



Forming partnerships

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About Candour

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

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The articles in *Candour* reflect the views of individual ministers or contributors writing in a personal capacity. They are not representative of the Church's official position. Please approach the author for permission if you wish to copy an article.

Contributions

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

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Negotiating risky partnerships

Amanda Wells

It wasn't an easy task to fill this *Candour*, and I'm grateful to the people who filled gaps at the last minute. Perhaps this was because of an early deadline to beat General Assembly; or perhaps because partnerships are not the hot topic we initially envisaged.

You might wonder where *Candour's* issue themes come from. The answer is that every November, the *Candour* editorial committee holds a planning teleconference to discuss and decide on issue themes for the following year. If you have any ideas you would like to contribute to the 2009 mix, please email me.

When we talked about partnership last November, we were thinking about how you balance tensions between different groups while maintaining separate identities and dealing with any strings that might be attached to grants. We were also interested in examples of cooperation between different Presbyterian churches. This isn't quite what we got, but the results make interesting reading nevertheless.

My dictionary suggests that partnership involves a sharing of risks and profits. It's about being stronger together and therefore more able to achieve the aims of each party. But it's also about maintaining a focus on your goals, and on your identity, rather than having these subsumed into a larger whole.

Some partnerships carry significant risks. For example, every General Assembly we invite the media to attend and cover the event. You might ask whether this is a good idea. You might say that it would be better to keep the media away, to avoid the possibility of dirty laundry being publicly aired and the Church's reputation being devalued. But then you might envisage a journalist standing outside the fence at St Pat's speaking to camera saying something like "this year, Presbyterians are meeting in secret for the first time, as they make key policy decisions". Or you might think of the lost opportunity to have the Church's voice heard by New Zealanders.

Like any partnership, each party wants something slightly different. We want positive coverage of the Church that reflects the reality of what's happening in our congregations. The media wants a good story. These two goals are not necessarily aligned. But if openness, transparency and honest debate are principles that Presbyterians value,

it makes more sense to nurture the partnership than to shut the media out.

This doesn't mean we'll be happy with the result. Like any partnership, our expectations of what we can get out of it need to be founded on a strong dose of realism. Sometimes the best we can hope for is a neutral-to-bad effect on our reputation. The only certainty is that refusing to engage with the media in these cases guarantees a bad outcome.

It's not only people outside the Church who consume the media; it's safe to assume that our churchgoers are strongly influenced by information through the media, no matter how much effort we put into internal communication like the website, email campaigns and Spanz. I'm writing this before GA08, so all I can say is that we've prepared to engage positively with the media as well as we can.

The partnership with the media can and does work; perhaps you've been followed coverage of the Church speaking out on behalf of Vanuatu seasonal workers. Some workers had contacted Presbyterian churches in their area about difficulties they had experienced. When 2006-08 Moderator the Right Rev Pamela Tankersley was in Vanuatu, church leaders there asked her to speak out on the issue. Coverage of her statements has resulted in action and investigation by the Department of Labour. It's also shown New Zealanders that the Church cares about social issues in our communities and is prepared to have its voice heard.

Another positive example of this partnership was in June in relation to Environmental Day, when we issued a statement outlining the Church's suggestions for taking care of creation. The Press newspaper in Christchurch rang local minister the Rev Geoff King, and ran a significant story about his efforts to live sustainably by cycling everywhere. This was picked up by other newspapers around the country such as the *Marlborough Express*. This kind of coverage helps change impressions people might have of the Church as boring or inactive.

The November issue of *Candour* will consider General Assembly 2008. If you'd like to contribute, please drop me an email at candour@presbyterian.org.nz

Being part of something bigger

Ray Coster, *St Andrew's Mt Maunganui, Bay of Plenty*

Living in a growth area of New Zealand forces you to face some ecclesiastical truths.

I must be a very slow learner, or a deluded pastor! After 31 years in ministry, I am beginning to see the church in a new light. God has placed his church in a city or town to bless that city and “seek the welfare” of that city. That task is not given to one denomination or one fellowship – it is given to us all collectively and we have to learn to work together. My task as a minister is not to have the “best”, “largest”, “most anointed” ... church in town. My task is to work with all Christians for the welfare of the people who live in this city.

About eight years ago, I began studying the demographics of the Western Bay of Plenty. The growth projections are enormous. Between 2006 and 2051, the Western Bay population is projected to double in size from 146,000 to around 300,000 people. Most of this growth will be in Tauranga City. About 50,000 people – that is, a city the size of Napier, New Plymouth or Invercargill - will join us in Mount Maunganui and Papamoa. Just under 90,000 people will be living in this coastal ribbon by 2051. A further 50,000 will join other parts of Tauranga City.

The question I wrestled with was: “what are the implications of this for the Church?” As I shared with pastors and other Christian leaders, we soon realised that the task was far too big for any one of us. If we continue to work on our own doing the same old thing, we are sunk. We have to learn to work together. Sociological factors began to force us back to God’s purpose and plan for his church “in the city”.

While that may have been the prompt that spurred us into action, it is something much deeper that is driving and inspiring many Christian leaders in Tauranga to work together for the advancement of the Kingdom. It is the call of God to his church that is driving us now for greater fellowship and relationship in ministry. The question being discussed amongst many church leaders in this city is, “how do we work together for the transformation of

Tauranga Moana by the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ?”

