

CANDOUR

News and Views for Ministers

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Services and Worship

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Noticeboard

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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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Glen Innis Vacancies

November 20-27	Homestead
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December 4-11	Cottage
December 11-18	Homestead/Cottage
January 15-22	Cottage
January 29-February 5	Homestead/Cottage

To enquire about vacancies, please email glen.innis@xtra.co.nz or telephone 06 855-4889. Ministers are welcome to inquire regarding vacancies due to cancellations.

Worship Resource Bank

Many of us who prepare worship are interested in both having access to other people's ideas and to sharing our own resources with others.

One way in which we can do this is through the worship resource bank which is being developed at www.presbyterian.org.nz.

Our hope is that worship leaders will e-mail us the worship resource(s) they have created. We will post it under what seems like the most appropriate category so that others can access and use it. We would also be happy to receive recommendations of worship resource websites which we can also post as a link on the site.

If you go to www.presbyterian.org.nz, then to "minister's resources" and then to the "worship resource bank" you will see the topics which we are hoping to stock with resources and web-links.

- a. Theology of worship
- b. Calls to worship and benedictions
- c. Prayers
- d. Worship and sermon preparation
- e. Communion
- f. Baptism and confirmation
- g. Music
- h. Youth
- i. Children
- j. Drama
- k. Funerals and memorial services
- l. Wedding
- m. Alternative worship
- n. Ordination/induction services
- o. Blessing and other service liturgies

Seasonal resources will also appear on the resource bank. Any resources you would be willing to share with others on these themes would be gladly received.

Contributions can be sent to Sharon Ensor: ministerwpc@xtra.co.nz
(04) 472-6402.

Serving those on the outside

Amanda Wells

Sundays are our bread and butter; where people gather to meet, worship and hopefully become equipped to face their working week.

I'm finding it difficult to think of anything useful to say about services. Instead, I start thinking how it's funny that while you can go to hundreds of services, remembering individual instances proves hard.

The services that stay in my mind are those out of the norm of my experience; worship at Taize, alternative DJ-led meditation at Greenbelt, a Catholic service I stumbled across in an Anglican cathedral. By definition, you can't re-create the unusual on a weekly basis.

But these were all circumstances in which I was an outsider; a visitor not accustomed to the norms of the worshipping community. If I'd felt awkward, I wouldn't remember them positively. Maybe that's why I particularly remember them.

I know I've been an insider at services to which I would feel extremely reluctant to bring a guest. Too many of these to remember, perhaps. So many of our church trap-pings only make people unfamiliar with them feel confused, uncomfortable and threatened.

Even singing falls into this category. Once you've left school, and aren't one of the extreme minority who belong to a choir or vocal group, how often do you actually sing? Maybe at rock concerts, but going to more than a couple a year is pretty unusual in New Zealand. Singing round camp fires just doesn't happen to my generation.

If you can cope with the singing, what about the words? I've read a lot of stuff lately about the feminising of Christian culture; how worship couched as love songs repels men and undermines what have been traditional masculine values. While I don't necessarily agree with all of this, and think it's not only men who have problems with the love-song-emphasis overload, how many new men do you see turning up in church on Sunday?

But it's not just the words of our songs (or hymns, if they're your preference). It's the Christian dialect in which we unthinkingly converse. Being part of the Christian culture can be like living a double life, with a set of vocabulary that serves another purpose entirely from

your secular conversation. "Grace", being "saved" and "redemption" are obvious examples, but what about the meanings we apply to "love", "sin" and "serve". Try explaining those to a person who doesn't share your conceptual foundation. Someone recently explained to me that "servant" had only negative connotations and he couldn't relate to it. I found it interesting to realise I felt the opposite because of the concept's intimate association in my head with Jesus; but I struggled to explain this without introducing more problematic terms.

I'm always shocked to realise that many of my contemporaries have never attended a church service, apart from a marriage or funeral. Sometimes the only theoretical framework they have for what happens on a Sunday comes from television or books, or from that kind of received wisdom passed down in families. But perhaps these prejudices can be closer to reality than we would prefer to admit.

Providing answers isn't easy. I find it a lot easier to pose questions:

- Why Sunday morning? Why not weekday lunchtime or evening?
- If you're only attracting regulars, what are you going change? Are you threatened by this question? Is your congregation threatened by this question?
- What are regular attenders gaining from the services? Are they like meetings of a club, where loyalists are confirmed in their continued association? Or are they places where people don't feel embarrassed to bring a friend? Would you feel embarrassed to bring a friend who had never set foot in church?

Some of this month's essays seek to answer these questions by telling the stories of experiments and evolutions. Others ask why we aren't engaging more seriously with these issues, which are surely some of the most fundamental to the Church's future.

This is the final issue of *Candour* for 2006. The next issue will be February 2007, with a deadline for advertising and editorial of Monday 29 January 2007.

We'll be having a planning session for next year's themes towards the end of November. If there are any themes you would like to see canvassed, please email me at candour@presbyterian.org.nz

Preparing the shape of Sunday

Pauline Stewart, St Heliers, Auckland

I spent a combined 11 years in Paeroa and Te Aroha - small country towns in the Waikato with relatively small congregations. On a good day, Paeroa had 100 people at church, including children. Te Aroha had 80. They were very different in their culture. For the last two years, I have been in St Heliers, a suburban village close to the city of Auckland that is affluent and sophisticated. On a good day, we have 180 at the first service and 90 at the second. Once a month we have early communion with 15 and an evening rock café of 30 to 60. We are in good heart and having quite an exciting time.

The shape or landscape of Sunday morning at St Heliers is vastly different in some respects from Paeroa and Te Aroha but the panorama is still the same size - everything from the parking of the cars to the serving of coffee and tea and the driving away is part of that panorama of worship. The work of worship - to construct the landscape - was not easier in the small town than it is here in St Heliers, even when you take into account that there are two services on a Sunday and sometimes three and four. I have never found the work of worship on a Sunday easier because of the size of the church. I have found this work all consuming and difficult no matter where I have been.

But I have found each place very different and though I can use ideas that I have tried before, they cannot be transplanted in the landscape. They need re-grafting, to continue the analogy.

From my experience, there is a certain amount of personal reshaping to do when coming to another parish or church. This has to happen in terms of my style of leadership, my choosing and use of music, my approach to involving others, and the style and amount of liturgy.

The personal reshaping is often the most difficult.

There is always the tension as to who needs to reshape the most; the minister or the congregation.

To be sure, reshaping will be needed, and by both.

We have all accepted the increasing necessity for the minister to be a mission enabler, entrepreneur, efficient administrator and employer or whatever else; but yet I find that still the most vital, connecting and impactful work I do is to prepare and lead worship on Sunday, as well as

help shape the landscape of people and programmes that make up Sunday. In my understanding, this is pivotal to everything else **in** the church and that happens **from** the church, and, in our case here at St Heliers, also the Community Centre. What happens on Sunday affects and impacts everything else and also reflects and celebrates the life and journey of what is happening during the week.

