

CANDOUR

News and Views for Ministers

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Endings and beginnings

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Contributions

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

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Stepping outside our boxes

Steve Taylor. *The Out of Bounds Church: Learning to create a community of faith in a culture of change.* (Zondervan, 2005)

By Fyfe Blair

We all love our own comfort zone. However, most of us are well aware of the signals that our church is facing death today. We are sometimes asked, “what would it mean to step outside our box?”

Well... if you have any imagination, here is a book that will stimulate. It isn’t just a “how to” book. Instead, it is borne out of some deeper theological thinking, processing and engagement that takes both Gospel and culture seriously.

It is a very accessible book that will appeal to a wide range of people and churches.

Through a series of “postcards” you are taken around the globe to different places, peoples and stories. It reflects on culture shifts, it offers a theology of creativity (Koru theology) and engages with emerging mission.

It speaks of “spiritual tourists”, “redemptive portals” of the body of Christ, missional boundaries and the “DJ sampling” and mixing of culture. There is insight from places of alternative worship and the sensitivity to tradition as well as the call to move beyond in mission.

There’s further reading, web sites, and more to follow up on. Taylor offers us a “critical Christianity”; a way of thinking and acting fashioned out of intellectual rigor, original analysis and questioning, resourcefulness and clear-sighted faithfulness.

This book should serve as catalyst, stimulus and encouragement for your own theologising, imagining and creativity.

It may not be your language or metaphor, but don’t be dismissive: “this book is for those who dream the dream of finding God in the desert of the [postmodern] real.”

Perhaps we can all begin to take a step out of bounds.

Have you read a book you would like to share with other ministers? Feel free to send a review to candour@presbyterian.org.nz

Marking change and the year's end

Amanda Wells

I find transitions fascinating. A former workmate once commented that I was obsessed with the date. In my defence, I rarely know what the actual date is, but do often think in terms of “what was happening a year ago today?” and “how long has it been since x milestone?”

As I write, it is year and a day since I arrived back in New Zealand after nearly three years in Europe. It's been an interesting transition to make and one that involved a multitude of new starts; some deliberate and some unavoidable.

Just before leaving the UK, I went to the Greenbelt festival, held near Cheltenham. I wasn't sure what to expect. An English Parachute? Far from it. While Greenbelt also has an energetic festival vibe and a worship element, it's primarily for adults. Opportunities for contemplation, critical engagement and alternative forms feature heavily. It's about social justice, spiritual growth and engaging with the margins. If you ever get the chance to go, seize it.

One of the workshops was about change: how to recognise it, mark it and move on. I can't remember who gave it or even the organisation to which they were affiliated, but what has lingered is the point that “positive” life changes, like getting married, having children or starting an exciting new job, involve an element of grief for what you lose. The speaker suggested it was necessary to acknowledge and celebrate the positive elements of the phase you are leaving before attempting to embrace the new.

Sometimes I read the “e~mergent kiwi” blog, written by Steve Taylor (whose latest book is coincidentally reviewed by Fyfe Blair on the facing page). Earlier this month, the blog covered his church's transitions packs. These aren't just for your standard engagement/marriage/new baby events, but also for transitions in life that the church (and other people) may be less good at marking: relationship break-ups, losing your drivers' licence, and moving house, among others. An original but cheap gift and a card are presented to the person, along with the chance for some pastoral support.

In encouraging analysis of turning points, large or small, we open a door to transformation, and to consideration that life is linear rather than cyclical. I will always remember a sermon that argued “The Lion King” (released

on film that year) was heretical because of its focus on the “circle of life”. But the truth is that our message, with its end that is a beginning, speaks to those stuck in destructive and repetitive patterns of behaviour.

Many of the contributions in this issue of *Candour* wrestle, directly or indirectly, with the question of how to generate an ending that is unwanted and whether this can lead to new growth. Others write about new starts that go hand in hand with ministry, and the ways in which these changes can be managed.

We will have a lot of transitions to acknowledge during the coming years. Many ministers will retire, more parishes will close or amalgamate and new ways of being a community of believers will evolve. How we handle these will send a strong signal to our society about the type of group we are.

It's a thought-provoking collection of essays, and a strong note on which to end the *Candour* year. Our next issue is February and I can't tell you its theme, because this is yet to be decided. During the next month, the editorial committee will have a planning session to thrash out *Candour*'s themes for 2006. Your contributions to this process are most welcome: please drop an email to candour@presbyterian.org.nz or a note to PO Box 9049, Wellington.

However, I will be looking for contributions to the February issue before the end of the year, so articles on any burning topics would be much appreciated. Letters to the editor are very welcome too. In fact, spontaneous contributions of any kind. It can be a challenge pulling together content to fill the magazine, and I'd like to express my appreciation of those who have responded to my requests or entreaties since I took over as editor in May.

John Daniel's Mission Possible series takes a break this issue but will continue next year, with the aim of providing useful tools that help parishes realise their missions. Feedback or suggestions are welcome, to John or to candour@presbyterian.org.nz.

A good ending wraps things up in a way that leaves room for dissenting reflection; that shuts doors but doesn't lock them. We're good at funerals. Can we create closure as well in other circumstances?

Church planting: A crying need

Jim Wallace, Bethlehem Community Church, Tauranga

In October 2003 I wrote for *Candour*, asking the question, “where have all the church planters gone?” It is an internationally known fact that churches and denominations go through a life cycle. They are planted, they grow, mature, ossify, and die.

In that article, I listed some of the reasons and I don’t want to repeat them here. Needless to say the only way a denomination can escape the life-death cycle is for it to engage in a rigorous programme of church planting. In fact, it has to make church planting a primary planning objective. Given the state of our national church, it is unlikely the initiative will “come from above,” which means the onus is on presbyteries and local congregations to pick up the tab and start making the strategic decisions necessary to move into a mood of adventurous faith.

We could help facilitate this “new mood” by passing an overture at General Assembly level that basically says that property in areas of terminal decline (either in the inner city or rural heartland) be sold and vested in a special fund, administered by the Church Property Trustees, with the sole purpose of buying land in growing areas (in consultation with the local presbytery) so that church planters can be called by a presbytery to establish a new work for the Lord.

My skill is not drafting overtures but surely in the church there are other people who can also see the need for this type of motion. Freeing up money that is tied up in declining situations and moving away from our “turfism” or presbytery parochialism are critical for our survival. For example, we have congregations of less than 30 people using buildings that if they were sold would release \$4-5 million that could be used to buy land for maybe 10 new churches in growing areas. I ask myself, am I the only one who can see the logic in this?

On a more immediate note, here are some ideas about church planting that I have been mulling over. I offer them to you as thought starters.

Church planters: leadership

In church planting, leadership is a critical factor. In many ways, the role is like that of a minister of a large church. Initially, church planting is leadership focused. Large successful churches have strong “charismatic” leaders:

I believe new church leaders need that “charismatic” experience and confidence dimension. They must be the focus of growth (people come because you are a good preacher), at least in the beginning. I don’t believe we have recognised this factor.

John Maxwell says, “a leader’s role is that of a vision caster; the one who can accurately describe to a group their preferable future”.