One of the images that I have found helpful in thinking about the church in the city is the wall around old Jerusalem. The purpose of the wall is to provide security for the people of the city and the wellbeing of those who dwell within the wall. The wall contains a number of gates. In the image I see the various churches or fellowships in

the city as the gates and the wall between the gates is the relationship between the churches. Both strong secure gates and strong walls are needed to “protect” the city.

In this city I have seen churches come and churches go – and still we continue to focus on ourselves

In the past, many churches have focused upon themselves and their well-being, but neglected the relationship with other fellowships. Or we have chosen which churches or fellowships we will relate to. The outcome has been one or two strong gates in the city, many struggling gates and the walls of the city in tatters. In the 23 years that I have been in Tauranga, I have seen five different churches become “the place to be”. The word would go round the Christian community, “that is the church where God is present, where the anointing is...”, and people would leave their church to be “where the glory is!” But all the time nothing was changing in the “heart” of the city in Kingdom terms.

If we are honest, the place and influence of the Church has probably gone backwards. The soul of the city has got worse, not better, even with all the busy work of so many churches striving to do their best. The strength of relationships and family life have continued to struggle. Suicide, family violence, hopelessness, drug use and immorality have increased, not decreased. The influence of evil in the city has not lessened.

And all the while some churches have continued to big bigger buildings while others have struggled to maintain old buildings or even pay staff. Growing churches have spent more and more on the latest equipment, getting sucked into the celebrity cult image.

In this city I have seen churches come and churches go – and still we continue to focus on ourselves.

In the image, it then occurred to me that God never intended his glory to be on any gate in the wall. “I will not give my glory to another” (Isaiah 42:8, 48:11). In Old Testament times, his glory was to be in the Temple – at the heart of the city. In the New Testament, the believers who dwell in the heart of the city are the Temple of the living God (1 Corinthians 3: 16, 6:19, Eph 2:21).

In the great priestly prayer of John 17, we often focus on the unity that Jesus prayed for – and rightly so. But the unity had a purpose – that the glory of God might be made manifest in the world (city)! (vv 23-24). No matter how strong the gates are, when the wall is weak the enemy simply comes in, destroys the Temple and the glory disappears. It is not enough to have strong gates (churches) – we must also work on the wall (relationships between the churches).

The glory of God is seen in a city not only when we focus on one or two gates but when the various gates are strong and in good relationship and fellowship. Of course we must continue to work on strengthening the gate that we are part of, but we must work just as hard on the wall between the gates – the relationship or partnership we have with each other.

In practical terms, what has this meant for us? I will restrict my comments only to Mount Maunganui and Papamoa even though there is excellent work being done on partnership in the greater Tauranga city too. In Mount Maunganui and Papamoa, a good number – not all – of the ministers and pastors now talk about and think of ourselves as just being part of “The Church on the Coast”. The heart of this is relationship, not covenant or some other form of written agreement or contract. Partnership must be born out of and grow through relationship. We even long for the day when the sign outside our various churches will no longer be St Andrews Presbyterian or Mount Baptist or Bayfair Christian Centre – but “The Church on the Coast at Dee Street”, “The Church on the Coast at Tui Street”, “The Church on the Coast at Grenada Street”. What message would that give to the community?

We now look for ways of working together more and more, of sharing resources and ministering in the community. When we plan for ministry now, and strategise for ministry in the future to meet the growing population of people, we look for ways of doing this in partnership. We simply keep the channels of communication open. We submit ideas or thoughts to each other. When we run a programme, the invitation to participate goes to all the churches. In seeking to establish a community centre, we do this together.

We are still very much in an embryonic state in all of this and will have much more to learn and many more mistakes to make. Most of the initiative and momentum

is only among the leadership. It is yet to spill over to the membership. But it is life-giving to see the various churches longing for, praying for, and hungering for greater partner-

ship for the sake of the “city” and the people who “dwell within the walls”. Lying right at the heart of this partnership are prayer and fellowship together. It is so refreshing to see the focus being taken off self and into the heart of the city – where it should be. God’s glory was never meant to reside on any gate – that is not the purpose of a gate. A gate is never meant to be a temple. Aspects of competitiveness, hidden offences, resentment, and envy between pastors and churches have all had to be confronted and confessed.

For us, this does not mean giving up anything of value from the past – our denominational affiliation for example. It is not about property or money. These things all remain the same. It’s not giving up anything – it’s simply adding to what we have for the sake of the Kingdom and the city.

It may have been sociological growth that prompted us to partnership, but surely partnership between churches will bless any city or town whether there is growth or not.

There has been one other very significant move that growth in this area has initiated – partnership between the Church and the City Council and Central Government agencies for the sake of the city – but that is another story!

Lying right at the heart of this partnership are prayer and fellowship together

Finding partnership experiences

Emily Wotton, children, youth and families worker, Auckland presbytery

This month's theme of "Forming partnerships" basically summarises my job description and the essence behind the various tasks and encounters that make up a day in my life working within Auckland presbytery.

In a consultative way around our churches, my primary role is to form partnerships with individual leaders working with youth, children and families, encouraging and supporting them in their ministries. In turn, the leaders from these ministries seek to form positive partnerships with young people, parents, volunteers, and the community. Often the most challenging area is navigating their partnership with the elders and leaders of their congregation. My secondary role is to form partnerships on behalf of the presbytery with para-church organisations and ecumenically that may benefit the wider work of presbytery and/or the individual congregations.

For the most part, congregations are very focussed on their local mission at hand. Many have limited involvement or relationship with neighbouring Presbyterian churches, other denominations or Christian organisations. Partnership is resisted. This is certainly accentuated in Auckland, which can be extremely fragmented from suburb to suburb. The presbytery is no stranger to the challenge that this brings to developing meaningful communities.