Whether or not this translates into 30 hours of work is really up to the minister. What I have found is that Sunday is everywhere and in everything; starting on Monday morning. It creeps into every conversation and email, every book title and TV programme and even in the shower there is the preparation for Sunday doing a dance in and around the engagements that fill my diary.

I love it and I hate it. I look forward to Sunday and get excited thinking of great ideas but yet I dread it.

Sunday at St Heliers

The 9.00am service is really a celebration, with the emphasis on integrating new people and families and enabling the enculturation into a church community to be positive. It was started in Martin Baker's time to provide a contemporary experience of worship because it was deemed a fruitless exercise to radically change the existing traditional worship experience in the traditional environment. So a small group started in the church hall - simple message and short, humour to be found, modern songs, very little liturgy, extensive children's programme. Four years down the track, there is still a lot of informality but with greater use of simple liturgies and a lot of involvement from all ages. A child reads a specially written "thought for the day" and assists with the offering prayer. The numbers have grown. The strong Kids Friendly approach is evident in the words and tone of the worship and in the attitude of the people. Older people come to enjoy the children as part of their worship of God. They too are honoured on special Sundays.

I would say there is sometimes too much involvement and not enough hush and stillness. Our small and primary children feel they belong and affirmed and I believe they will grow to have a different expectation of worship and a greater understanding of their place in the body of Christ than the present older teens.

Our older young people have sometimes received the

message that unless we are entertaining them then it's not happening and they seem to know very few adults on a personal level. Recently they have led the preaching and prayers at a couple of services and their desire to grapple with the deeper questions of faith was very inspiring. Last year, several of our young people went on a faith journey which resulted in them being confirmed. It has made a significant difference to the way they see their place in the church community. It brought spilling-over joy to the adults and has ongoing ripples into the worship life.

The strength of relationships across ages strengthens the experience of worship for everyone. This can be so for a large congregation as well as a small one. Someone other than your peers should care if you are there.

The 10.30am service is less informal; a mix of traditional and contemporary. A choir often leads the music and new music is encouraged as well as the use of brass and other instruments. However, in my heart I know that in our desire to please the older adults we are still hanging onto some things that are simply not transferable to a newcomer. We still base our thinking on the fact that every new person will have had "Presbyterian" or "Reformed" experience and that they have been going to church all their life and have just changed churches. The saddest aspect is we often worship in the second service without children present. When there are no babies or children present week after week, then that begins to affect the way people worship God; the way they listen, the way they sing. They become less interesting and less interested. They don't look sideways anymore and their love for children becomes that which is theoretical; children are unseen and unheard. The Gospel is preached and listened to without the presence of children. We are concerned about this and our worship and music task group is working to unite the two services more in nature and to commence a children's programme for the second service.

The morning teatime is squeezed between the two morning services; it is a bustle and a buzz with people arriving early to have a cup of coffee before the second service chatting to those who have just been at the 9.00am service.

The children have a separate bench for their food but share the same area to eat. The teens are in a side room close to the action. They have their own dynamic of friendship. All have managed to find handfuls of biscuits on their way through the throng of morning-tea chats.

This is a time to promote events, sell tickets or collect

DVDs and books. This is a time to make conversation, to be invited to someone's house for a meal, to find out how to join a group that could grow faith. There is always a project or event of which there are photos to enjoy or to look forward to.

The shaping of every Sunday begins early in the week. We have a worship and music task group that looks at special events and themes and gives help with preparation and leadership. They meet every six weeks. The convenor of that group actually looks up the music we choose weekly.

Questions I ask myself sometimes at some point in the week in shaping Sunday.

- Will this be pleasing to God?
- Will this please the people who complain the most? (I am not sure if they have a hotline to God)
- Can I sustain what I am planning to include? (this is for a regular long-term change)
- Is this new idea too gimmicky?
- What will touch each person? Tom Bandy calls it a heart burst and I have been using his words to help me in my preparation. "Where is the heart burst possibility in what I am preparing?"
- How will primary children be caught up?
- How will littlies be affirmed?
- How will teens feel noticed and see a point of relevance? (one point is enough for them)
- Where is the quietness and still small voice of God in the rhythm of the worship time?
- Where is the excitement?
- Will this music work? Have I got a variety of feeling in the music? What will the kids love? What will the oldies love?
- What can people go away with of practical value for their stressed, busy lives and that is easy to remember?
- How can I keep all this to time? (Time for us means that we have only a half hour in between services and to run over means cutting into the coffee and fellowship time in between services)
- Is there room for spontaneity?
- Will this foster a love of worship in people or will it put people off?
- How do I keep the notices and news in perspective and not too dominant a part of the worship?

I sometimes think, "what would make me want to stop trying on Sunday and try another vocation?"

If the following list of scariest and most soul-destroying

experiences of worship became commonplace for a new-comer, then I would stop trying...

- We kept saying we were friendly and we weren't because our friendship was limited to polite surface hellos that have no commitment to friendship.
- We never engaged in decent conversation.
- We just kept window dressing and redressing the little things like moving candles and carrying Bibles but never changed or opened our hearts and minds.
- We never knew the names of children.
- No one knew my name and I never heard my name on the lips of another.
- No one needed my gifts and talents.
- No one offered hospitality.

Two sayings that are important to me with regard to worship:

1) "Don't let any crumbs fall through the cracks."

Every detail counts; every adult and child is a gift from God. I do let crumbs fall through every Sunday but far less fall because this is my motto.

2) "The highest hymns of the sun are written in the dark... if I went to the sun I'd just sit in the sun." Dylan Thomas

Creativity and joy don't often spill over when we are comfortable and have so many resources; we never feel desperation or pain.

Well, in that case, we must be doing some things right.

Thanks for the opportunity to share. I often think about how other ministers are going preparing for Sunday, especially on a Saturday night. I like to think that's a prayer. It helps me know I have company for the dawn of Sunday.

Broadening the definition of worship

Richard Dawson, St Stephen's Leith Valley, Dunedin

If I were giving advice to young ministers these days about what to aim for in worship services, it would revolve around the word "eclectic". One of the meanings of eclectic, and the one which has inspired this approach, is the following: "made up of elements from various sources". I say this for two very simple reasons.

Firstly, I think that one of the Church's primary tasks in worship is to address culture and in doing so to draw culture into the Church's act of worship. Paul's fundamental question in this regard is found in 1 Corinthinans 14:19, where in the discussion around tongues, he says this:

But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.

Now I take this to indicate a much wider concern than simply that of tongues. It is, rather, more a reflection of Paul's evangelical heart and desire that people should be addressed by the Word in public worship. A worship service should be a place where people can at least understand what is being said and, by extension, have, as they say, "some skin in the game". The more a person can

identify with certain elements within the worship service, the greater the chance that they will be open to both the Word and the Spirit of God in that place. Hence, by extension, the greater the variety of means used to conduct worship, the more chance there is that any given service of worship will draw a congregation to God. Conversely, a narrow worship style will inevitably speak only to a culturally narrow group of people. And this applies to both to so called "traditional" approaches to worship as well as "modern".