Some factors that I believe are necessary for a new church:

- Prayer
- Good worship leader – contemporary music
- Committed leadership team
- Hospitable people who are part of the new church
- Inspiring, relevant preaching
- Contemporary feel
- Good use of modern technology.

Types of church planting:

1. Establishing a new church in a new area. A healthy church looks to have a group intentionally move from their existing congregation into that new area (a new housing area that doesn’t have a church in it). This is the establishing of a daughter congregation that is supported by the existing strong church.

What is the fruit of the apple tree? When I ask this question, many people give me a look that says, “what a dumb question”. Yes, apple trees produce apples, but this is an incomplete picture. Within each apple are the seeds designed to produce more apple trees! The fruit of a church is another church.

In practice:

- The group should be at least 10-15 couples with children. It has to have a critical mass for it to function. It will be a team effort, with hard work from each sent person because to appeal the new church has to offer a range of ministries. Worship, preaching, children’s, youth and hospitality as a bare minimum.
- This involves a sacrifice by the moving group – and this should be acknowledged by the parent church, which should commission them and send them forth with full support.

- At some stage, the plan will be for the daughter church to grow up and become independent.
- Leadership is critical. Our problem (as I said in my October 2003 article) is that we often put new ministers into these areas and they don't have the experience to make it work.

2. Establish a new congregation within an existing church. This again has in the past been resisted because of a fear of division. But I believe that if we are to turn the tide of decline, this must be an option we push for.

The fact is that “the smell of death” is over many of our congregations. We cannot mix the new wine with the old rigid people in the old wine skin. Basically they WILL NOT relinquish control of the service they have become familiar with – and why should they? They will love the hymns until they die. They have been raised in the “Christianism model of a settler Church” – not a “mission model of a post-modern outstation of the Kingdom”. I don't think we can change the church nationally into a mission church. It is better for us to get permission to start new churches, congregations and outposts — call them what you will — but they have to be new, courageous, and mission-focussed.

In reality, ministers and keen leaders have been bashing their heads against a resistance to change for years. I say we should stop wasting our energies trying to change what exists and get permission from session to begin a new church or a congregation as a parallel structure under the loose umbrella of the old. The benefit is that when the time comes and the old dies (as it inevitably will) then the new church will have buildings to use and adapt without the huge cost of building.

I believe that rather than changing the “old service” in an effort to make it appeal to post-modern families, we should invest time, energy and technology into making it the most excellent and inspiring traditional-style service in town. It already has a clientele and we should build on its strengths and go for it, not try to change it into something it doesn't want to be. It is a false monolithic paranoia about being difference meaning we are divided that stops leaders from growing something different and new. I say “what the hell”- go for it! You can't fail unless you try.

We are divided anyway, and there is not one “Presbyterian way” of doing things. That is one of the strengths of our church. We don't have set liturgies. Let's use that as a strength and stop wringing our hands about division.

Usually those who do protest about division, about “not knowing everyone”, and who tend to say “why can't they just like it the way it is?” don't want to lose control. That is a heart issue, not a structural issue, and I suggest that if they know their service will not be changing, they will let you go for it.

Hold a forum or a congregational discussion and simply ask permission to try it for one year as an experiment. Too often people react because they think you don't like what they value and appreciate. At St John's, Rotorua,

I don't think anyone knew which type of service I preferred.

In the past, we have demanded that these more traditional services change and have alienated their

key consumers by implying that they “have to change” to be mission minded. I suggest it would be more helpful to do this service better because the demographic bulge means there is a huge mission field among this age group.

At Bethlehem, we have begun an “inspiring traditional service”. It is a new housing area and a huge number of retired people are moving in. The service is at 11:00am and we say: “have a lie in; being a working person you need it. Come to church at 11:00am and then it's out for lunch – what a good idea.”

This service includes a standard hymn-prayer structure, inspirational items, classical music, faith points and preaching, all fitted into one hour. We began it in March and we have an average of 30 adults and 2 children attending - and this is growing. It also gives us more space in our contemporary service, which is at 9:00am

3. Ethnic churches. The planting of new congregations that specifically target and minister to the needs of the new ethnic groups that have come and are coming into New Zealand. For example, Taiwanese, Cook Islander, Samoan, Korean and South African. I suggest the influx of these cultural groups into our church has in many ways masked the crisis we face.

4. Multiple services. In some ways this is not really church planting unless the new service is targeting a new group of unchurched people.

5. Types of new churches:

- Café style – as with Vineyard at Mt. Maunganui
- Family worship style where children are fed - as at Omokoroa
- Primal Style as with Christian City Church, Auckland and St Peters
- “the gathering” style discussion, coffee, without worship songs but with inspirational items or focus.

The way ahead

There are a number of methods.

1. One is to have an intentional church planting plan as a denomination. That is, to use our national church structure and Assembly Assessment to decide where population growth is happening and be proactive about buying land for future development. (This was something the PD&M department did in the 60s.)

2. To enable and encourage presbyteries to have an intentional church planting strategy by making them responsible for what was once called the “mission and ministry” levy. In other words, the presbytery would collect the levy with the specific purpose of church planting.

3. To encourage large, growing churches adjacent to increasing population areas to see their mission as being proactive in planting new churches. The national church could encourage this by allocating a proportion of Assembly Assessment back to the church for a period of five years for the sole purpose of resourcing the planting of another church. This would be facilitating the establishment of “daughter congregations.”

4. To get real about churches in decline. We need to have presbyteries make realistic decisions about congregations in rural areas that are depopulating or city congregations that will never grow because their demographics are so different from their mission environment that they have the “smell of death” about them.

It is important that we get realistic. To grow a church that needs more than 5 percent of the population to attend is unrealistic unless there is a revival - and revival (in spite of visiting speakers’ prophecies) is not on the horizon. In fact, the realistic proportion is probably less than 3 percent for Presbyterian Churches.

In rural situations:

If it requires more than 5 percent of the population within the local area to form a viable church that can sustain ministry, then we should either:

1. Shut the church and encourage the people to attend another church in the area. (One denomination considers it okay for people to travel one hour to worship.)
2. If there are a number of parishes like this, amalgamate them into a circuit, have one minister serving the area with a travelling ministry and focus on lay leadership.
3. Focus entirely on lay leadership, as at Ngakuru. (If there isn’t any, then close the church). Have a ministry enabler to look after three to four parishes.

In urban situations:

In some churches, the demographics of the local congregation are so different from the population that it would be impossible to attract the community. If the area is healthy (that is, its population is stable and includes a demographic spread), we have these options:

1. Form a circuit amalgamating parishes together into one or two parishes within the area.
2. Employ a church planter to use the buildings that will now be made available.
3. Have a good number of people who have a heart for evangelism (at least 15 couples with children) move from a growing healthy congregation into the building. They then establish a new congregation with the church planter, who has spent time with them to establish a vision for the new work. They form a new leadership team without the past eldership but with the blessing of the sending church.
4. Close the church, sell the property and buy land in growing suburban areas where there is an influx of people.

Well, there you are; some ideas to chew on.

But let me say the time for action was yesterday. I’m convinced that every one of us has to adopt a church-planting mentality that sees the resources we have as part of a pool that can be used by anyone - any church, any presbytery - to further the Kingdom of God by establishing new churches. That has to become the bottom line for assessing what we will do with our funds and resources in the future.