People that I encounter are, for the most part, longing for effective and mutual partnership experiences. Commonly, existing partnering is established through a connection made through a trusted parishioner. These partnerships may be deep and ongoing, despite the parishioner moving elsewhere or the organisation changing. However, some are quick to cut ties if their network source is out of the equation. Fears that inhibit partnership can be a historical experience, hearsay, or simply a misperception.

For example, a common fear is that partnering will take time and energy away from existing ministries which may be already faltering. But, often the opposite happens. Existing ministries can be enlivened, new people are drawn to positive partnerships, and both parties experience growth and/or success. The best effect is that the load becomes communal and the celebration of journeying together is enjoyed. Also, the support of shared struggle can be just what you need to pull through a hard situation or difficult set of circumstances.

Lately, I've been reading a lot about fostering a culture of partnership, particularly with young people. A lot of research and resource-sharing is available on the subject of "increasing participation". Much of the material is created by government departments and agencies.

The information below is from a resource called "Building a Culture of Participation - Involving children and young people in policy, service planning, delivery and evaluation" put out by the National Children's Bureau in London. Where are we in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand at with this and what is our personal part to play? Do we want to increase partnerships in our denomination and locally within congregations? Is partnership with young people key? Below is a summary of what it takes to bring about that kind of change:

Change needed at different organisational levels

Managers: *To back new ways of working, lead the implementation of these through the organisation, meet with and listen directly to children and young people, and help to ensure their ideas are put into action.*

Staff: *To develop positive relationships and engage in dialogue with children and young people. Including those working directly with younger people, those with occasional contact or whose work impacts on their lives.*

Policy: *To help ensure change becomes an openly stated and expected part of the way the organisation works into the future.*

Building participatory cultures is a complex and dynamic process. Change has to be negotiated between policy makers, senior managers, other staff and younger people and may be unpredictable. This is a creative process that involves eliciting and fostering enthusiasm, sharing ideas and learning through doing. Only by discussing, listening to each other, trying things out, and continuing to do so, will it be possible to decide each next step. It is a process that highlights that older and younger people have something to learn from and with each other, not least how to work well together.

'Partnership without marriage'

Noel Butler, minister emeritus, Dunedin

A local church has three primary physical resources; people, buildings and finances. When it decides to seriously address the needs of the people that surround it, each of these is likely to be in short supply.

The local church may respond to the perceived needs of the community by developing a mission statement and drafting a strategic plan. But if anything tangible is to be accomplished for the kingdom of God, words must become actions, nouns become verbs, dreams become realities. And for this the church may need to humble itself and seek help from unexpected places, by partnering with people or institutions that have parallel aspirations.

It has been my experience that there are people and institutions that are willing to partner with the church for the common good in a community when they are approached wisely and respectfully. That raises the question, "how does one approach a prospective partner in a manner that is likely to have a good outcome for all partners?" It is this question that I wish to address with respect to securing financial resources.

Before making an application for finance to a funding provider, the local church needs to be clear in its own mind what the project is, including the need for it, the shape, the target group and the likely outcomes of the project. No one wants to partner with a church on the basis of a vague idea or hazy a dream. When the project has been clearly identified and a plan has been drawn up, including a proposed budget, then one can identify possible funding partners.

The identification of prospective funding partners requires a lot work. Researching websites, annual reports and networking with people who have funded similar projects are key elements in the process. Once a potential funding partner is identified, then the church needs to be satisfied that entering a partnership with a particular funder will not compromise its own integrity or the integrity of the particular project.

Once satisfied of the potential benefits to both parties, then it is very helpful to seek a face-to-face meeting with the key person in the organisation. (Uncovering who is the best person to meet with may involve making discreet enquiries from an appropriate person in an appropriate network over a cup of good coffee.)

Careful preparation for the meeting is essential so that one can clearly articulate the need, scope, uniqueness, a financial plan and the benefits to the funding provider of becoming a partner in the project. The financial plan must show what financial commitment that the church is willing to make and what other providers have committed to it. And, then, I have discovered that the best results come from a statement like, "we are hoping that you might become a partner to the project, contributing say \$10,000. Do you think that that might be possible?" Often the other person will respond with something like, "I think that that is possible" or "I would be happy to support an application for \$7,500 before my board." With such a desirable outcome you can re-enforce the benefits that this partnership will be to the funding provider.

The next important step is to fill in the application form with careful attention to detail. Prior research helps the applicant know exactly what is required, and that can be anything from a paragraph or two to several pages of detailed information. And prior research will have briefed the applicant on the language that is appropriate to the ethos of the funding provider. For example, if the funder is church organization, it is appropriate to use language of the church; but different language sits more comfortably with a community funder. With a little thought, this can be done while maintaining the project's Christian nature.

On the point of integrity, it must be said that some important Christian projects, usually of a specifically evangelistic nature, often do not fit the criteria of community and government funding agencies. This is understandable and must be accepted. However, that conclusion should not be assumed ahead of time but talked through with the proposed funder. This is best done prior to making an application. It saves everybody's time. After a grant is received, the church must keep faith with its partner by ensuring that the grant is applied to the project agreed on, that the church's accounts are transparent and that the funder is properly acknowledged and invited to opening functions, annual meetings and so on.