Please be assured that I am not advocating that we give up some sort of formal and underlying structure to worship that addresses and gives voice to a Christian understanding of what it means to be in relationship with God. The foundational voices of adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication and meditation on the Word should all still be there. But these should act as a structure upon which the flesh of the service should be and can be built with great variety and imagination.

Nor am I advocating that we make our worship services into a kaleidoscope of experience that might overwhelm a congregation. Rather, I suggest that we intentionally set

out to identify both the different cultures and tastes within our congregation and deliberately “set them to worship”. What a difference just a small thing can make. I recently identified seven different language groups within our medium-sized congregation at Leith, and so a few weeks ago I set out to greet the congregation in each of these. What an amazing reaction and what a unifying thing to do!

The age ranges in a congregation also represent a culture. Some of the most profound worship experiences I have been involved in over this past year have been led by young people who’ve created and produced the service. And this, of course, doesn’t treat them as the church of tomorrow but recognises that they are, most truly, the church of today!

The careers of people represent a culture; as do their hobbies; as do their passions. As a church, we recently joined a community service group who are planning to preserve a section of native bush close to the city. This doesn’t interest everyone, but it’s got the juices of quite a few people in the congregation really running. And so on two occasions now, our children’s talks have included reference to this particular project. The adults love it!

Every church I know of prides itself on being welcoming. But if we’re not speaking the language of those who come through our front doors by including something from their culture in worship, I really have to question just how welcoming we really are.

Secondly, I believe that behind virtually every expression of art and culture lies the human desire and design for relationship with God, and that to draw these back into the arena of worship is to bring them, as it were, home.

Now we have to be careful here. I am not identifying art with worship. That is clearly not the case and in fact, just as beauty can be used to promote lust and joy can be attained by making another miserable, so art can be used to desecrate and deny both the image of God in humankind and God as such. But that doesn’t mean that beauty is not beautiful or that we were not made to experience joy. It simply means that we apparently have the ability to distort and misuse even the best of God’s gifts.

Given that this is the case, the Church has the permission to become wildly extravagant with worship and break open the traditional moulds that characterise both so called traditional and modern worship styles. Both of these act as straight jackets in worship. They constrict our choices and make it harder to reach people who don’t identify well with these styles, and they have clearly

ghettoised the church in the last 30 years or so. Within the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, we have churches where to play a Bach piece or to use a string quartet would never be thought of, and other churches where drums and a base player and a modern Hillsongs chorus would be similarly frowned upon.

And I have to ask myself, why do we persist in living in these ghettos? Are we afraid to experiment – to reach out to a vastly more complex culture with something they can identify with? Have we become so afraid to test the waters than even leaving the shore is unthinkable? I say “do it and do it now!” Break open your worship style. Modern worshippers – have a “classics” service and advertise it widely and revel in the music of someone like Bach, or use a violinist to bless the congregation as the offering is collected. And you traditionalists – is there no place for a modern band in worship with you – is there no place for youth culture? And, of course, this is to say nothing of jazz, hip hop, modern dance, ballet, and the wonderful torrent of artistic expression present in this country.

The truth of the matter is that just like the old Highland Churches of Scotland we have, for years, been fencing the communion table. That is, we’ve erected pietistic and artificial barriers around who may and who may not have communion with God. However, we haven’t done it in the context of the Eucharist but in the context of worship style. And what’s worse, the barriers haven’t just affected the faithful who would attend a communion service but they’ve extended into the wider culture of the society within which the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand is planted. By excluding all sorts of music, dance and other artistic expression from our worship, we also excluded the people who identify with these. And I must add that we evangelicals are as guilty as anyone else of this. We have been and are quite un-evangelical about what we will and will not allow within our services of worship.

Once again, let me assure you that I am not advocating the abdication of the Church’s role in worship to culture. The Church must remain discerning in regard to what is and isn’t appropriate. But haven’t we really become far too precious about this? Yes, let’s not swallow the narcissism of Hollywood; but let’s also recognise the breadth of our own conviction that culture is more than a repository of the sinfulness of humankind. It is also the major expression of our creation in God’s image.

A contemporary music journey

Rose Nisbet, Plimmerton Presbyterian, Wellington

I am a musician. I play piano, guitar and bass guitar. I was classically trained in piano, but my music teacher also taught me the basics of modern music. My musical preferences are at the rock end of pop. I am also the daughter of missionary parents; in our family the desire to share our faith, and the role of church in facilitating that, was part of the air we breathed. Consequently, I am strongly motivated to make music in a way that is culturally relevant to my peers, so that they may find God and/or find a way to worship God meaningfully. We honour God by bringing our passion, joy and vitality to him in worship, as well as our sorrow and distress. For some that is best expressed by choirs and high church. For me and many of my peers, it is in amplified electronic music.

I was shoulder tapped at church when I was 17 and started playing the piano alongside the organist. And so began my apprenticeship. For the next four years I played and learnt, getting feedback both from the other musicians, the worship leaders, the congregation, and my parents.

During this time, our church went from a small neighbourhood church in the suburbs of Howick to a growing middle-sized church. Changing the music style was part of that growth. When I started, there was a roster of men who liked music and enjoyed leading the congregation. They picked their favourite songs from a range of hymns and choruses, there was always a Saturday practise to get everyone up to speed, and the instruments were piano and organ.

By the time I left four years later, there was a guitar, bass guitar, drums and piano with a worship leader and a couple of singers. One of the big shifts that happened here was a shift from instrument-led music to vocal-led music. Instead of the tune being played melodically by the piano/organ, the tune is carried by the singers. The band provides backing. This is entirely contemporary – listen to your radio. It is not at all what a great many congregations are used to. You don't need a huge number of instruments – this can be achieved with a guitar – but you do need a very able singer. These days you don't even need an instrument because there are worship karaoke CDs; but you still need a singer.

The shift in our church was led by one man who had been in a charismatic, contemporary church in Singapore. Dave came back and it seemed as if overnight our entire

music culture changed. He stood up with his guitar and said “we are going to do it this way and we are going to sing these songs”. He was my introduction to contemporary church music as we know it now. He had a range of skills and competencies, which I realise now, are rare in one person. He could play an instrument, put a bracket of songs together, lead singing, lead a team, choose new songs, and get the right equipment in place. My later experience bears out the fact that it takes an experienced person or group of people to get things going. If young kids are going to offer the musical impetus then a minister or older person needs to offer the leadership and worship direction.

At that time the choruses were very simple and within the competencies of fairly basic musicians. It was easy for a relatively new player to join and get up to speed. If you carefully choose simpler songs it is easy for new musicians to come in.

The next church I was involved with in a meaningful way was small, neighbourhood and multicultural. When I arrived a group of people had just started a band and there was a space for a pianist. We had weekly practises and played one or two songs a month in the morning service. This continued for six months. It had its benefits because there were some fairly new musicians in the group, so they were learning their instruments as well as learning to play as a band – two entirely different things. And none of us had the experience necessary to take us into the main church culture. But then we got a new minister, Andrew, who brought an experienced, leader wife, Angela, with him, and we took off. He used us every Sunday. The mix of African songs, Island rhythms and harmonies, and Hillsong compositions blended beautifully. It was here that I learnt the value of team – without Angela we were only half of what we could be. So now I look for the people who are missing and ask them to join. If they aren't there yet, we wait and pray. We also needed Andrew's support and drive to forge us into a meaningful unit. The desire of the minister to have contemporary music is critical to its success.

