

CANDOUR

News and Views for Ministers

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Faith and hope in a climate of fear

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Presbyterian Church
of Aotearoa New Zealand

Noticeboard

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:

Amanda Wells (editor) on (04) 381-8285 or candour@presbyterian.org.nz

Advertising

One-quarter page: \$80 plus gst (87mm x 117mm)

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Any artwork must be supplied electronically and in a high-resolution format. Measurements are indicative only and subject to layout requirements.

The next advertising deadline (for the October issue) is 28 September 2007.

Glen Innis Vacancies

September 10 17	Homestead/Cottage
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Ministers are welcome to inquire regarding vacancies due to cancellations.

The Church Property Trustees have reluctantly decided to introduce a **refundable \$50 booking fee** for Glen Innis. This fee is payable to Margaret Black and refunded on arrival at Glen Innis. Changing your booking will require payment of another booking fee.

Call for mid-winter resources

Sharon Ensor, Graham Millar and Dorothy Harvey from Wellington, having reflected on the scarcity of Southern Hemisphere resources for Mid-Winter services and original resources for worship to mark Matariki are seeking submissions to be included in a new publication to assist ministers and leaders of worship.

We are especially interested in Calls to Worship, Prayers; Hymns; NZ Poems and reflections; All age worship; Social and mission activities.

Themes which could be addressed include:

- Beauty in the Winter season
- Winter sports and outdoor activities
- Time for reflection, togetherness
- Hospitality : Sharing of resources
- Preparation and storage for Winter eg firewood, food, clothes.
- Family faith activities for Winter evenings, around the table, sharing stories
- Darkness to light, Evergreen Christ: (reflecting the evergreen nature of our native trees)
- Matariki – stars – guiding – symbols - seasons - celebrating our abundance - new beginnings etc

We are especially interested in original material. For published material it would assist us to know the name and contact address of the Copyright holder.

Submissions can be posted to: Wadestown Presbyterian Church: 118 Wadestown Rd. Wellington or

Email us via: ministerwpc@xtra.co.nz

By 21 September 2007

A word for the fearful

Amanda Wells

The assumption inherent in this issue's theme is that a climate of fear exists and we are living in it. But to an extent New Zealand's distance buffers us from the background fear that's become normal in the US and Europe. We don't seriously expect our trains or airports to be blown up by terrorists, though we are aware of the possibility. This is quite different from the view that it's just a matter of when.

So while you could take this theme to refer to an increasingly fearful perception of the threat of terrorism, perhaps you'd be better redefining it for our context as a fear for the future of the world in general. Recent wild weather may be only a foretaste of the change that we have inflicted on our climate. We seem no closer to stopping pointless wars or dealing to world hunger than we have ever been.

However, after you've read Kevin Ward's article, you might define fear as anxiety for the future of our aging church, particularly when he says "the difficulty now is that many of these congregations are beyond the reproductive cycle".

Fear concentrates attention rigidly on the problem. It doesn't create a calm space for finding and evaluating solutions. It creates a desperate need to "fix it now" and make it go away.

Fear is our monster under the bed. We don't talk about it or acknowledge it as a societal or individual problem, instead choosing to adapt our behaviour to side-step its symptoms. Our individually focused society makes a virtue of coping alone, with few people embedded in the kind of extended family support structures common only a couple of generations ago.

So many of our actions are fear-generated. Just talk to your neighbour; the relentless pressure of mortgages ensures low-level income anxiety; the insecurity of jobs provokes subtle performance anxiety; the success of others breeds insidious comparisons that undermine self-esteem. Why? Because our society quietly broadcasts that "good enough" is not adequate.

Our meritocracy puts all the focus on individual achievement and if you buy into this vision, failure is your fault. Personal worth becomes located in external factors such

as appearance, job status, wealth and sporting prowess. It's not about who you are; to just "be" is to stand still.

Jesus' interaction with Mary and Martha seems a particularly apt parable at this point:

*Martha was worried about all that had to be done... The Lord answered, 'Martha, Martha! You are worried and upset about so many things, but only one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen what is best, and it will not be taken away from her.'*¹

Usually the things we worry about are things that can be taken away from us: money, possessions, health, loved ones. If we're honest, we admit that we're Marthas. Being a Mary is not an easy thing nor is it something that our society or church nurtures.

Jesus had plenty to say on this theme. "I tell you not to worry about your life."² Could he have been more explicit? To me, worry, anxiety, etc are the besetting sins of our age, tacitly endorsed by our culture but inexorably distancing us from God.