There is a lot of good-will and support for churches who carefully prepare their mission projects and who treat potential partners with courtesy and respect. A mission church seeking to be the body of Christ in the world finds allies and partners in the most unexpected places. Such is the mystery of Sovereign Spirit of God.

The challenge of mission together

Colin Marshall, St John's Mt Roskill, Auckland

This is a personal reflection from a decade of working in parish ministry, and with multiple parishes in the Auckland region as Convenor of the Auckland Parish Committee. The views are mine alone and I don't claim they are all correct by any means, but rather reflect my struggling with the reality of ministry and mission in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, and more particularly, in Auckland today.

The situation

Among other things, the New Testament epistles identify one substantial reality: church life is not easy. In fact, it can be hard work. I love the apocryphal story of Jesus meeting a blind man and healing him, meeting a lame woman and healing her, and then meeting a minister and sitting down beside him to cry. Every minister and elder who has spent time in any form of ministry leadership knows how personally challenging the task of ministry can be.

This generation faces issues that are not new, but that have different twists reflecting the changed face of our Church and New Zealand society. The reality is many Presbyterian churches are struggling to cope. The reasons might be somewhat generically categorised as (1) spiritual, (2) generational, (3) administrative/financial, and (4) a crisis of leadership – and not necessarily in that order. I'd like to touch on these briefly.

We might be tempted to see a spiritual malaise as the consequence of the long, drawn-out conflict within the Church in the last few decades. So much energy has been expended with infighting, it is said, that the Church now has to rediscover listening to the guidance of the Spirit. But the issues I suggest run deeper.

The European Presbyterian Church was essentially a settler church built on the existing Christian faith of immigrants to NZ. It was a Church that, because of its solid educational objectives and scholarship, appealed to those wanting stability and personal advancement. This worked well until the 60s, when things went horribly wrong. As society turned to non-conformity and a questioning of

everything, the Church not only failed to respond with innovation and relevance but instead proceeded to publicly self-destruct. The faith and belief of many were irrevocably damaged. Thousands left the Church, many never to return. Pretty much a whole generation disappeared from our pews. Instead of leadership, we had factionalism.

The Presbyterian Church has, with some notable exceptions, never had a heart or mind for winning converts to Christ, to Christian faith. The Church has been a teaching, rather than reaching, denomination. That worked well where tradition fed the Church the children of its own, but

when that stopped happening and society turned its head away from the Lord, we Presbyterians immediately had a problem. As that problem was never addressed, many of

our congregations have now aged to the extent there is no one left to do the work.

During the same period, NZ saw the rapid development of migration from the countryside to the cities. Rural areas, historically staunchly self-contained, saw a rapid demise and the closure of many churches that were no longer economically viable. Some, now sharing ministry, have turned ministers into Sunday boy (and girl) racers, scooting from parish to parish across the countryside.

Aging churches can be very demanding because they have fewer and fewer people with the energy, or ability, to do the work of the parish, yet the numbers to be served are still there (for now). The decline of groups such as the APW (the traditional workhorse of many parishes), and the increasing requirement for both men and women to be in the workforce have changed the dynamic of family life and ministry dramatically. The women, who had formerly done so much but are now too elderly to handle the workload, have not been replaced by the younger generation. The load on the smaller number of younger people (often in their 40s and 50s) all too often results in their burnout. Sadly, the cry "we have to do everything" is not unusual from this age group.

We cannot go on doing what has worked in the past because the context has changed enormously

This type of frustration and burnout has led to an exodus from parishes of the middle aged and younger for somewhere more “vibrant”; commonly non-Presbyterian churches. The net result has been an increasing load on the sole-charge minister who is left to help people “die nicely”, as Pete Willsman put it so aptly a few years ago. Where there is no time or energy for vision, let alone outreach or mission, the church goes into an ever-declining maintenance mode.

If there weren't enough challenges already, the administrative and financial burdens on a parish have grown dramatically. Until recently, the now extensive band of elderly have faithfully supported the church but their support will soon disappear with them. A review of finances compared with parish numbers makes interesting reading. Sometimes financial viability disguises, for a time, the serious issues within a parish. But only for a time.

As the state increasingly interacts with church life, financial compliance, and the like, become more and more complex. The financial load is further complicated with issues such as tax, GST, KiwiSaver, financial reporting, the Charities Commission, Beneficiary Fund, staff payroll, parishioners' receipts ... and the list goes on. Who is to manage these at the professional level now required? This is one thing ministers are not officially trained for or allowed to manage ... but how many do ... or worse ... how many don't even realise their, and their parish's, precarious situation?

Many parishes have dated buildings in a sad state of repair that do little to enhance the image of a vibrant church. Yet some parishioners have an enthusiasm for their buildings that they don't so keenly exhibit for the Lord (yes I know what I just said – I've seen it!). Some parish buildings speak so loudly that nothing the parishioners say can be heard by the community.

To bring change requires leadership. But it isn't really leadership if there is no one to lead, no vision is being developed or worked out, and increasingly boring tasks are simply being repeated day after day, week after week. Leadership today requires a new dynamic, with men like Joshua ready to go forward in faith, men and women willing and ready to lead in new ways, opening up new frontiers.

Ways forward

All of this might be a reason for despair and depression but I don't think so, even though burnout and a negative introspection is far too common and real mission is spasmodic. My somewhat brief and generic summary hardly

does justice to the complexity of the issues at an individual level, yet what we are seeing is a new awakening to both practical and spiritual realities.