Umata was considered the father of the band because it was his vision that got it started. I learnt from him what a faithful leader does. He would make sure the practical stuff was taken care of so that we could play, even to the extent of becoming our sound person instead of playing

the trumpet himself. A contemporary sound is amplified, meaning an investment not just in electronic instruments but a sound system and microphones. The sound person is as important a member of your music team as anyone else, because they make or break the quality of what people hear. Find the people who love doing this. Often it's an almost musician – someone who learnt an instrument and loves music but not to a level where they can participate instrumentally.

We moved to Dunedin. We joined another small, neighbourhood church with an energetic minister. I joined forces with Howard Carter, who came from a large musically able church and we offered to develop a contemporary-style band. We started with weekly practises but were playing only once a month. We did this for six months. This works because you have to build up confidence about playing together and a repertoire of songs. It is important that the musicians know a song well before introducing it to the congregation. In the next year, we played every two weeks, and added more musicians. By the end of the year we were the house band. This kind of progression meant that the introduction of band-led worship was incremental while still giving people the comfort of what they were used to.

It was in Dunedin that I learnt about congregational culture. I brought my rock/pop preference, Howard brought his punk/alternative preference, and we assaulted a small South Island congre-

gation once a month for six months. Apparently the under 40s were cool with it. The over 40s were not. Richard, our minister, was very patient while we found our groove. Then he got involved, bringing his South Island country/ballad preference, and the congregation breathed a sigh of relief because finally this was their style. I learnt that a song may be hugely meaningful to one congregation but not work at all in another. As a musician and worship leader I bring my own style and preferences, but I exist to serve the congregation and if my favourite songs don't work, I find what does. Or I modify my songs to a style that suits the congregation. And over time my enthusiasm for my style rubs off on them and they come to appreciate something new.

It was also here that sustainability and continuity became important. We were only in Dunedin for two years and I

knew that they couldn't depend on me as the pianist, because I was going to leave. So I picked up the bass guitar. But two of our main musicians were the minister, Richard and his wife Fran. The weekly Saturday practises plus the Sunday mornings put a huge burden on them. The time commitment is a big deal. You cannot achieve something different without regular practises and a commitment to training. Anything less than a weekly practise will not cut it. Advance preparation is vitally important. There is a great deal of effort in developing and establishing contemporary music in a church. Those getting involved need to be able to evaluate their commitment yearly, and those doing the asking need to recognise the cost. It is also fragile because people move, so part of the development includes fostering and/or attracting new musicians – all the time.

My understanding of technical difficulty developed. I had come from a band of predominantly Pacific Islanders for whom the vocal difficulty of a song was not an issue. Now I found that our pakeha singers in Dunedin would ditch a song if it was too hard to sing. This issue has developed over time as contemporary music has become more sophisticated. Can we play it, can the singers sing it? Even if we can, we might be far more able than the congregation. Add the fact that a congregation will often

take a few weeks to warm to a new song and you can easily be confused about what to sing. So we came up with some three-week guidelines. 1) If after three weeks of practise it is still a struggle, it goes. 2)

I exist to serve the congregation and if my favourite songs don't work, I find what does

Do it with the congregation for three weeks. If after three weeks it isn't flying, it goes...or rests till next year. Even then it's still possible that we can all do a song adequately but it just doesn't fly. And this leads to the number one rule of thumb – do we like it? Do our spirits rise to meet God's when we sing this song? Are we moved by it, challenged by it, inspired by it? Does it give meaningful expression to what we believe?

So now we are at Plimmerton in Wellington, a reasonable-sized suburban family church. In our time here, contemporary music has been established. It has taken an investment by the church in a paid worship director, Georgie, to help make it happen.

We have a proportion of elderly people in the congregation who need to sing at least one hymn most Sundays.

We also have a growing bunch of preschoolers who come on Sunday mornings to dance to the songs up the front of church before they go to Sunday school - a pre-school mosh pit. You can imagine the tension.

We had to structure lots of learning. Our contemporary pianists have had to learn how to play hymn rhythms. There were practises for Sundays but we needed to establish a weekly team practise to learn new songs. The sound guys have had training so they know what to do. The singers had to grow in confidence and ability so that they were able to carry the tune. The congregation is learning to follow the vocalists. And I have had to learn to worship lead. In every other church the pianist has been an instrumentalist, the worship leader is a vocalist. Here all the worship leaders were pianists, and no-one else knew how to lead. So if I'm playing, I'm leading. I have had to learn how to sing while playing, and use a microphone.

A big issue here is that churches with more people and resources are able to reproduce a sophisticated sound, and this is attractive. We have people in their 30s and younger who either remember when Plimmerton could achieve that sound and want it back or who have been to city churches in their youth and want us to be like them. This church is currently family style with a mix of experienced and beginning musicians; we are struggling to achieve a pop sound. We live with this tension, of having to know what is achievable for us while striving for what is desirable.

There are lots of things that I know now from having a go over the years. There are many skills on many different levels. Have a go, get some training, have another go. Make a mistake, add people, learn from them, keep having a go. Start somewhere. Who knows where you will go? But what an awesome journey you will have.

Summer School 2007

School of Ministry & the Department of Theology & Religious Studies, University of Otago

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Prof. Joel Green Professor of New Testament Interpretation Asbury Theological Seminary, USA

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Turning murmurs into conversations

Robyn McPhail, Kaeo-Kerikeri, Northland

My first reaction to the request for an article was “no, I can’t say anything of value about worship. I’m not that good at it.”

Doing Sunday worship is very much a work in progress for me, endeavouring to do the things Amanda mentioned in her invitation; namely make changes, delegate responsibility, consider the shape and needs of Sundays, explore alternative worship (and assess it candidly), organise music and experiment without alienating the faithful. There can be so much “murmuring in the wilderness” about what happens at church on Sundays.

I certainly don’t get crowds at worship. In fact I am quite comfortable with the eight-plus-me that recently met up in the neighbouring parish where I have become interim moderator.

For many years, worship was my top work stress provider. I never felt I got it right and my dear friends in the faith kept sharing their dissatisfaction. It is still a major focus of each week but now I just do my best and appreciate the willingness of people to grow with experience.

“You can’t please all the people all of the time” is something we agree to be true. Recognise that, as worship leader and as congregation, and I think we have the basis for initial good grace in exploring new options. Where the congregation reflects a mix of people in terms of interest, personality and theology – and this is notably the case in rural areas – there cannot be one right style, and especially not one right type of music. Choice of music can depend most of all on the skills of accompanists (if there are any) and the confidence of the congregation. A building’s acoustics makes a difference in enhancing or dulling the congregation’s experience of its own singing.

Taking as given that our focus is always beyond ourselves – worshipping God – and our primary driver an inspiration and energy other than our own – Christ leading us and the Spirit connecting us – the involvement and experience of all who are present occupies my foreground for planning and assessing content and format. Our agreed plan is to spend an hour together: we keep close to time, because there are two services in two different communities and because this predictability fits well with the people present.