Transition ministry: Serving the church

Chris Bedford*

Everyone knows what transition ministry is about, don't they? Yeah, right.

Transition ministry originated 25 years ago in the USA when a group of church leaders (including Alban Institute founder Loren Mead) saw the need to provide ministry during a pastoral vacancy that involved more than just keeping things ticking over. They founded the Interim Ministry Network, which is based in Maryland, USA. Check it out at www.imnedu.org.

The Interim Ministry Network provides high quality professional training, and accredits people who satisfactorily complete the three-phase course, which comprises two intensive week-long residential courses and an agreed practical programme between the residential phases.

What is transition ministry?

Transition ministry helps churches prepare for the next phase of their life by addressing issues that might hold them back in a new period of ministry. It helps them look ahead with a clear sense of purpose and direction.

Transition ministry is more than trouble-shooting. Certainly a qualified transition minister can help where there has been the loss of a long-term pastor, misconduct, death of a leader, or conflict within a congregation or between pastor and congregation.

But there's more to it than that. In the time between settled pastors, there is often the need to review a parish's changed circumstances and to ask questions about its mission and reason for being. Transition ministry can help a congregation re-focus, discover its present sense of identity, develop vision and goals, get rid of unhelpful baggage from the past and explore options for the future. Dealing with issues such as these during the time of a "vacancy" helps prepare a congregation for a successful ministry with its next called pastor.

Transition ministry is not simply a maintenance ministry to fill a temporary gap between one ministry and the next while the call process unfolds, or while someone is

on leave. It is ministry with specific "intentions" to be accomplished – these are goals identified by a presbytery or synod, by a parish review or visitation, or by the congregation's own leaders.

Normally a transition ministry would be 12–18 months but it may be as long as three years. There is a formal contract established between church and transition minister, and the transition minister is ineligible for long-term settled ministry in the parish they serve.

In our sister church, the Presbyterian Church of the USA (PCUSA), most presbyteries require vacant parishes to

use a qualified transition minister to help them with leadership, mission and ministry issues particular to their situation, and to help them prepare for their next pastor.

The PCUSA has a 300 member Association of Presbyterian Interim Ministry Specialists that focuses on transition ministry issues in that church. Check it out at www.apims.org

What do transition ministers do?

There are six "congregational tasks" that provide a framework for transition ministry with a parish. Particular issues such as conflict resolution or grief at the loss of a pastor are dealt with alongside these.

1. Telling our story

Church members are encouraged to look at their history and identify significant events and trends. As they recognise important themes and values in their past, they will prepare to look forward and commit to a new chapter in their parish story.

2. Discovering a present identity

In this task, parishes ask questions like "who are we and what do we stand for?" A sense of identity helps a congregation know what sort of pastor they need to help them fulfil the particular mission and witness that God is calling them to.

3. Exploring future directions

"What is the particular mission and witness God is call-

Transition ministry can help a congregation re-focus, discover its present sense of identity, get rid of unhelpful baggage from the past and explore options for the future

ing us to?” This is a vital question for any congregation. Church members are encouraged to think creatively and courageously, taking into account the make-up and giftings of their congregation, the nature of their community, and their willingness to take faith-spurred risks.

4. Encouraging new and renewed leadership

A time of ministry transition allows people to review and adjust their roles and provides an opportunity for new people to emerge as leaders.

5. Renewing denominational and ecumenical links

In this task, the congregation takes time to review its links with the wider church – locally, regionally, and nationally.

6. Committing to new leadership and future

Here the congregation is helped to prepare for and embrace the future, whether a new minister is being called or some other form of ministry will be undertaken. A high degree of ownership among the congregation of future church life is encouraged so that all can say “this is our church and our ministry”.

About 25 of your colleagues throughout New Zealand are accredited transition ministers. Several, such as

David North and Ruth Caughley, serve in positions formally tagged “transition ministry”. Others, such as Margaret Anne Low, are using their transition ministry training in settled ministry situations to help parishes over a longer time period to make changes for their future.

Presbyteries or boards of nomination may approach national mission enabler John Daniel and ask for the name of a suitable transition minister to work with a particular parish.

I enjoy the challenge of change, new adventures in ministry, helping churches face their future in the name of Christ, and I work best with short-term goals. I appreciate the high standards of professionalism required by the Interim Ministry Network. I’m glad to make the commitment to transition ministry.

**Chris Bedford completes his present transition ministry appointment at the end of this year. He is available for another position anywhere in New Zealand. Contact him at 09 296 8665 or cksrbedford@clear.net.nz if you’d like to discuss possibilities with him.*

One step forward, two steps back

David Coster, Cashmere Hills Presbyterian Church, Christchurch*

It was not too long after I had been inducted into Caversham Parish that the seed for what became known as Coastal Unity was planted. Not that we saw it that way at the time.

Few of us like imposition from on high, and having the Synod of Otago and Southland defer funding for Caversham and St Clair building projects in 1994 was like a bombshell being exploded in the midst of long-held and hard-worked-for dreams. The Synod expressed concern that both congregations were planning significant expenditure on old buildings and asked that discussions take place on common use of buildings.

That was the seed – money! If funding was to be forthcoming from the Synod, then St Clair and Caversham office bearers needed tangible evidence to present to Synod that the request was being given serious consideration. As St Clair was within hours of signing a contract and

Caversham had already signed a contract, to totally defer the projects was not an option. But what we agreed to was a covenant between the two parishes to promote growing together in a deeper way “through doing things that cannot be so effectively accomplished apart”. This included sharing resources, combined worship over the summer holidays, periodic meetings of office bearers, and agreeing to discuss working towards a formal union of the parishes. The Synod accepted the covenant and provided funding for both projects.

In 1997 Corstorphine–Concord parish office bearers approached St Clair and Caversham indicating that they were concerned for their future viability. They expressed the wish to close the parish and to offer their buildings for sale. A combined meeting of office bearers, after much discussion, agreed to work towards forming one parish with one session, one board of managers, one set of accounts and a team of ministers. But many in each of the

three parishes were afraid. Afraid that they would lose their sense of identity. Afraid they would lose their sense of family. Afraid they would lose their sense of intimacy and friendship. Afraid they would lose their independence and decision making.

The final outcome was that St Clair remained on its own while those who wished to from Corstorphine-Concord became part of the Caversham congregation. A number of those under the pastoral care of the Corstorphine-Concord chose not to join either St Clair or Caversham, with the whole evening congregation moving to another parish and becoming the nucleus of an evening outreach congregation there.

Though one combined parish was envisaged in 1997, this was not the outcome. St Clair and Caversham continued under the covenant.

If funding was the genesis for the idea of forming one parish, resignation and retirement became the “pruning” that finally brought Coastal Unity into being.

In 2001, the St Clair minister indicated he would be retiring from St Clair in early 2002 and the minister of Green Island lodged her resignation to take effect from Christmas Day 2001. The half-time mission assistant had already moved from Caversham to another full-time position. This left a situation where Caversham was seeking a half-time mission assistant, Green Island a half-time minister and St Clair a full-time minister. This was the dynamic that provided the impetus for what became known, after many attempts to find an acceptable name, as Coastal Unity Parish (CUP).