What has arisen from these ashes is a new era with a very different face. We now have an ethnically varied Church, where numerical strength lies in the Pacific and Asian cultures, one with strong family-based ties and the other with a vigorous evangelical ethic. Each, with their multitude of sub-cultures, “do church” very differently from traditional European Presbyterianism. I suggest that both will probably be far more significant in the future of the Presbyterian Church. And, interestingly, multiculturalism has been a boon to many churches, whereas mono-culturalism in many areas threatens to become a generational trap if not addressed by ethnic churches.

So what of the rest? What happens to the many small traditional and newly multi-cultural Presbyterian churches that are struggling to cope? Do they have a future?

In suggesting some ways forward here I do so mainly with regard to European and multi-cultural churches, and at that more particularly in urban settings, though some of the following may have wider application.

Spiritual awakening

At the risk of being quickly shot down but those of a differing theological perspective I'd like to suggest that we need to take more time in prayer and reflection asking the Lord what he wants of us and seeking his leadership and vision. In many meetings to resolve conflict or move things forward, I have asked individuals and groups “has the Lord told you this or is it just what you want?” When that distinction has been made, it is far easier to go forward, together, trying to achieve various goals. The Church is the Body of Christ together and we are to be led by the Spirit and the Word of God.

This leads to another key issue that people love to avoid but we shouldn't. Our theological diversity does not help our mission. Where there are significant theological differences, only the most generic vision and objectives can be agreed and they are unlikely to be deeply spiritual ones. Hence Auckland Presbytery can only have the most generic vision statement (“To make Jesus Christ known”) but it has never achieved, let alone activated, a mission plan.

At parish and inter-parish level, this is even more critical. We cannot be unevenly yoked. At best, we can recognise that others will go about a different mission differently and respecting that is the best we can ask for. To share

spiritual goals requires a common belief, that's what church is; people of like spirit, mind and like heart in the Lord, working together. This way far more is achieved and little energy is wasted with internal wrangling. The sooner we recognise this structurally, the better at all of our various levels.

Doing ministry together

Christians of like mind should be of a heart to work together. Unity in the Body of Christ is a Biblical imperative. Many of the practical issues parishes face can be addressed by working together, but not all. Some people you can never please, but who said we were here to please people anyway? God's imperative for us is a mission and discipling imperative, not a social security plan. He/she who saves their life will lose it and he/she who gives his/her life will save it. To do things together is to give up something of self to serve.

Many of the practical concerns of parishes can be resolved by economies of scale and specialisation. Why have two, three or four parishes in an area all trying to have full administrative support, ministers covering all ministry roles, and a small number of elders and parishioners jumping between Sunday School, youth work (in the few places it now exists), pastoral work and a myriad other spiritual and practical tasks? Bringing together and rationalising resource, allowing the focussed exercise of individual talents and spiritual giftings, and sharing enthusiasm (rather than burnout) seems an obvious solution. But there are catches.

Firstly, change requires courage. Joshua was instructed by the Lord to be strong and courageous (1:6). Then he would be a successful leader. I think we need to hear this call as well. We don't step out in faith when we stay in our comfort zones. If we are to lead people of faith, we need to be stepping out in faith, not occasionally but regularly. As the people saw Joshua's faith they were emboldened. So too our churches need to be emboldened. Presbyterian = safe. It should = stepping out in faith. There is a tomb stone on a Presbyterian minister's grave that says "preached the Gospel without enthusiasm for 40 years." It would be funny if it wasn't true. We need to rediscover being excited about the Gospel and what the Lord does in people's lives. And we can do this together as we step out in faith and see it happen for ourselves.

Secondly, leadership is critical. Bringing together multiple churches, without cohesive leadership and vision, will achieve little. If anything, it will hasten decline. But bring in new models of leadership and church life, new

synergies, new vision, hope and expectation and see what happens.

Thirdly, the commitment of some people to sites, plant, buildings and property at the expense of the Gospel is, I believe, a sin. God gives to achieve his ends, not chiefly for our comfort (if ever – see Jonah's story!). Sometimes, and sometimes sadly, historic value has to give way to new initiatives. If our goal is God's mission in the world and being the Church he wants us to be, then communities will need to decide where they stand and what is the most important. For some, this will mean selling or pulling down what the past has sweated for in order to establish something new. For others, this will mean the raising up of beautiful examples of past design with contemporary vibrant congregations. Each will need to determine what will work, not just for themselves, but into the future.

Fourthly, new skills will have to be learnt and gifts appreciated. We live in an age of specialisation. This is obviously true in areas of administration and finance, and we need to find such people to look after and train groups and individuals in parishes to do these tasks. But we also need to do the same in mission. Who are our evangelists? Our pastoral workers? Who are our preachers and teachers? Our disciplers? Our healers even? The New Testament recognises that the Lord has given differing people to the church and equipped them for their specialist tasks. We need to recognise this too and work with a more Biblical model of church. We've got the eldership bit right but why did we stop there?

Finally, I might suggest that this process is long overdue. For some parishes the time is shorter than they might think. Where the skills and abilities to bring about change are not present, parishes should consider seeking outside facilitators to assist in the process. I'm excited about what I'm seeing already as God has changed some parishes, including ours at St John's, around. It's not a quick process. Nor is it easy. But the end result is well worth the effort. And seeing a parish slowly turn outward to mission and seeing new people coming in, and coming to faith from lots of different cultures ... now that's exciting! And then to see those people keen to see mission wider afield, even overseas, I say "go Lord go, you're doing great things with Your people!"