The time discipline has also encouraged the use of the delete button in preparing the worship script. This is something I have a tendency towards anyway in order to maximise space for conversation with God and so as not to overload with my own theories or with our Protestant tendency for intellectualising.

What has helped me navigate the peaks and troughs of the work in progress called weekly worship, and reframe grumblings into constructive feedback, is a general theme of engaging and building participation. There are a few features that have now become a natural part of services for me that reflect this aim.

I approach the “Word” section of the service as an opportunity for conversation. We bring ourselves – needs, experiences, excitements, worries – and put them in relationship with the presence or reality or mystery we call God. We hear scripture read and let our questions from life, as well as the questions the particular scripture stirs in us, interact with it. And we listen for God’s Word within the interaction.

To help make sure we have brought ourselves with us to worship, so to speak, and not left too much of our stuff at the door, I invite the week’s Bible reader to bring what we call a “Symbol of God’s Presence”. This was a suggestion I picked up from Dorothy McRae-McMahon at a workshop in Christchurch some years back. The idea is to bring a tangible item that sums up something of the person’s experience of God in the last week or at a significant time. If people wonder if they could come up with anything, then the questions to open up thoughts are: what have you been doing? What’s been taking your attention and energy? What stirs your heart? (Hence, for example, the crop farmer who brings soil!)

Speaking about the symbol is supplementary and not essential. The symbol could be just the placing of the object on the Communion table. But experience has shown that even the shyest ones get brave and say something. Recently, one person brought her knitting and linked it with family. Another has brought the top plate from the barbecue and talked of looking forward to gatherings at his place and other social functions together as a church. Some years back a person got up and started talking about his week’s work - the sheep yards, two days in the workshop trying to make something that didn’t work,

then coming inside the house and finding the chaos that goes with the granddaughter visiting with her toys and her giggles. As he talked he picked up five soft toys from their storage place in front of the pulpit and placed them on the Table. He concluded by pointing to the line up and saying “that’s my symbol of God’s presence - the grandchildren”.

My hope is that the people present are also thinking about their week and where God has been for them, or where they are feeling their need for God. The routine has been then to sing a hymn of that person’s choice. Part of the motivation for this was the frustration at being constantly criticised for my choice of hymns. But there is even greater value in enabling people to identify what sings faith for them, and often they introduce the hymn with some comments. What is more, we get to sing one another’s songs, and our own world gets bigger.

I suspect it is the goal of conversation between ourselves and the Bible text, in order to try to hear God’s Word in the midst, that has had me reading the texts at different stages during the reflection, depending on how it pans out. It’s many years now since I first did this, by holding the Old Testament reading (it was one of those magnificent early January ones) till the end and letting its poetry speak for itself. Sometimes it is the Gospel that has the last word, with a lead up that invites intentional listening, and gives people both the permission and the responsibility to hear for themselves its call to them.

It also means that each style of speaking – Bible texts, my reflections, poems or reflections from others – occurs in relatively short portions that fit our concentration spans, and allow us to come and go without feeling totally lost. I encourage people not to treat the context of worship as something they must concentrate on for every moment of the hour. There is freedom to ebb and glow with thoughts and images as they capture a person’s attention. In fact I believe this enables greater overall engagement with worship than if the person followed my thought patterns every step of the way.

A data projector has assisted this sense of freedom and openness to personal connection with worship. All the hymns and songs are now projected as people enjoy being able to hold their heads up and look out towards oth-

ers as they sing. The words are usually connected with images that are a kind of interpretation in themselves and invite people to move beyond the words to their own interpretations.

Throughout the service something is on the screen. The aim is to be not too busy, because we do have large numbers of older people in our congregations who can feel distracted by visual noise. An image relating to the Bible text or the theme or the stage of the service simply sits there, available for those who wish to absorb it or just float with it. I have had an ongoing theological aim with these images too: using the local context of land and people, as well as national and international events, in order to encourage strong links between faith and everyday life.

As a clergy worship leader, I have always feared the power of being the upfront dominant speaker and been wary of the danger of me abusing this power. There’s been an assumption that truth is spoken from the front, a single and dogmatic truth. But if it is God we are to hear, then the best any of us can do is feed a truth-stirring conversation. I come with an offering, at most, and I aim to speak in invitation.

I encourage people not to treat the context of worship as something they must concentrate on for every moment of the hour

To nurture this perspective on the role of the worship leader, and to continue the theme of involvement by those present, I choose to have a space before the end of the service for others to make their contribution. Any thoughts or images, words of witness or wisdom, that have come to them during the time together, I invite them to “put in the middle”. Sometimes they trigger more thoughts but I never debate the issues. A key point is affirming for people that they are allowed to disagree with me! Greater spiritual maturity is our shared goal, and it is good to be able to listen to someone else’s offering and find myself invited into further insights and spiritual depth.

Engagement, involvement and spiritual maturity are also the motivation for the 1B4 exercise book for the “Prayers of the People” that belongs to the congregation. Who and what we pray for depends on what the people present choose to write in the book. After two years, one of our congregations has filled their first book and the other is not many pages behind. It may not be a big thing but I’ve stuck with it.

Our people are mostly rather shy about speaking prayers out loud and a book passed around during the service enables them to express their thanks and their concerns, and name people they are worried about (with the point emphasised that they know the people would be happy about being named). It can be a bit tricky at times reading the writing, but I ask for forgiveness ahead of time if I might get a name wrong and sometimes comment that at least God knows who is being prayed for. Silence is always part of this prayer as well, for all the stuff we can't find words for but we know the Spirit will do it for us.

In all, I think I enjoy preparing worship now, even though the thoughts I began with still hold: I don't feel all that

successful (not when you do a weekly head count) and I don't know how much progress we are really making.

I think what's happened is I now thrive on people's comments that express dissatisfaction. Like the young mum who has just made some radical suggestions regarding our newly

budding Sunday School and integrating better with worship. A bit of chat (as much as her lively children allowed us), some conferring with others and a rearrangement of plans for next Sunday, and we'll give it a try.

We will take time to assess it too, so it won't be like the Sunday School changes my mother convinced the Waikaka Valley Session to make 50 years ago, which are still officially on trial.

Our people are mostly rather shy about speaking prayers out loud

Let the children come: Inclusive worship

Jill Kayser, Kids Friendly Coach, Auckland

Bill Easum, theologian and author, suggests the "Body of Christ" is the best Biblical metaphor for a functional "permission-giving" church. And it is 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 that I share with churches at the start of my Kids Friendly training workshop entitled "Child Inclusive Worship". Not only is it a great reading to role model how easily children can be involved in sharing scripture in all age worship, but it sets the scene for what is to come. It emphatically concludes: "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."²⁷

Caroline Fairless, author, priest and advisor for the Episcopalian church in the United States suggests: "a worship community is misshapen without the presence of children." And as I travel the country sharing the Kids Friendly vision, I consistently hear: "we have no children at our church" and "why don't the children and young families come?"