To say that the journey was a straightforward one would be a massive understatement. For every step forward, we seemed to take two steps back. By this I mean that office bearers and interested people would attend meetings and agree on a direction and timeline to present to the three congregations. But some of those who declined to attend the discussions continued “blocking manoeuvres” at the local level. For them, the fear of loss of local identity outweighed any benefits of amalgamation.

Finally in 2001 the three congregations voted by a majority (in two of the congregations there was a significant “no” vote) to combine into one parish with one session, one board of managers and one set of financial accounts.

What was envisaged seven years earlier finally came into being in a form, and through circumstances, that we could not have envisaged at that earlier date!

Some learnings:

- It takes time for people to trust others’ motives. Therefore don’t rush the process. Time spent bringing people on board is not time wasted.

Don’t expect 100 percent agreement

- Don’t expect 100 percent agreement.

People will use

various means to dissuade others from proceeding and some may leave the church. (My experience is that those who did leave were not regularly at worship anyway.)

- Financial control is power. Therefore make sure that the accounts in any amalgamation are combined into one set of accounts, with one treasurer accountable to one board of managers or parish council. To not do this is to dissipate financial accountability and leave financial control with the local property committee.

- Legacies specifically left to a congregation remain for the use of that congregation, unless that particular congregation votes to make them available to the wider parish.

- The allegiance of most people remained to the local congregation of St Clair, Caversham or Green Island. It has taken time for people to identify with Coastal Unity as an entity. Because of this people are more willing to serve on local committees rather than on a Coastal Unity committee.

- Identification with Coastal Unity tends to come from the leadership.

- Having the combined resources of three congregations (two of which were able to sustain full-time ministry) enabled programmes and activities that would not have been contemplated prior to amalgamation. This also allowed a ministry team to be established with delegation of responsibility dependant on the skills and abilities of each of the members of the team.

- Theological affinity is as important as geographical proximity.

**David Coster is a former minister of Caversham and Coastal Unity, Dunedin.*

Moving on and reaching out

Mo Mansill, national youth coordinator

My Dad lived in the same house all his life till he went to university. He went to one primary school, one intermediate, one high school and then on to university, all in the same city. I moved five times with my family before I moved out of home at the age of 20. Since then, I've continued to move around a lot. Last year I moved into my eighth new home in 8 years. I've always been a transient person – my home is with people rather than places. I've probably moved more than most, but the reality is, that my experience of moving so often is not that unusual. Younger generations today are moving more than ever before – try comparing how much older members of your church have moved compared with the young people in your youth group.

Like the last seven, move number eight was not just a practical hassle. I found myself feeling a bit emotional, although I couldn't really pinpoint why. One thing I've worked out after so much moving, though, is that there is emotional baggage tied up in moving on — stuff you leave behind, and hopes and fears of what's before you... I've been told that for some people, moving can conjure up grief that is the equivalent of someone close to them dying. Certainly for many, it can involve feeling unsettled, uncertain and lonely for a period of time.

Every year some of the young people we care for move on – particularly at this time of year. It is a key time for us to show our love, care and support, and there are ways in which we can do that:

Presbytality

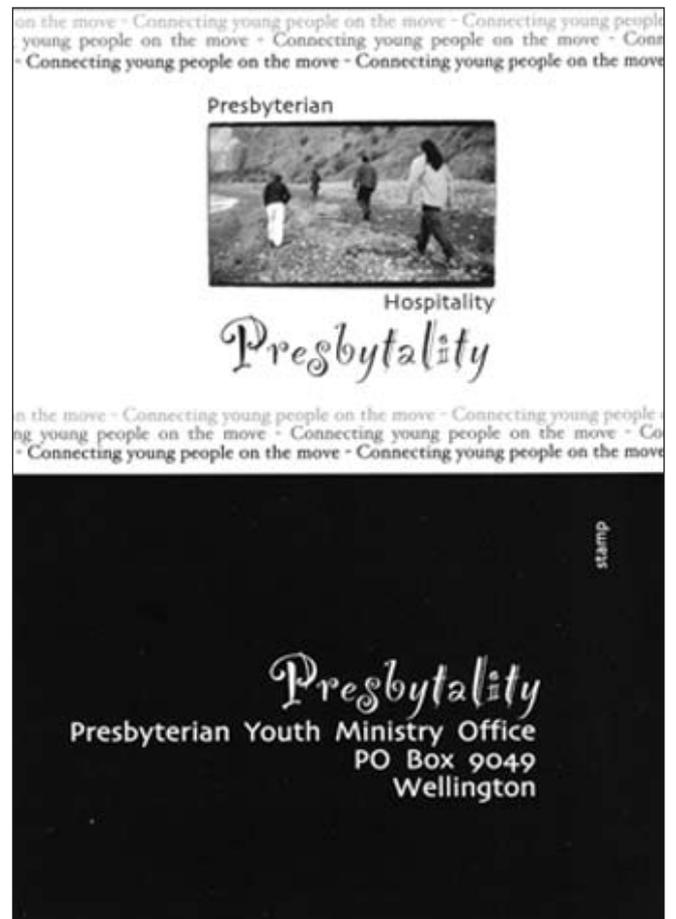
One of the times when our young people dip out on God is when they finish school and move to a new place. Finding a new church often gets pushed down the priority list as other things become more exciting. Alternatively, many students find themselves lonely, isolated and overwhelmed. One of the perks of being Christian is that members of the tribe are everywhere. What better way to show our Christian tribal colours than by showing some hospitality to our young people as they leap into a big new chapter in a big new place in their lives?

Presbytality is about connecting young people on the move with youth workers/leaders they can relate to in their new home. It's about offering young people the opportunity to link up with a new church if they want to, but mostly, it's just about offering hospitality. Linking young

people up with a youth worker who will take them out for a coffee and be someone they can catch up with in a new city.

How it works:

If you want to link up someone who's moving on from your church with a friendly face in a new city, drop an email to: mo.mansill@presbyterian.org.nz and we'll send you a Presbytality postcard (pictured below). Fill it in, send it back to us, and we'll put them in touch with a nice (normal) Pressie who'll take them out for coffee.



Fuel for dreaming: Moving On

Last year the PYM office did an issue of *Fuel* magazine which looked at young people at times of transition. It's full of ideas, thoughts, reflections to give you ways of helping people through times of transition in their lives. You can read it here: www.presbyterian.org.nz/fuel or email us at the PYM office for a back copy.

An ordinand's finishing thoughts

Nathan Parry*

In the beginning was the ordinand, and the ordinand was void and formless (apart from the pre-requisite 1½ degrees plus 0-15 years of lay ministry experience, depending on the particular ordinand); and the spirit of God was moving over their life giving them a sense of “calling” that they spent a year getting “discerned” by various church courts before going to Dunedin.

Then the School of Ministry said “let there be classes of Worship, Christian Nurture/Education, and Theological Reflection” – and it was so. And there was a weeping and a gnashing of teeth from some of the ordinands from charismatic backgrounds ‘cos they had to learn big words like “epiclesis” and they found out that the way they’d been doing communion for the last umpteen years wasn’t right, and anyway they shouldn’t have been doing it ‘cos they weren’t ordained yet! But on the whole they looked back and saw that it was good. And it was holidays, the end of the first semester.