Mary Logan, *Nordy: Arnold Nordmeyer, a political biography* (Steele Roberts: Wellington, 2008), \$45

Reviewed by Alan Quigley

Arnold Nordmeyer was a Presbyterian minister who made an outstanding contribution to the life of this country, a contribution based on the depth of his Christian socialist convictions.

He was a southern man, born in Dunedin, educated in Alexandra, Oamaru, OU and Knox College. He was ordained in Kurow, a widely scattered rural parish, in 1925. This was an area soon to be radically changed by two events: the construction of the Waitaki dam, which brought a great many men seeking work, together with their families, and then the onset of the great depression. It was his experience in ministry that drove him into politics. What he saw in his visiting, understood in his pastoral care, and recognised in the many who came begging to the manse door, led him to see how great a change was needed in the society. His socialism developed through sharing thinking with the local GP Gervan McMillan and the school teacher Andrew Davidson. Together they drew up the basic framework of the social security scheme. But knowing that this could not be implemented from outside, both he and McMillan entered Parliament as Labour members in 1935. Nordmeyer resigned from the ministry at that point but remained an active and committed member of the Church until his death.

Nordmeyer was widely recognised in Parliament for the quality of his mind, his informative contribution to debate, and his absolute integrity. He became chairman of the select committee on health and from 1941 Minister of

Health. We all stand in his debt. In the face of bitter opposition from both the National Party and the Medical Association, he progressively introduced free hospital care in mental health, then maternity, then general admissions and outpatient care, x-ray benefit, physiotherapy benefit, free district nursing service and the laboratory diagnostic benefit. Because of entrenched opposition to what was labelled “socialised medicine” he was unable to introduce free GP services but did secure a subsidised scheme that continues more or less today.

His time as minister of finance is remembered mostly for what Keith Holyoake successfully labelled the “black budget” of 1958. The incoming Labour Government inherited a financial crisis. It had been apparent to the Treasury for some time that this was looming, but Holyoake kept it secret as he recognised an electoral disaster in the making if it became known. Nordmeyer was forced to raise taxes – most famously on cars, petrol, beer and tobacco; but true to his principles he designed a budget that would not increase unemployment and also raised the family benefit and aged and other pensions. Further, while Minister of Finance he took steps to establish a broader base for the New Zealand economy. The first steps were taken towards a steel factory based on our iron sand, negotiations were entered into for an oil refinery, and carpet making became an established industry.

Nordmeyer is a person of whom the whole Church can be proud. His faith drove him to take many steps for the betterment of us all. He endured bitter criticism with dignity and courage. David Lange rightly described him as one of the “builders of New Zealand” and we can be grateful for what he was and did.

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Highlights in this issue include....

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News

Lest we forget

*Niki Francis, other recognised minister, Wellington**

It is Open Monument day in Flanders and huge buses squeeze along the narrow country lane, sandwiched between green-gold patchwork fields and Polygon Wood's dense trees. The buses disgorge hundreds of local people who have come to remember the courage and bravery of one particular New Zealand soldier and of multitudes who fought and who lost their lives on Flanders fields during World War One.

First we unveil a plaque to a New Zealand soldier awarded a Victoria Cross for his actions in 1917; later in the morning we will move to the Buttes War cemetery at Polygon Wood for a commemoration at the New Zealand Memorial to the Missing.



At the lane's edge, a New Zealand flag flutters over the side of a two-metre high concrete pillar constructed with chunks of concrete from First World War German machine gun posts. Beneath the flag, a plaque commemorates the outstanding bravery, courage and devotion to duty of a young New Zealander, Private Henry James Nicholas who, on 3 December 1917, single-handedly took a German machine gun post at the battle of Polderhoek Chateau in the field behind.

Twenty-six-year-old Nicholas, a member of the 1st Canterbury Battalion and a carpenter prior to enlistment, was awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions.

In the soft morning light on the narrow Flanders lane, London-based New Zealand Military Attaché Lieutenant-Colonel John Boswell reads the story of Nicholas' outstandingly courageous actions while two uniformed New Zealand soldiers indicate the locations of the 1917 activity in the green-gold fields behind us. Boswell uses terracotta-tiled roofs of farmhouses rebuilt since the destruction of World War One and the vivid green maize field as landmarks for the story.

New Zealand Ambassador Peter Kennedy releases the flag, revealing a photo of Private Nicholas etched into the

bronze plaque. Nicholas' face is solemn; his eyes beneath the brim of his "lemon-squeezer" New Zealand Expeditionary Force uniform hat meet those of the onlooker in a direct gaze. Tragically, Nicholas died in action near Le Quesnoy, France, the year following his courageous actions at Polderhoek, only 19 days before the armistice.

After Ambassador Kennedy, local mayors and Brigadier Warren Whiting, New Zealand Defence Attaché in London, have laid wreaths at the foot of the column, I step forward and say some words of dedication and blessing; I utter the hope that all who read the words on the plaque will be inspired to work for peace.

Nadell Karatea-Kokiri and Rachel Filiata, Palmerston North school teachers currently

based in London, support the blessing with a waiata tautoki, bringing tears to the eyes of many present as we think of the young man who showed extraordinary courage.

After some moments of silence, the crowd is divided into groups and led through Polygon Wood on a guided tour of German and New Zealand battle sites. Those of us involved in the service climb into cars that skirt the edge of the Wood and take us to the Buttes Cemetery.