What does this say about us, Christ's Church? Does our form of worship drive families away? Do our attitudes tell children they are not yet members of our Church? Do our beliefs about worship prevent us from being inclusive?

So what is worship? Exploration of the scriptures and personal experience suggest to me that worship is one place where we encounter and experience Christ. It touches the heart and stirs the spirit. It is communal and inclusive. It engenders belonging and invites response. And it's formative, "caught not taught" (Westerhoff). Worship is not education. It may impart information, but this is only a minor theme within the worship gathering. Worship is so much more, it is "sacred drama" (Fairless).

Whatever your belief and experience of worship is, there is one thing on which I hope we agree: worship is not an RM (rated mature) adults-only activity. This view is without foundation in scripture, theology or church history. Jesus said: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matthew 19:14) and "if anyone causes one of these little ones to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were drowned in the depths of the sea" (Matthew 18:6).

How does our worship respond to Jesus' command to "let the children come" and how do we ensure that our actions

and attitudes do not cause the children of our communities to “stumble”?

Kids Friendly encourages churches to regard all worship as “all age worship”. The Sunday experience is an important part of the Kids Friendly review process. Churches are challenged to consider how children and families coming to our churches (often for the first time) perceive and experience our welcome, communal worship and children’s programme.

Our beliefs about evangelism also influence our response to children in worship. It is suggested that traditionally the Church has tended to assume evangelism follows a linear progression of: first, you must believe certain truths (we teach), then you will belong to a community of faith, finally you will behave in a way that reflects Jesus. If we consider the biblical pattern, we find that the disciples responded to the call of Jesus to belong. In belonging they grew to believe, and then they were able to adopt a new way of behaving. Belonging is the breeding ground for belief and action. (Evangelisation of Children, Lausanne Occasional Paper, Issue Group 18).

Our Kids Friendly statement of intent has as its second claim: “at this church, children belong and participate in the life and worship of the faith community”. Kids Friendly churches are urged to be faith communities that invite children to belong, demonstrate how Christians behave and help children to grow to understand and embrace its beliefs and adopt the Christ-like behaviours they have (hopefully) seen demonstrated.

A Kids Friendly church is a place where children know they’re extremely important to their church. As my son Blake, eight years old, says: “but we have to go to church because they’ll miss me if I’m not there.”

Kids Friendly worship is not child-centred; it is intergenerational worship where children know they are loved and valued and where they can develop leadership and minister to all ages.

Kids Friendly is not a programme for children, it’s an attitude that says children belong here. They’re welcome here. They contribute and participate fully. And we value them so much that we plan and design our worship deliberately to include them, so they know they’re important to us and to Christ.

Kids Friendly worship invites children to participate, involves children in every aspect of the worship event, shares the scripture in meaningful ways, involves all, in-

cluding children, in prayers, uses language that is relevant and inclusive and encourages children to minister to us.

Kids Friendly churches are intentional about their commitment to include children in worship and seek to educate parents and others on the importance of this.

Pauline Stewart, minister at St Heliers, renowned for her expertise in and passion for involving children in worship, suggests that child inclusive worship requires the whole congregation to adopt the “LOVE” principle. “We need to **L**ose our life (existing) to find it (new life). We need to **O**rganise and plan our services to be intentionally inclusive of children. We need to offer **V**ariety in our content and **E**veryone needs to embrace the children,” says Pauline.

So what does your church believe, say and do when it comes to nurturing the faith in children? Is your heart for children evident through your worship?

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When there is no ordained minister

Marion Partridge, Maheno-Otepopo Presbyterian Parish

It is with some trepidation I begin this essay. I remind myself that *Candour* is a magazine for ministers, and I am an elder or lay person. Or, as we move into the 21st century, am I reflecting a mindset that belongs to a previous age? Do we in the Presbyterian Church need to recognise changing forms of ministry?

Or maybe this is a reflection of the changes that are taking place within our Church, particularly in country areas and small congregations. In many parishes, lay members are now called to assume tasks previously the preserve of the ordained ministry.

Worship is the public face of the parish and before the Church bells ring, a lot can happen.

I would like to share an insight of our experiences in a country parish accustomed to traditional forms of worship. This will be not so much about the service of worship on a Sunday but more about the behind-the-scenes activities that result in that person leading worship on a given Sunday.

Change is not easy. Sometimes we choose to change; more often change is forced upon us, and this can happen in a parish when a minister leaves. The following story illustrates our experience:

Although many, including some elders and managers, have not been aware of it, the minister has been quietly preparing the people of the parish to fend for themselves following his departure. A situation like this can either be a cause for despair or a challenge to go forward with God in the community.

Presbytery appoints an interim moderator and the next Sunday she “preaches the parish vacant”. This is where we start to come up against the archaic language used by the Presbyterian Church. For a parish that is facing long term “vacancy” without ordained ministry, this is no “interim”. Then there is the term “vacant parish”; just because there is no longer an ordained minister living in the manse, it does not mean that a parish is “vacant”. People

are still attending worship and elders are quietly doing those tasks that elders have always done, according to their gifts. The Session and Board of Managers are still meeting monthly with the interim moderator, the Word is being preached, and people visited. In fact, it’s “business as usual”.

This attitude assumes a parish is not complete without an ordained minister, when in fact there are numerous parishes that for many years, because of financial constraints, have been without or between ministers, and have functioned very well. At times like this, people feel needed and really pull together. Maybe we need to ask, “have we been worshipping, if not the individual in the position, but the position of the minister?”

A country parish, with six preaching places, two services a Sunday and a six-week roster; on reflection, this must

be a minister’s worst nightmare. The parish needed some time to accept the manse family leaving and to grieve that this phase of its life had come to an end.

At times like this, people feel needed and really pull together

There was opportunity for a group who were prepared to lead worship to come together and form a worship team. In accepting this role, they agreed that, following the departure of the minister, they would provide one service per Sunday at 10am at St John’s, and one evening service a month at St Barnabas’. This replaced the complex and unwieldy two services per Sunday roster that was designed to ensure all six worship centres received equal worship times. Having the whole congregation now meeting at the “same time, same place” each Sunday meant for many a double grief: the loss of the minister and the loss of their traditional place of worship .

The new system brings the whole parish together, and at morning tea time folk from all parts of the extended geographical area now have a greater opportunity to fellowship together.

Some of the advantages have proved to be:

- that people now know when and where worship is
- the singing is better

- the richness of the fellowship is appreciated.
- and the worship leader does not have to rush away to the next service.

We must not assume that everything is rosy:

- There are some who are grieving the loss of “their church” although at this stage nothing has been said about closing any worship centres.
- For some, the longer traveling distance is a problem. Some areas are working well together to ensure those without transport still attend worship regularly.
- Others who will travel distances to town for other activities deliberately stay away because there is not a service where they live.

The question we need to address is “how has the Sunday worship service changed?” The feedback tells us that members of the parish appreciate the variety of worship styles, which probably reflects the fact that a minister will not always reach all of a congregation.

Team members made great statements about doing worship differently and not following the old pattern. It is interesting, nearly two years out, to observe that most services follow the traditional pattern.