And lo, three more semesters did follow in quick succession... The next was fieldwork, where ordinands are sent out to work either in Pressie churches around Dunedin or other ministries like Synod office, university chaplaincy or just following John Daniel around carrying his briefcase and shining his shoes. I was allowed to do mine in a local Baptist church because they had a special focus on Celtic services.

First semester of the second year was back to classes, this time preaching, leadership in congregations, and reformed church history – all very good. All the semesters here are peppered with intensives and block courses as well, on topics such as Te Aka Puaho, cooperating parishes, charring meetings, sexual abuse, mission in contemporary NZ, the Treaty, church polity, rural ministry, conflict resolution, PI Synod etc... We were also sent off on a cross-cultural placement for a while over summer.

For me the last semester has been working as a chaplain intern for Clinical Pastoral Education. Again there are a variety of placements at the hospital, prison, psych wards, Presbyterian Support or various other community-based support groups.

The two years here have all been very challenging and formative, with plenty of opportunities for reflection and a large practical component to put what we’ve learned

into practice. Also, on top of all of the above, we have to present a “synthesis” before we graduate that is sent to our home presbytery for assessment (the regulations say 6,000 words but mine managed to hit 26,000 – and wasn’t the longest!). But now, the biggest challenge of all! Transitioning from this time of formation into real-life parish ministry!!!

As someone who went to Dunedin with no parish ministry experience, thankfully I can say I leave confident that I’ve got a good grounding and a solid basis for life as a minister. Naturally I still have much to learn. Most of the topics have to be covered very briefly given the time constraints, and there is much to cram into the two years, but at least I feel I know what areas I need to do further study in.

My first funeral or request for pre-marriage counselling will cause me great stress, I’m sure – but this is when we pray that our future parish contains a retired minister, or that there is someone with the time to mentor us in our presbytery.

Another point of stress for graduating ordinands can be the process of getting called to a church itself. The year is drawing to a close and very shortly we will find ourselves without houses and without incomes, a difficult situation to be in if you have children but have yet to find a parish. If boards of nomination could bear that in mind, it’d make the process of finishing up at the SoM much more pleasant.

This could result in simple things such as:

1. Vacant parishes who could handle a new grad (bearing in mind that nearly all have had significant ministry experience) using the established process and sending their profiles to the Introductory Workgroup.
2. I know your board only meets every 2 months, but you have a student who’s interested and will be homeless by then! Could you possibly show mercy and have a special meeting early?
3. It probably makes sense from a parish perspective to get a student interested in your profile as a backup just in case the minister you really want turns you down. But the time wasted by the ordinand thinking

that they've got a potential job can translate into a few months living in a cardboard box under a bridge in the new year.

4. We all trust God, that's why we're here! It's still nice to know what's going on though, and regular communication and updates are appreciated.
5. The Board of Nomination I met with was very organised and had prepared five questions to ask me that

gave them a good perspective on my theology, personality and ministry style. We've already had five years of theology exams and having our beliefs regularly challenged: billions of probing questions just when we think it's finished might send us into shell-shock!

**Nathan Parry will be licensed in South Auckland in November and starts his ministry at Island Bay Presbyterian Church, Wellington, in February 2006.*

Making the transition to ministry

Andrew Scott

In a way, I am probably not the best person to be writing this article. I may have graduated from the School of Ministry, but the study goes on, and on... You get the picture.

I was asked by a current ordinand the other day if I thought they were ready for ministry. Without thinking, my reply was, "no, but you will be when the time comes". I had never really thought about it that way before. It struck me that the two years we spend at the School of Ministry (SoM) is an incredibly privileged time-out that God uses to grow us in all kinds of ways. For some of us, the SoM seems like a not-so-private hell on earth, while for others it is the opportunity of a lifetime. Most of us fall somewhere in between the two extremes.

I spent most of my time at SoM thinking of it as the opportunity of a lifetime. Then, as we wound toward the end of our two years, I began to champ at the bit. As far as I was concerned, I had done what I came for; now it was time to climb back into the real world and put all the bookwork into action. In the end, I walked away with something akin to a sigh of relief mixed with a whoop of anticipation. It had been a good time, a growing time and now it was time to look forward.

Of course, the job-hunting process didn't help me to feel settled. Beginning in about May of the final year, each ordinand starts the process of being matched with a parish. The Introductions Committee does a fantastic job (I have to say that, I'm part of the committee this year), but the tension involved in working through the possibilities begins in May and doesn't let up until you are in your parish. For some, this is a relatively simple process.

For those who work through multiple possibilities before finding the right match, it can be a stress-filled venture. Fairly early on in the process, Ruth and I had chosen to follow a different path by looking for part-time work while I finished the honours part of my Theology degree. To be honest, that decision made no difference to our stress factor. No matter what our end goal, the thought of moving into what amounts to the great unknown — actually doing what you have spent so long studying for — holds equal portions of excitement and fear, tinged with regret at moving away from people who have become good friends and valued colleagues.

Our decision to finish my study meant that when the opportunity to apply for a part-time lay position as youth pastor at Kaikorai Presbyterian arose, we leapt at it. The fact we had been doing the job voluntarily while at the SoM can't have hurt our chances in the application process. While it meant that I wouldn't be ordained in the foreseeable future, it did give the opportunity to get into ministry and to do those last papers at the same time. The only problem was that the job didn't start until February of the following year. And we had to eat between SoM ending in November and my job beginning in February.

Casting around a little, I was offered a three-month summer-supply position in Winton. What a blessing to have a good blowout after so much study, and to get paid for it as well. It was almost like coming home, even though I had never been to Winton and never ministered in a true rural parish. I was finally doing what I had spent 10 years of my life studying for - and a lot longer than that working up to. The joy of preaching regularly, of visiting, praying with people, encouraging and being encouraged

was amazing. It helped that I wasn't dumped into a new parish on my own, with senior minister Neville Jackson around for most of my time there. The opportunity to work collegially with another minister in the same parish was another blessing that I think every new minister should have the pleasure of experiencing.

By the time I got back to Dunedin, the year was in full swing. I had travelled between Winton and Dunedin several times in the final few weeks to get the youth group underway, and so it was a little like slipping from one room to another with no real transitioning. The hardest bit was picking back up on the study side of things. There is no small level of frustration involved in really wanting to put your full efforts into just one thing and knowing that you can't.

So what about endings and beginnings? It is tempting to describe the School of Ministry as a necessary evil on the path to becoming an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. I don't think that is fair to the staff, the students or indeed to the concept of

the school itself. I gained huge benefits from coming to Dunedin and putting 100 percent into learning as much as I could. That means that for all its faults, and there are plenty, there was a sadness in leaving the School of Ministry. Friends and colleagues have moved on to positions around the country and the atmosphere of constant challenge to my ideas and opinions is something I miss.