As Simon McLeay observes, when given the choice, people pick safety over joy. Joy sounds fine in theory but safety offers freedom from worry, with everything always working out in a nice, contained way. A very attractive vision when you're wrestling with our postmodern world of fears. But can you imagine Jesus advocating safety?³ Being safe crushes thoughts of risk-taking or reaching out in faith. It implies desperately maintain a delicate equilibrium with as few unorthodox moves as possible.

We are never safe in this world. Why do we expend so much energy dancing to fear's tune? Didn't someone tell us to "be not afraid"? Isn't this a message our society is longing to hear?

The next issue of *Candour* has the theme "men in church". Contributions are very welcome and can be emailed to candour@presbyterian.org.nz. The deadline is Friday 28 September.

¹ Luke 10:40a, 41, Contemporary English Version

² Matthew 6:25, CEV

³ I'm not talking about health and safety policies, but about the individual construction of psychological security.

When fear comes calling...

Geoff King, Knox Presbyterian, Christchurch

On a Friday afternoon in the middle of winter, fear came calling on the city in which I live. At precisely 2:45pm, a small bomb exploded in the flower dispenser in the forecourt of the service station diagonally opposite my place of work. Ten minutes later, another bomb detonated in a rubbish bin outside a central city music store. Shortly after 3pm, a cleaner was injured by a third device exploding in an office in the city bus exchange, and at 3:37pm the fourth and final explosion occurred in a shopping mall several kilometres away. Whilst the bombs, all contained in plastic soft-drink bottles, produced only relatively small explosions, the shock-waves created by them were far wider than might be expected from what police described initially as a “student-type prank”. Even allowing for the usual amount of journalistic exaggeration, central Christchurch was indeed plunged briefly into a form of “commuter chaos” as Saturday’s *Press* report claimed, with hundreds of bus passengers, many of them children, forced out of buses and onto the inner-city streets.

The same issue of *The Press* reported another fearful set of facts, with a front-page article about the latest suspected child-abuse case being investigated by Christchurch police. The newspaper revealed that Christchurch health workers are referring nearly two children a week as suspected victims of physical abuse to the CDHB’s child-protection service, with 87 suspected child victims being referred and 26 at-risk babies being removed from their mothers soon after birth last year.

A survey I heard on the radio whilst driving to work recently confirmed something I have suspected for some time: we have become a more fearful society. From the tougher security measures in place at our airports to the tighter constraints we often feel we need to place on our children’s safety as well as our own, fear is an ever-present factor in our daily experience. The question is: what is a fitting response from people of faith?

For people whose faith is in the God made known in Jesus, the most obvious (and Biblically-mandated) response to fear is love - but as is often the case with obvious, Biblically-mandated responses, living out the implications of this is far easier said than done. How does speaking of love help people milling about a central city precinct in the midst of a bomb scare? What use is talk about love to a child caught in a web of violence in a

perennially unsafe home? In a world in which wars continue to be waged over matters of religion, what does Christian faith have to offer? What grounds are there to hope that the fearful environment within which we currently live can ever change?

One of the things that gives me hope is people’s willingness to engage critically and creatively with the values that shape and form our societies - especially those inherited from religious traditions such as ours. On the night before the bombs went off in Christchurch, for example, several hundred people gathered in Knox Church for the second in our winter series of lectures aiming to promote discussion and debate on matters of faith. Those present were challenged by a thoughtful and thought-provoking address from the Rev Dr Sarah Mitchell, who drew on the words of a number of hymns and worship songs ancient and modern to question our implicit theological and christological assumptions, and to invite us to set Jesus free from systems of thinking that authenticate and legitimise the use of violence in our world. Whilst no one would want to claim that certain Christian understandings of the atonement are responsible for all of society’s violent problems, it is I think hugely helpful and also hopeful when people are enabled to look at an often unexamined aspect of a particular faith tradition in a liberating, life-giving way.

Another example of something that gives me hope took place on the afternoon of the following day. At about the same time as the bombs were going off in central Christchurch, I was several blocks away, visiting two elderly parishioners who joined our church community a couple of years ago. Both educated, articulate people, they are now in that phase of life in which things previously taken for granted become anxiety-inducing: travelling to other cities to see friends and relatives; even travelling within the same city in their own car.