At the beginning, many in the congregation thought that several members of the team would be involved each Sunday. What has happened is that we have often involved others who are not in the “team”. Depending on one’s personality type, we have also discovered that we work quicker when working alone.

We have had our anxious moments like when, owing to ill health, an invited minister advised on the Wednesday that he was unable to preach on Sunday.

A quick email around the team elicited three responses:

- An offer to involve members of the congregation talking about their participation, whether related to employment or voluntary, in community activities.
- A member who could revive previously used material
- And a member who would start from scratch.

We chose the community-involvement service, which because it featured and affirmed the work of our neighbours was appreciated by the people.

At a worship team meeting, it was suggested that each team member have a “panic pack” so that in the event of another member falling ill or being called away suddenly, they could be called on.

There are some pitfalls that need to be recognised:

- The worship team members feeling we are important and that the parish cannot do without us; this could be identified as pride.
- Attempts to re-invent the wheel and always wanting to change, for change’s sake.
- A feeling that we can do it all, with some not appreciating the need for training.
- A perception that the team is a “closed shop” or is becoming clichéd.

Worship will be different to that provided by a minister; it will be more varied, it is likely to be nearer to the people, as those who may have lived in the district all their lives share experiences together with other folk who have moved into the area. It can lack the depth of theological experience but no one will complain we are talking over people’s heads.

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Stephen Voorwinde, *Jesus' Emotions in the Fourth Gospel: Human or Divine?* (London and New York: T. and T. Clark, 2005)

Reviewed by Rinny Westra

To make the most of this significant book, it will be wise to have your Hebrew Old Testament, your Septuagint (in Greek, of course, hopefully with English text on the opposite page) and your Greek New Testament open on the table with you. You will then have a rare exegetical feast. (Stephen Voorwinde is Professor of New Testament Studies at the Reformed Theological College in Geelong, Australia.)

The Gospel of John is traditionally the “most divine” of the four Gospels, insofar as the messianic and divine self-consciousness of Jesus shines through it in a way that is nowhere near as evident in the Synoptic Gospels. What is also evident from Voorwinde’s work is that John’s Gospel is by no means just a docetic (i.e. “Jesus only appears to be human”) account of Jesus, but that it also attributes profound and deep human emotions to him. Most of these emotions cluster around the death and raising of Lazarus and the approaching suffering and death of Jesus. In fact, even the emotions that relate to the story of Lazarus foreshadow the forthcoming passion of Jesus, as Jesus’ action here alerts the authorities to the “danger” that Jesus poses for them. Voorwinde concludes that these emotions are thoroughly human, thus showing that Jesus was thoroughly human, but they are particularly poignant because, according to John, he also has supernatural foreknowledge of what lies ahead, showing that he is also divine, and that that in fact increases his suffering and the fearsome anticipation of that suffering.

This is a painstaking study of emotions in the Scriptures and related documents: the Hebrew Scriptures, the Septuagint, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Apocrypha, and the Christian Scriptures, with references to the writings of Josephus and of Philo of Alexandria as well. The results of all that research are contained in 10 substantial appendices at the end of the book, where the words used for the emotions in these writings are carefully catalogued and the frequency of the appearances of those words are calculated. The result is a substantial database for this study. Then all of this material is used as the spotlight is put on the emotions of Jesus in the Gospel of John.

While the word “covenant” (“*diatheke*” in Greek) is nev-

er used in the Gospel of John, Voorwinde proposes that it is the concept of covenant that provides us with the hermeneutical key for the interpretation of this Gospel. To prove that point, he shows the close links between the structure of the Gospel and the Five Books of Moses. John 1:1-5 clearly relates to Genesis 1:1-5; the use of tabernacle imagery (“he tabernacled among us” in John 1:14, with the accompanying reference to “beholding his glory”) relates to Exodus; and the similarity between the farewell speeches of Jesus in this Gospel and the farewell speeches of Moses in Deuteronomy, etc. He makes a good case for this, showing that Jesus functions here both as Lord of the Covenant as well as the Covenant partner who finally gets it right on our behalf. And he shows how, as in the Hebrew Scriptures, the emotions of God relate to how the covenant is observed or broken by the Israelites, and how this is also the case with Jesus and his followers in the Fourth Gospel.

While all this covenant material is exegetically very helpful, it seems to me to be stretching it somewhat to use it to illuminate the “divine-human dilemma” relating to Jesus and his emotions in the Gospel of John, seeing that the word covenant never appears explicitly in that Gospel. I would suggest that in view of the emphasis on incarnation and the divinity of Jesus, a better hermeneutical key may be to simply use the divinisation/deification theme that is central in the soteriology of the Eastern Orthodox Churches, and that is summed up in the slogan “the Divine became human so that the human might become

divine/come to share in the divine nature”. That Eastern Orthodox emphasis seems to me to be based on

...it is full of insights and helpful exegesis for the preacher

the Gospel of John. Note the capital “D” for God and the small “d” for humans. Professor Evan Pollard used to call this a “landing-and-take-off Christology”, and it certainly fits in with the incarnation drama in John, where the crucifixion of Jesus is actually the beginning of his glorification.

What all that means for us today is not so much the task of the exegete as of the systematic theologian. Therein may be found the basis for yet another book.

This is an expensive book (£65) but it is full of insights and helpful exegesis for the preacher. Several potential sermons have come to my mind as I made my way through it, and it will certainly have a place alongside the commentaries on the Gospel of John.

Highly recommended.

Stuart Murray. *Post-Christendom Church and Mission in a Strange New World*. (Paternoster: 2004)*

Reviewed by Fyfe Blair, Highgate Presbyterian

In this book, Stuart Murray seeks to move the discussion out of post-modernity/ism and to explore the other term that has become part of our vocabulary in recent times: “post-Christendom”.

Murray offers an interesting perspective and seeks to make a case for ways in which the Church should respond to its changing status in society. He highlights key moments that were significant cultural and theological shifts that impacted the Church’s mission for centuries.

There is actually a necessary, though lengthy, historical introduction that helps set the context for his discussion. In the whistle-stop historical tour, we move from the coming and expansion of Christendom, where Augustine appears as the significant figure in the Christendom shift, to the disintegration of Christendom, where Murray is particularly looking at the Reformation.

In his reading of the reformers, he states that “they introduced important changes but did not challenge the Christendom mindset”. Hence, as Murray points out, oaths, infant baptism, tithing, “just” war, the use of Scripture to support the dominant culture, Old Testament taking precedence over the New, the marginalizing of Jesus, a “clergy caste” who “performed services”, an increased “dominance of monologue preaching”, the operating with a “hermeneutic of order” rather than justice, concern with church discipline, all reflect how the Reformers “hoped to transform society from the centre, but challenged none of the essential components of Christendom”.

It is perhaps at this juncture that Murray’s Anabaptist perspective radically prods at those of us who are of a Reformed tradition or background. Nonetheless, the book highlights how inaction, denial or hope in outmoded revivals are simply no longer options, and calls for the Church to accept that radical change is needed in all areas of mission and ministry. Indeed, it shows how a new mindset is required for actually “being” Church.