By the same token, there are all the new challenges of beginning new ministries. I have planted a new youth group in Brockville, play basketball and touch as an outreach with youngsters in the community, organise Dunedin-wide youth group events, and train young leaders. All of that means that I have little time to dwell on the past other than to be grateful for the opportunities I have been given. I am absolutely convinced that God is consistently calling me to move out of my comfort zone and attempt new things for the Kingdom. In that way, there is an ending and a beginning every day, and new things to learn and attempt at every opportunity. What an exciting way to live life!

Risking New Zealand beginnings

Fyfe Blair, Highgate Presbyterian Church, Dunedin

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our explorations
will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
T.S. Eliot, "The Four Quartets"*

A TVNZ programme looked at a series of New Zealand explorers who sought to open up new areas and discover new territories. Their steps were retraced and diary notes read, revealing something of the less romanticised notions of being an explorer, the problems, the pains, the life-threatening hardships of terrain and weather changes and more. One only has to read King's *History of New Zealand* or most recently look at the series "Frontier of Dreams" to begin to appreciate how exploration has, and continues to be, shaping and affords us the excitement of continuing to "know the place for the first time". It is what seems to be expressed in the No.8 wire attitude! *We shall not cease from exploration...*

My own journey in ministry seems to have been about risking beginnings and having a keen sense of wanting

to keep learning, exploring and growing. So, after nearly 10 years in a joint (linked) "traditional" Church of Scotland parish near St Andrews, I undertook a call to begin a church plant (New Church Development) in Cove on the south side of Aberdeen.

As at other points in my life, this was like starting again and knowing so much for the first time. I had to learn new ways and new patterns as I was now placed in a sort of "space" between church and culture. I confess I loved every minute of it, though it was not all easy terrain to explore and map out. There were the sacrifices and costs. After nearly seven years, the question was "what next?" *We shall not cease from exploration...*

Then whispers of fresh explorations beginning in Dunedin, of something called the Highgate Project (Roslyn and Maori Hill). Interested? After much deep searching and conversations, a 10-day trip to meet one another and see, we accepted the call, started packing up, saying our numerous farewells.

We arrived in Dunedin in April 2005 as a family. The Highgate Project had become the Highgate Mission, no longer an add-on, but all encompassing of our whole life and witness. We have had a whirlwind of changes structurally as we have explored what it means to be a missionary congregation in our place. I find that it is quite liberating to be in ministry here that is free from the many parish demands that operate under the Scottish parish system. Accordingly, I think that it means the culture can be engaged on very different terms. Some 18 months later, we continue to explore the unmapped territory, seeking to live towards a fresh vision. *We shall not cease from exploration...*

On a wider note, I confess that while I have appreciated the exploratory attitude and the excited calls to mission, it has been a shock to see just how dysfunctional and in disarray our national structures are, with all the implications of how this affects the church on the ground. Callum Brown in his book *the Death of Christian Britain* wrote of how the church in Britain was showing the world how religion dies. Michael Jenkins has something similar in his book, *The Death of the Church*; and similar analysis is shared by Kevin Ward, Alan Jamieson and others here. It seems to me that just as the land has many fault lines of tension, the Church has several running through and across each other. In particular, I note a sense of tension between what I regard as “inherited” Presbyterianism, the legacy of what it means, and is, to be Presbyterian, and the sense of “everything done in good order”. This is in tension with the pressing missionary context that is New Zealand today and the calls to mission with a “No.8 wire” attitude. *We shall not cease from exploration...*

Amid the culture shifts we encounter today, it seems to me that we need to keep exploring; re-interpreting our text and tradition amidst the fragmentation of our culture, and to begin remapping. Walter Brueggemann speaks of Exodus and Resurrection and offers the imagery of call to “leave the brickyard in order to trust in the wilderness”. (*Living toward a Vision*, p166). Such abandonment of the safe and secure is a less demanding place to be in. But equally it is the place where we are nameless, without purpose, only moving in mindless productivity, and have no value questions but only more bricks and quotas. I fear that we may feel trapped in whatever “brickyards” we are in, accompanied by a general sense of fatigue, weariness, if not hopelessness. Can we leave to trust in the wilderness?

If we look at ancient maps we would quickly realise how inadequate they are for us today. However, when cartographers came to the end of the known world they would

often print on the map “Beyond here be dragons”. I think that even looking out into the present wilderness has that same frightening sense of the unknown. Maybe the old maps don’t fit anymore, not simply because they are old, but because the fault lines have shifted so much that the land (society/culture) itself has shifted and changed the landscape in which we minister and witness. I would also say that our European mapping is still very linear and rationalistic; it works according to calculations, angles, distances, shapes. On the other hand, ancient native maps tend to conserve connectivity, the relationship of people, land and places. Maybe we need to understand our connectivity, and to do this vitally, with the mission we are called to be part of in New Zealand. It isn’t our lineage nor particular history, but our present responsiveness to “leave the brickyard in order to trust in the wilderness” that is the issue.

I was privileged to be part of the early years of New Church Development in Scotland and to be on the ground mapping new territory. Alongside others and from lessons learned, I was putting together the sort of things that would shape the overall church planting process and direction. We find ourselves placed at a new frontier of dreams, at the threshold between the poles of old order and potential chaos of newness. It necessarily means living in the place of paradox, which is a place of immense risk, but also new beginnings. Indeed, as Darrel Guder states;

*“The beginnings we must risk, and which we can risk, are all, by virtue of God’s revealing and empowering address to us, decisions. The Gospel confronts us as it has done since Pentecost, with the decision to respond with obedience to claim that Jesus Christ is Lord. It is His word that summons us to a life of witness, and to become a community that leads a life worthy of the calling to which it has been called... and we too can risk the beginnings of penitent response and transformed minds and hopeful walking in a new direction.”*¹

It is my personal belief that we need to encourage one another; we need a connectivity; we need to risk the beginnings of leaving to explore and trust in the wilderness. Perhaps then we may discover the “places” we are placed in for the first time. We shall not cease from exploration.... I nga ra o mua (walking forward, looking back)

References

¹ Guder D. Inaugural Lecture as Peachtree Professor of Evangelism and Church growth. Columbia Theological seminary 28 March, 2000. *Risking Beginnings: Mission and Evangelism after Christendom*. p10.

Telling your church good-bye

Contributor's name withheld by request

I have just had it announced to my second congregation that I have taken up a call in another town. The disappointment is being expressed and the sorrow is evident in the eyes of those whose hands I shake once again at the door.

“We are sorry to lose you”; “we don’t want you to go”; “you will be greatly missed.” What does one say at such a time? I generally say nothing. The one response that I really appreciated was: “been nice to know ya, see ya later”. From a pragmatic farmer who has seen them come and go many times before. I could laugh at that and give him a poke in the ribs and a cheerful “see ya round”.

On the other side is the new congregation, saying encouraging things like “we can’t wait until you arrive”; “it will be so good to have you come and have a minister again”; “now great things will happen”; “now we will stop the drift away and start to build up our numbers again” (not necessarily); “we are so looking forward to having you and your lovely wife living in the manse” (so is the wife, it’s only two years old, after all).

Endings and beginnings – quite common in the ministry. Some express the impossibility of moving from the area

that they have always lived in. Others, like the school principal, expressed the desire to move every year if he could, as he loved to move. (I didn’t ask his wife her response to his statement.)

