepening relationships.

A key need for many men is “comradeship” or “mateship”. The Boys Brigade got it right when it set the development of “comradeship” as one of its objects. This is most strongly forged in the shared experience of a common task, especially one that helps others and where the results are clearly visible. There are few opportunities for forging these bonds in the church, but they can be created.

Working together for a common goal does great things for men, especially when an element of physical toughness is called for. Sitting in rows in church, singing (mostly songs that are two centuries old and sung too high!) or praying in a group doesn’t connect with many 21st century men. In my experience, men are mostly likely to have a religious faith that merges with the things they do day by day. It’s not formed in meetings, but it will connect with stories of life experience. It resonates with Celtic faith.

I affirm the value of visiting men in their workplace. Many men’s identity, mine included, is forged by their work. Tap into an understanding of what their work means to them – the affirmation it gives them, their anxiety about it, their desire to provide for their family. Ask them questions about what it means for them, what their hopes are, where the God-stuff is for them in their work, and you’re well on your way to helping them build a strong and relevant Christian faith. I’ve done it with farmers, businessmen in offices, production line employees, and self-employed contractors building houses, and can attest to its value.

We often don’t give much emphasis to developing Christian faith with men because it is particularly hard work. It takes time and sensitivity and you can’t do it with programmes! Develop strong one-on-one relationships that build trust. Have no agenda other than care, interest and friendship. Men don’t forge friends easily – they are like big trees that grow strongly and slowly in the right conditions. Because men don’t talk easily about their faith or feelings, doesn’t mean they don’t have any. Jesus understands men – he was one of us!

Dear colleagues

I have just finished reading Steven Carden's book *New Zealand Unleashed*. Steven has been described as a "futurist who examines and studies New Zealand Society". His parents were members of one of my previous congregations. I found the book a really helpful summary, describing both organisational theory and also providing an overview of the major influences and challenges faced by New Zealand society. In reading the book, it is not hard to apply some of the analysis to the situation our Church is facing at the current time. It is best to read the book yourself but here are just a few ideas that I found interesting:

The paradox of change. Equilibrium has been critical for human survival. In agrarian society for example, if the cycles of planting, growing and harvesting are broken, then society itself is imperilled. There is something that continues to be deeply upsetting about the order of our lives undergoing change. And yet on the other hand, we also know that without both personal and organisational ability to adapt, survival is also threatened. I have found in my work over the past few months that a strong emphasis on the urgency of the problems we face does not necessarily galvanise groups into a commitment to adapt. In fact the response can be retrenchment and defensiveness. It is sometimes hard to remember that our Christian faith is based on the most world-changing confession of them all – bowing before the risen Jesus and confessing "my Lord and my God".

The interconnectedness of participants in a system. A small change in an ecosystem - a slight temperature rise for instance, or a reduction in a population of insects - can have catastrophic or beneficial consequences for some other participant somewhere else in the system. Steven relates this observation to the way that human systems organise themselves. In some small way as ministers, we probably all have examples of unintended consequences. I can think of some shockers. But the good examples I can think of in my ministry relate to how some small change I have made, often without giving it much thought, has symbolised for others a move towards supporting new possibilities and opportunities for our congregation or Church. Maybe there is some small change you can make now which might signify a new direction for your congregation. Outcomes are often difficult to predict.

Diversity of teams is the best way to find a solution. I love being with a group of people who all agree with me - but unfortunately it seems that this is not the way to find the best solution to a challenge we are facing. There needs

to be some commonalities but differences in approach, perspective and working style are critical. We also need care in the way that we measure and value competency or skill. It may be good having one or two visionaries on your planning team but it might be very unhelpful having all 10 with this skill. As well as expertise there are values such as experience, faithfulness, loyalty and wisdom that work together to help determine the best solutions.

The dangers of monocultures. We hear the sad stories of people who have invested their life savings in a single finance company, or a disease that wipes out an entire species or an economy that depends solely on the production of one commodity. I spent many holidays working as a labourer producing a daily newspaper. In just a matter of days, the entire trade of linotype operators, with its union and apprenticeships and training, was made entirely redundant with the advent of computers and word processing. Can we stretch this analogy to our congregations? What particular vulnerabilities do we face if a large majority of our congregation or our elders are the same culture, a similar age, and share very similar memories? It may be near impossible for monocultures to change or adapt to new circumstances.

The valuing of creativity. Is the view "if it isn't broken, don't fix it" really going to help us find the best ways to respond to the missional challenges of our Church? Similarly, what about the priority we give to the command to be "realistic" or be "practical". Is that how penicillin, air flight or the television came to be invented? Do we have any mechanism in our Church life that supports the one person who comes up the novel or left-field idea? - Especially once it gets to the finance committee? Can we allow for and support the possibility that this might be the best idea anyone has had for a long time?

I am perhaps particularly conscious of these issues now as I work on the umpteenth edition of the Church strategy document on the behalf of the Council of Assembly. Not many really disagree with the basic idea – that we need to find some way of using the vast resources we have tied up in underutilised buildings and rapidly growing investments to support new congregational and church growth – the difficulty comes when we try to develop a mechanism for this to actually happen. A perspective that looks beyond our individual congregations to a reaffirmation that supports a collective commitment to future growth and development will require participation and support from each of us. I hope and pray that there is still an "us" and that we will find a renewed sense of unity in sharing this challenge together.