The legacy of Christendom remains in the vestiges and mindset that persist - ecclesial and social. Murray outlines some responses that we need to move beyond: denying, defending, dismissing, dissociating, demonising, disavowing, disentangling, deconstructing, and disembarking.

For all Christians concerned with the present and very real issues, Post-Christendom is an informative, hopeful and important account. However, its historical introduction, whilst necessary for setting the book in context, is overly critical and lengthy, and the book as a whole does perhaps betray a particular historical reading. Nevertheless, this does not undo its worth.

The final chapter, as he acknowledges, is not so much about resourcing answers as about matters of keeping on questioning. In conclusion, it rests upon a fresh encounter with Jesus at the margins of Church and society, “since that is where Jesus is so often found”.

The helpful thing as you read through this book is that Murray persists with rigorous questioning that I think is vital to connect our inherited past (Christendom) with the present we encounter. This book challenged me and the questions raised should continue to engage us in our own context here in New Zealand, where perhaps some of these questions are more pointedly being faced.

Also worthy of a read are Stuart Murray’s *Church Planting* and *Beyond Tithing*. His writings, I would suggest, are accessible and thought provoking.

Stuart Murray. *Church After Christendom*. (Paternoster: 2004)*

Reviewed by Fyfe Blair

In this book, Murray continues his helpful analysis of post-Christendom churches. Part One explores issues of “shape”, taking Acts 11:1-18 as a paradigm to consider the shifts from Christendom to Post-Christendom. The key question is “how might the church emerge or evolve?” Murray teases out the issues of belonging, believing and behaving after Christendom and the complexities of this. I especially found helpful the clarity of his analysis and critique of the notions of “centred”, “bounded” and “fuzzy set” models of how we understand Church. In particular, he considers the degrees of alienation and the language we make use of here, for example, semi-churched, de-churched, etc. Rightly, I think, perhaps because I have issues about such language, he states:

This language is problematic, not least in its omission of any reference to other faith communities and its Christendom-orientated assumption that “churched” is the cultural norm, rather than a counter-cultural experience. And it categorises attitudes towards Church rather than Christian faith. (p25/6)

Reviews

There is a chapter that critiques matters of leavers and joiners, which picks up on the works of James Fowler, Alan Jamieson and others. Murray then explores issues of Church emerging or evolving. In some ways, this is irresolvable at present, but I did like the probing, questing and the search for wisdom that we might learn from both inherited and emergent church.

Part 2 takes Ephesians 4 as a Biblical paradigm and Murray wants to ask the question “what kind of church can survive and flourish in post-Christendom?” The chapters that follow explore mission, community and worship. Within each, Murray takes terms and phrases that have become common language in today’s church scene, for example, “maintenance to mission”, “institution to movements”, etc. Across these chapters he considers evangelism, church discipline, leadership, rhythms and resources. He concludes:

Post-Christendom is a new environment. Ephesians 4 envisages a church united in hope (v4), confident

in its destiny (v13) and getting on with the simple day-to-day business of speaking the truth in love (v15) and doing works of service (v12). If the church does survive the demise of Christendom, it will surely be a church sustained by simplicity and hope. (p231)

I say “yes” to that. I reckon that this second book (in what is now a series) is an invaluable resource that should help us frame our questions better in the new environment in which we find ourselves. I appreciated the deep challenge, along with the refreshing ways that Murray provides open, honest analysis and critique. I found I couldn’t put this book down. It is a book I will probably need to keep returning to. A big thumbs up to Stuart Murray for this one, but do read Post-Christendom first!

**Both these books are available for loan from the Hewitson Library*

St Martins, Christchurch

St Martins, a suburban parish in Christchurch, is looking for a minister to provide a full-time ministry of Word and Sacraments, and would welcome enquiries and/or expressions of interest.

The priorities for this ministry include:

- a flexible, participatory approach to worship for all ages;
- pastoral care and support, especially to young families and the elderly;
- outreach to parents, children and schools;
- training and sustaining the leadership team of elders and lay leaders.

St Martins has affirmed itself to be an inclusive congregation, and seeks a minister who is able to relate to, and nurture the faith of, all members.

More information is detailed in the parish’s “*Expectations of Ministry*”, available from the Nominator, to whom enquiries and expressions of interest should be addressed:

Michael Thawley
75 Sarabande Avenue
Christchurch 8051
thawley@attglobal.net
(03) 354-0008

Ministry Survey

Many parish ministers will have received a copy of a Ministry Survey being conducted by Peter MacKenzie.

If you have not already completed the survey, can you please take the time over the next few days and return it in the envelope provided so that the results can be analysed.

A report will be available through Candour in mid-2007.

I have recently written this note to the Presbytery of Wellington. It may be relevant to your coverage of debate on the issue:

To: The Clerk, Presbytery of Wellington

I find the decisions of the recent General Assembly about leadership in the Church inherently exclusive and at odds with a fundamental part of the Gospel. I can no longer in good conscience “uphold the doctrine, worship, government and discipline of the Church.”

Accordingly I herewith resign as a minister (emeritus) of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand.

David Simmers

Being a Presbyterian can be both exhilarating and embarrassing. Right now, it's embarrassing.

I'm one of the at-least 35 percent who do not support the latest motion from the General Assembly excluding those who are gay and those in non-marital relationships.

The 65 percent who voted in favour of this motion will eventually be replaced by a different 65 percent, one with a broader vision and one in touch with the facts of life.

In the meantime, I will continue to baptise, marry and take the funerals of many within and outside the church

community. And if someone tells me they're gay or that they're living in a non-marital relationship, then maybe my hearing will be playing up.

Glenn Livingstone

A prayer to honour the courage of Ian Dixon

O God who is revealed at the edge,
The Moderator declared we hear the Assembly decision
in silence.

All I could hear was someone sobbing.

We were silent too, on the evils of

John and Tony and George's war

(The religious wing are always right)

and complicit in our silence with the economic priests

whose doctrines fuel global warming.

(Let us worship growth in all its forms).

God, your Son kept the company of those at the margins,

Those the purity codes rejected.

We confess we have not declared all foods clean.¹

We confess it is easy to sneer or jeer

at those who bare their souls in the coliseum.

May we be gracious and humble enough

to recognise the courage of one of history's persecuted minority.

In the name of the suffering servant, Amen.

John Howell

Reference

1 Mark 7:19

Survey of stress and burnout in paid pastoral ministry

(is this the unspoken problem in our parish ministry?)

Studies overseas indicate that pastoral ministry is now one of the most stressful occupations one can undertake. Anecdotal evidence within NZ strongly suggests the same but no solid evidence exists as to whether this is true or what the extent of the problem may be (and therefore what action the church should take in support).

The National Mission Enabler in collaboration with BCNZ has initiated a survey of this issue which will be distributed to ministers through their Presbytery clerks at the beginning of December.

The coordinator for this project is Dr Brian Gallaher, pastor of the Mossburn Presbyterian Church in Southland and BCNZ researcher. Please feel free to contact him for further details or questions on 03-248-6020 or email bwgallaher@clear.net.nz