The sky is bright blue and I am grateful for the autumn sun's warmth as we wait in front of the New Zealand Memorial to the Missing, which commemorates 378 members of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force whose bodies were never found. The green lawn before us contains the remains of 2108 soldiers who lie beneath the neat rows of white, round topped gravestones; each planted with shrubs and flowers. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) immaculately maintains the cemetery; 1677 graves are unidentified. There are just 139 identified New Zealand graves; 23 "special" New Zealand graves indicate that New Zealanders are believed to be buried there. Polygon Wood cemetery across the road contains 103 graves, of which 60 are New Zealanders.

Reflection

These are just two of many CWGC cemeteries in Flanders.

The silver fern etched into white headstones distinguishes New Zealand graves; Kiwis lie alongside Australians, British and Canadians and, in the smaller Polygon Wood cemetery, one German.

As we Kiwis wait the return of the groups walking through Polygon Wood, some comment on the cemetery in which we stand.

“When I first came here yesterday, I found it depressing, but now I am amazed at the peace here. It’s so beautiful and it’s so quiet, not even the birds sing.”

“It sounds strange, but this is my favourite war cemetery; it’s so peaceful.”

And peaceful it is. So peaceful that it’s difficult to imagine the muddy quagmire, studded with naked, shredded tree stumps and broken bodies that it was 90 years ago when ANZAC soldiers fought here.

Organising such commemorations is a major logistical exercise and Lieutenant-Colonel John Boswell and his team from the New Zealand High Commission in London have done a fantastic job.

“Well done, Madre, you’ve done a good job of organising a perfect day with the Big Boss,” a soldier comments to me.

I can hardly take the credit but we’re all grateful for this perfect day in the midst of indifferent Belgian weather.

Others begin to drift into the cemetery and I recognise local people I have met in the year I have lived in Belgium, some of the many who are committed to remembering the multitudes who came from afar and helped win back their country; people like Johan Vandewalle, whose family has farmed on the edges of Polygon Wood for centuries and who now runs the pub, De Dreve, at the end of the road. Johan was involved in the discovery and identification of the “Zonnebeke Five”: the remains of five Australian soldiers discovered during road works in 2003 and recently reinterred. He has provided crucial information in iden-

tifying soldiers’ nationalities through cloth, badges and boots from the remains that continue to be found in the area. I talk with Geert Dhaene who is known as “the man with the camera” because he attends many commemorations, creating an extensive photographic record.

Guy Gruwez OBE, MNZM, OAM, MSM, former president of the Last Post Association is present. The current president, Benoit Mottrie, cannot be present today but is represented by his brother. The Last Post Association is the local group that has ensured that the Last Post is played by local buglers at the Menin Gate in Ieper (Ypres) every evening since 1928 to honour those who died in the Ypres Salient during World War One.

These local people, and many others, take seriously the line recited at the end of Binyan’s Ode – “lest we forget.”

Once everyone has arrived at the Buttes, Rachel Filiata greets the VIPs, Peter Kennedy, Dirk Cadroen the Mayor of Zonnebeke and Brigadier Whiting, at the entrance to the cemetery and brings them over to New Zealand Memorial to the Missing where Nadell welcomes them to the ceremony with a karanga and hongī.

Whiting and his family, including daughter Charlotte, who is involved in both wreath-laying ceremonies, were members of Wadestown Presbyterian Church before his posting to London.

Kennedy and Cadroen inspect the Belgian army guard from the Ieper Barracks and I greet the crowd, welcome them and open with a prayer.

My recent research into family involvement in World War One contributes to this being an intensely moving experience for me, and a huge privilege to be part of the commemoration in this way. My interest in family grief patterns resulting from wartime losses make me want to encourage the people present to remember that the gravestones surrounding us and the names on the Memorial to the Missing are those of ordinary men, mainly young, who travelled far from home never to return. I want people to remember the others who did return home, changed



Reflection

forever by their experience. I want them to remember the great well of grief gouged in New Zealand's history by this event we call the First World War. My opening prayer reflects this.

Loving God, we stand here in your presence
to honour all those who defended freedom
and protected Aotearoa-New Zealand, Belgium
and our allies
during World War One.

In this quiet time
we imagine the battlefield sounds
the despair
the pain
and the grief.

We remember all who served here
especially our fellow New Zealanders
soldiers, nurses, doctors, carpenters, veterinarians,
cooks, drivers, pay clerks -
and all who were here during the dreadful times of
World War One.

We remember the New Zealanders who took their last
breaths here on Flanders soil
and never again walked New Zealand's hills, coast
and plains;
who never again looked upon the Hauraki Gulf's spar-
kling waters,
the green banks of the Taieri, Waikato and Clutha riv-
ers,
the Manawatu plains,
or the peaks of Ruapehu, Tongariro and Ngaruahoe;
whose eyes were closed forever to scarlet pohutukawa
blossoms at Christmas
and spring kowhai flowers;
whose ears never again heard the tui call at midday
or the morepork in the night.

We remember with love
all those who are buried here in Flanders soil
and we remember those who were left at home with
their grief,
with empty places around the table,
empty spaces in their lives and in their hearts.

New Zealand's soil was damp with tears
as Flanders' soil was wet with blood.

Compassionate God,
we remember them
we honour them

we thank them
We are grateful that we are free.
Amen

Nadell and Rachel support the ambassador's address with a waiata; the hauntingly beautiful strains of Whakaria mai fill the air; the music arrests time and honours the dead and the grief-stricken. The spell is held when the skirl of the pipes soars as Palmerston North bagpiper, Paul Turner, plays "The Lament for Murdo Mackenzie". Mackenzie was a Scottish Pipe Major who served in World War One and later emigrated to New Zealand where he was prominent as a piper and teacher.