There was teaching around years ago that talked about missionaries, pioneers and settlers. Missionaries come for a short time to do a job or part of a job and then go. Pioneers love to start new adventures, new ministries, and lead in new directions but get restless with the day-to-day running, the minutes of the last meeting and the AGMs. Settlers are there for the long haul, for their generation and their children’s children’s generation. They draw upon the strength and stability of well-constructed relationships and communities.

It’s just as well that God made us all different, for though I don’t like the process of leaving, the disappointment and sorrow in the eyes, I thrive upon the new place, the new scenes, the new people, the new adventures the new prospects, and the new gifts and abilities that are both operating and yet to be uncovered in people.

Endings and beginnings: yes, please, keep them rolling, I love ‘em!

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Ministry's comings and goings

Rachel Judge, St David's Union Church, Ashburton

It amuses and delights me when I hear at a funeral the strong assurance at the end of Psalm 121 –

*"The Lord will keep you from all evil;
He will keep your life.*

*The Lord will keep your going out and your coming
in from this time on and for evermore."*

It's that topsy-turvy, upside-down quality again of God's ways with us.

For some at that time of farewell, it will seem that the world has ended but as Christians we want to proclaim loudly then, even then, that God is with us. We are protected. We are not alone. God notices everything about us and cares

for every detail of our lives. Jesus also reminds us of this inclusive, intimate knowledge of us, in Luke 12: 6, 7 –

"Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies?

Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight?

But even the hairs of your head are all counted.

Do not be afraid: you are of more value than many sparrows."

God's promise to us in our call to ministry is also to take care of the details, and prepare the ground for ministry for us as we move from one place to another.

I've been the new minister in four parishes now, and the smoother part of the process is in the arrival and settling in to the new parish – the testing times are invariably earlier in the process while negotiating with a board of nomination secretly, as we continue to minister where we are. It's plain unsettling, and hasn't really become easier over time.

Some paths I've found helpful to take to smooth the process are: undertaking a careful and thorough inventory of the new parish before deciding. We all have our own levels of tolerance for various "unpleasant elements" in ministry. Alan and I have found it helpful to be aware of what we can and can't cope with when coming to a new parish.

While at a rural ministry event some years ago, during a steep learning curve while trying to settle into our first

full-on country parish, we stayed with some dairy farmers near Harihari who had consciously chosen to farm on the West Coast. Yes, they knew it would be wet – at that time they were going crazy following 13 months of rain pretty much most days. They knew each region has something that makes farming difficult – excessive winds, city encroaching, parching droughts, bucketing rain, or poor soil conditions.

They consciously chose the negative in farming that they felt they could best cope with, and stayed well clear of what they would experience as difficult – drought conditions. We all figured they'd be safe from that worry on the Coast!

Likewise in parishes and communities, it's a matter of matching up your personality traits, knowing what really presses your buttons when you're under pressure, and being self-aware enough to understand what sort of support you require to help you function well in ministry. Having some idea where you're comfortable accessing that help from is also useful.

Some of us as clergy and lay leaders thrive on a family-like, "in-house" style of ministry where we're happy to be vulnerable with some other leaders and give and receive feedback within a team environment. Others of us prefer more distance and will seek support from those outside the parish and place high priority on good quality supervision.

Some ministers and parishes seem to thrive on conflict, but we know that those parishes aren't for us. Our personalities work better under pressure when there is some nurturing available, without being molly-coddled, or at least when vital energy is not being siphoned off by constantly extinguishing fires of conflict.

I guess it all boils down to self-awareness, and how much pressure you want to carry. Our approach to choosing parishes is a cautious one, which means we weigh overtures from parishes very carefully, with much prayer, and then don't necessarily land up in spots that others would

The testing times are invariably earlier in the process while negotiating with a board of nomination secretly, as we continue to minister where we are

hanker after. The parish, particularly its key leaders, not its geographical or sociological setting has always been our focus when seeking God's guidance about a move.

Then when the decision is made and we feel comfortable that God is in it, we're reasonably intentional, as well as lax in communication, about letting go from ties in one parish so that we and they are able to move on. It's been far from easy, but I think it's necessary. I've so much appreciated that the colleagues who've preceded me in parishes have themselves let go of pastoral ties and maintained appropriate links with the parish, thus allowing me to form pastoral relationships and offer leadership.

The "variety's the spice of life" factor has also been a help in continuing to enjoy parish ministry in different places. I greatly admire people who adapt easily to a number of fresh careers through life, as many are doing now, and also those ministers who work within totally different fields at various times – chaplaincies, academic teaching,

overseas mission work, church planting and youth work, for instance.

While up to this point, God has called me to stay within parish ministry, I have appreciated the opportunities for new thrusts and extra ministry in each place. Workplace support, state school chaplaincy, rural ministry, ecumenical involvement and offering supervision to other church workers and clergy have been highlights for me within parish work. Again we each find what floats our own boat on the big sea of service to God. Parishes may not always appreciate our involvement in the wider church or our service in the community, but the picture is always bigger and more complex than one or two people can see, and stimulation is vital if we are to remain sane in ministry.

Ah, sanity in ministry!
Friend or foe?
Time will tell.

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Farewell to a house of worship

John Cromarty, Taihape-Waimarino Presbyterian Parish

On the back road from Hunterville to Fielding along Route 54, just before one climbs the long hill to Stormy Point, one comes across the tiny group of buildings known as Rewa. The pottery shop is advertised and opposite it is a fresh vegetable stall. Back down the side road a short way is the local church.

It's the usual steep roofed building with a central isle, a raised platform for the communion table, a pulpit on the left and the treadle organ on the right. There's a room out the back for the preacher to get changed and a porch tacked on the front. It's part of the Hunterville parish and used but once a year for a St Andrew's day service, which might attract six to eight people in a very good year.

On 18 September 2005, this church was formally decommissioned and the keys handed over to new owners who intend to convert it into a residence/holiday batch. The pipe band turned up with their pipes and drums, and the scattered congregation arrived from miles around. Many are still involved in churches within the Manawatu and Hawkes Bay areas but almost all moved away from the peace and quiet of the Rewa valley long ago.

The church was packed; all 80 seats full for the first and last time in many years. What was surprising and heart-wrenching were the ties to the building and congregation that were represented that day.

Women who had been baptised as infants, the last couple married in that church, organists of the past, ex-ministers and ex-ministers' families, sons and daughters, children of the original builders, Sunday school teachers and pupils.

There were those who had attended the Bible class in the congregation's hey day, when they met in the manse with the resident minister and played in the hall, both long demolished. Those who recalled Communion Sundays when the children were let out early to play while the adults had the elements. Or the time one of the local wags locked the parish council in the church after a meeting; the time when only the minister and one local turned up for a service, so they took their chairs outside under the plum tree and had a chat and prayer service.

The elements were carried out, the door was locked, the final benediction was said and the key was ceremoni-

ously handed over to the new owners, with prayers for blessings upon them and all who use the building in the future.

The Rewa Presbyterian Church building is sanctified and dedicated exclusively for the Lord's purposes no more but the congregation goes on. Memories, ceremonies, times of meeting with God and fellow believers slowly fade as the generations pass.

One would never dream that such an insignificant and humble building way out in the country with a seven-strand barbed wire fence could ever have been the focal point of so many God incidences. How then do we measure the importance of our important places, and the totality of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand nationwide?

Bush Telegraph

Is your parish on the list?

Bush Telegraph is sent out by email on the 1st of every month. It contains updates from the Moderator and Assembly service team, information about new resources, a noticeboard, the latest job vacancies and news about events around the country.

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If you can't receive information by email, contact Amanda Wells to discuss alternative arrangements (04 381-8285).

Make sure you're receiving the Church's monthly news update.

The story of Blueskin Union

Susan Jones, Opoho Presbyterian Parish, Dunedin

Closing a church is never a pleasure, though there can be satisfaction if closure on all levels is achieved well.

Warrington was the location of the Blueskin Union Church, the last remnant of a circuit of churches around Blueskin Bay, Waitati, just north of Dunedin. Furniture from Waitati and Seacliff spoke to that, as we found when we took inventory. People complain about hard pews but rush to buy when they are sold. People stay away from church, but criticise when it is sold or are the first to tender for the property!

Blueskin Union had money invested from the sale of a manse. With the interest, they could pay someone to mow the lawns and for a minister to preach monthly. However, at the beginning of 2003, only nine regularly attended. Throughout the 2003/4 year, three key couples moved away, leaving three members remaining.

It was as difficult to persuade three people that their beloved church should close as it might have been to persuade 30. They had long standing ties with the place. They valued the ecumenical nature of the church (though dispute over their union status added to the difficulties of the transition). Dealing with a parish, a presbytery and the local representatives of co-operative ventures was like assembling a jigsaw.

First Blueskin Union moved under the care of Knox Church Dunedin, the only church in Dunedin Presbytery that responded to a call for pastoral oversight. A service of thanksgiving marked this transition, with representatives from presbytery, the receiving church and the Forum for Cooperative Ventures. We negotiated, through a storm of misunderstanding, an extra three months for achieving the transition to closure. We needed that for the members to at last feel it was time to let go. The final service included some returnees, the present members, Knox people, presbytery and Synod representation. Ironically, the church was almost full. We took out the symbols, such as the baptismal register, marriage register, cross and chalice, and locked the door.

The church was advertised and sold. Some furniture was returned to the Methodists, small items of significance were given to the present members and the rest sold. This required sheer brute force, and many cars and trailers. Some money was reserved for awards to be made for "life-enhancing" projects within the Blueskin Bay area.

The sadnesses: first, one member regretted return to what she called "sectarianism" - to a single denomination - and did not make the transition to a Presbyterian church, relying on an ecumenical Bible study group in the area. Second, though local Anglicans offered a home,

the three members had different resources on which they could rely for Christian nourishment. Third, the area is now burgeoning with new subdivisions and increased numbers of sought after holiday houses. Could the church have risen again in the community with vision and creative use of resources? This is the question now sitting in the mind.

We gave the recent past a good send off. We closed the church, but it still graces the small village with its Tudor-style half-framing and its spire. It is still a symbol of God in that place, now owned by private owners. What will be done in that community for the future in God's name? Presbyterianism seems to have sidestepped having a part in that. The nourishing of Christian spirituality in that area is left to Anglican hands and to the community.

It was as difficult to persuade three people that their beloved church should close as it might have been to persuade 30

Rreviews and letters to the editor are very welcome. Please email candour@presbyterian.org.nz or post to Candour, PO Box 9049, Wellington, making it clear that your text is intended for publication.

Morality and mortality

Jim Wallace, Bethlehem Community Church, Tauranga

Recently there have been a number of articles about HIV/AIDS in the papers. Much of the discussion by columnists and on talkback radio has arisen because of Judge Susan Thomas's decision that a man who was HIV positive did not need to inform his partner, whom he had met over the internet, of his HIV status because he wore a condom during sex. The judge accepted current medical opinion that condoms provide adequate protection against transmission of the disease. However, it has to be noted that, according to research published in *Investigate Magazine*, condoms do not provide adequate protection for other sexually transmitted diseases.

In the same week, I listened to a lecture by Helen Green, the executive director of World Vision New Zealand, given to the Bay of Plenty presbytery. She spoke about HIV/AIDS in Africa. I want to thank her for this information because many of us in New Zealand do not realise HIV/AIDS is such a global crisis. Here are some facts: 22 million people have died from AIDS-related causes, and more than 42 million are currently infected. More than 4.3 million children have died from AIDS-related causes, and more than 2.7 million are currently infected. Putting this into perspective, every day 1600 children die of AIDS and 2200 children are infected with HIV.

Compare this to the huge precautions and publicity given the predicted Avian Flu pandemic. At the time of writing, only 60 people have died from this – far below even AIDS' daily toll. But 95 percent of those infected with HIV live in developing countries and perhaps this is why the Western media remains relatively silent.

More than 70 percent of those infected with HIV/AIDS live in sub-Saharan Africa. The figures for the Northern African region are unknown because the predominantly Muslim governments will not acknowledge the problem. Nearly 90 percent of AIDS cases occur among people in their 20s, 30s, or 40s; wiping out entire generations of providers and nurturers for children. By 2010, it is estimated that AIDS will leave 25 million orphans in Africa alone. In 2002, 19.2 million women were living with HIV. Women account for 50 percent of all HIV-infected adults worldwide and 58 percent of all adult infections in Africa.

Now I guess you are wondering what this has got to do with the recent decision by Judge Thomas. I think it has

everything to do with it. We are deluding ourselves if we think this sort of crisis could not happen in New Zealand. Health professionals are already warning of the increase in HIV cases as a result of casual sex practices and internet dating. AIDS is here; I've conducted the funerals of some who have died. As far as I am concerned, safe sex practices must become fundamental to relationships and talked about in youth groups.

I believe the man in Judge Thomas's case was, at the very least, morally obliged to inform his partner of his HIV status and also to tell her whether or not he had any other sexually transmitted disease. Moreover the young woman should have asked! In fact, every person who thinks it is their right to engage in casual, promiscuous sex should ask the question "Do you have AIDS or any other sexually transmitted disease?" It takes the romantic gloss off casual sex practices and hot and steamy one-night stands, doesn't it? It makes the safest sex practice of all — that of abstaining until you are married — much more appealing. These days, I also suggest all couples getting married should take an HIV/AIDS test.

Of course, liberal commentators will make their snide comments and poke fun at young Christians who choose to abstain from sex until they are married. Let them ridicule — people ridiculed Jesus too. And sure some young people will fail to live up to this high standard: they should make sure they use condoms. Personally, I encourage young people to aim high. If they don't try for high moral standards, they will slip down to the lowest common denominator. Maybe they can set an example to jaded, worn out, sexually permissive, and cynical baby boomers.

Young Christians can have a beautiful, fresh optimism and determination to form wholesome relationships. The Bible's teaching on chastity before marriage and faithfulness afterward are not a rules that stop people having fun; they protect us from stupid decisions and dangerous sexual behaviour!

Interestingly, the one bright spot in the rather bleak African AIDS landscape is Uganda. There they are promoting the ABC method of safe sexual practices: A = abstain until you are married. B = be faithful to your spouse. C = adopt Christian values and/or use a condom.