Local veterans are present, a local band plays the tunes of the Belgian and New Zealand national anthems, Charlotte Whiting reads a moving account of life in the trenches.

It is 90 and more years on, but the terrible losses continue to be remembered and the dead continue to be mourned. Commemorations are frequent in Flanders; they are not glorifications of war; they remember those who lost their lives or whose lives were changed forever. We cannot fill the great well of grief gouged by World War One and other wars but we can stand at the edge of it and determine to find a way of living peacefully to avoid such calamity ever again.

Lest we forget.



**The Rev Niki Francis was working in parish ministry in the Uniting Church in Australia (in Canberra) prior to moving to Brussels for her husband's posting to the Australian Embassy as Agriculture Counselor. She's also a chaplain in the Australian Army Reserve but was asked to do the NZ commemoration in her capacity as a minister of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand.*

House to Home

The next booklet in our series of social issues resources deals with issues surrounding the **provision of housing**.

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Your church will receive eight copies of the booklet in early October.

More copies can be ordered from Angela Singer:
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(04) 381-8284



Summer School: Christianity & Science

In January of each year, the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Otago and the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership offer a week-long block course. We want to let you know what we have planned for January 2009.

From **Monday 26 January** (starting at 1pm) to **Friday 30 January** (ending at 1pm) at St Columba, Botany Downs, Auckland, Professor Ted Davis will teach a paper entitled, “**Christianity and Science: Historical and Contemporary Interactions**”.

As in previous years, the paper is available as a University paper (visit the University of Otago website), or for “audit” through the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership. The fee for auditing the paper is \$600. Presbyterian ministers and ordinands may apply to the Knox Centre for a \$300 study grant.

Enquiries about auditing the paper, including applications for study grants, should be directed to the Registrar at the Knox Centre: registrar@knoxcentre.ac.nz; phone (03) 473-0783.

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Confessions

I write just days before the General Assembly. The Assembly is always something of a defining moment for our Church.

For the Presbyterian Church, our distinctiveness comes partly from a sense of shared history and the way we organise ourselves, but also from the subtle and not-so-subtle values associated with that organisation. A recent Metro magazine article on the work of the Charities Commission and the so-called “purple economy” recognised the wealth held by churches, and also acknowledged that the Presbyterian Church was the only large denomination that made public on its website its financial records. Part of a Presbyterian understanding of power is related to the values of transparency, accountability, equity and a suspicion of the concentration of power and decision making. I discovered that at least something of the context of our Westminster Confession reflected a desire to ensure that these kinds of values were enshrined in the way that Church and society organised itself.

Ministers and elders “sign the formula” that includes the statement: “I believe the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith and other subordinate standards.”

For a bit of homework, I took the Westminster Confession home with me to (re)read. There are parts in it, or at least in my copy, that make for difficult reading. Identifying the Pope as the anti Christ, for example, doesn’t do much for our important ecumenical relationships. From what I can find out, some Presbyterian Churches from other countries have removed this reference altogether and others, including our own, read the Confession in light of the Declaratory Act (1892), in which the Presbyterian Church “disclaims intolerant or persecuting principles” and allows for “diversity of opinion on such points in the Confession as do not enter the substance of the Reformed faith.”

The historians among us will know far more about the history of the Westminster Confession than I do, but for those of us less knowledgeable, a quick summary: in 1643, during a period of civil war, the English “Long Parliament” (under the control of Presbyterian Puritans) convened an Assembly of Divines (mostly Puritan ministers) at Westminster Abbey in London. Their task was to advise Parliament on how to bring the Church of England into greater conformity with the Church of Scotland and other Reformed European Churches. The

Westminster Assembly produced documents on doctrine, church government, and worship that continue to define, at least in a theoretical sense, what it means to be Presbyterian. These documents included a Confession of Faith (1646), a Larger Catechism (1647), and a Shorter Catechism (1647), often collectively called “the Westminster standards.” Parliamentary efforts to reconstitute the established Church of England along Presbyterian reforms were undermined by the rise to power of Cromwell (who seems to have been more of a congregationalist) and the expulsion of Presbyterians from Parliament in 1648. The subsequent restoration of the monarchy in 1660 soon led to the reinstatement of episcopacy and the suppression of Puritanism.

All our Confessions and Creeds have a context. If the Presbyterians of 350 years ago were in part motivated in writing the Westminster standards as a way of providing a common doctrinal base for the support of a particular, and they hoped, unifying church and related social and political structure, I wonder now about the context in which we are seeking to find some commonality in the expressing of our own faith.

Clearly the Pope, Rome or the Episcopalian form of church government and its complex relationship with the state are not the threat. As I speak with leaders of these churches, the ecumenical endeavour in terms of identifying structural or even doctrinal similarities or differences leaves many in the room wondering about what all the fuss is about. Not that there aren’t differences, it is just that the nature of them does not seem to warrant a great deal of attention. What is more, each one of these leaders needs to deal with the same range of difference (theology, culture, geography, economic) that exists within each tradition.

The threats for us are not Rome or the Anglicans, but an indistinctive place for the Church on the post modern supermarket shelf of belief options. In some ways, it seems much easier to think of the Pope or the Episcopalians as the enemy rather than the challenge of providing a distinctive, relevant and significant Christian presence in our communities. I hope and pray that this General Assembly will unite us in our commitment to meet such challenges.

I pray for God’s blessing for you and your ministry