But those fears, real and present though they were and are, were not the main focus of our conversation. Rather, we spoke about their fears about being “judged” because they felt they’d outgrown some of the things they once thought were essential to Christianity. A concern about sharing one’s doubts with a minister was mentioned, as if it were my role as minister to sanction or slate other people’s faith. A respectful renegotiation of perceived roles was then followed by one of the most profoundly

meaningful conversations it has been my privilege to have. Whilst I imagine that my responses to some of this couple's theological questions would not meet the approval of all of my colleagues, in the course of our conversation I became aware of something oppressive lifting. It was as if, by naming the fear and addressing it openly, we had sown the seeds for a new flowering of faith. And that flowering was, and is, truly mutual: one of my learnings in ministry has been and is that my parishioners' anxieties and questions often very closely mirror my own, and that as their minister I need also to be free to question, to wonder, and above all simply to love others and myself in the spirit of Jesus Christ.

So where does all this leave me when fear comes calling? Neither of the examples I have mentioned will nec-

essarily have any significant impact upon a society in which people plant bottle bombs in public places and children are not safe in their own homes. But I belong to a tradition whose founder likened faith to a mustard-seed rather than a multinational, and whose way of working seems always to have been from the grassroots up, rather from the top management down. I belong to a tradition that persists in claiming that faith can give rise to hope when love makes the leap from thought into action. And I choose to believe that this faith, this hope, and this love will ultimately prevail over the fear that infests our world.

The challenge I set myself - indeed all of us - is to live faithfully, hopefully and lovingly, overcoming the fear of our world in the courageous spirit of Christ.

Theology in the Company of the Arts

Professor Jeremy Begbie



Invitation to the 2008 Summer School

Dunedin, 21-25 January 2008

Greetings from the School of Ministry, which from 2008 will be known as the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership.

Over the past four years the School of Ministry and the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Otago have jointly hosted a Summer School with a leading overseas scholar, engaging with the best of theology as it relates to church life and ministry. We are pleased to announce that next January Jeremy Begbie will be presenting "Theology in the Company of the Arts" as a block course in Dunedin from Monday 21 to Friday 25.

Founder and director of 'Theology Through the Arts' (www.theolarts.org), Jeremy Begbie's research interests are principally in theology and the arts. He is currently Associate Director of the Institute for Theology, Imagination and the Arts at the University of St Andrews and Vice Principal of Ridley College in Cambridge, UK. He is also an Affiliated Lecturer at the University of Cambridge, teaching systematic theology.

The paper may be done either as part of a Master of Ministry programme through the University of Otago or as a stand-alone paper through the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership.

If you would like to enrol for the paper through the University, ring 0800 808098, or go to the University of Otago web site - www.otago.ac.nz - where you will see a "Register Online" option. If you would like to audit the paper through the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership, please contact the Registrar at registrar@schoolofministry.ac.nz. The enrolment fee through this means of doing the paper is \$600.

Students at the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership receive a 50 percent discount. Presbyterian ministers are eligible to apply for a study grant from the Knox Centre of Ministry and Leadership to help cover this cost.

For more information, please contact Graham Redding, principal@knoxcollege.ac.nz, (03) 473-0109

Freedom from fear?

Rachel Tallon*

A parishioner comes to you on Monday saying they're worried about the high interest rates. On Tuesday someone mentions that they are turning off their heaters early every night as they don't want to contribute to global warming. Wednesday comes and a friend remarks that global terrorism is really worrying them, an attack might happen here. On Thursday another parish member says they are worried about raging dogs/P-crazed addicts/paedophiles. The list goes on and it may seem like every second conversation reveals a state of anxiety that leaves you wondering if the world really is such a fearsome place. How are Christians faring in what appear to be "dark times"?

Fear is about being powerless in the face of numerous real (or perceived) risks. University of Kent Professor of sociology Frank Furedi put forward the theory of "degraded subjectivity – the way in which human agency is systematically diminished by a sense of fatalism". This often translates as "oh dear, it is the will of God", referring to a sense of inevitability due to forces beyond our control, from the weather to taxes. Accepting that one cannot change the course of anything is actually conditioned into people; it's not a natural response for most. In general, human nature desires to change events and circumstance for the better. That's why we decorate our homes, try to get fit and do countless other actions everyday, to effect change. Throughout history there have been incredible examples of people who have not succumbed to the sense of fatalism that can befall people who have descended to the point described by Furedi. Changemakers have always argued, contradicted, put their lives at risk and demanded change. They've not been prepared to accept the status quo, even if it benefited them.

Often in the general media there is an aggressive promotion of a culture of fear. Watch the 6pm news and the top bulletins are often devoted to a national murder/rape/abuse case of grim proportions. These news items are newsworthy, but every day, in the top spot? Often the reporting is grim and a balanced view of life is not shown. Stories are often laden with fear-associated words, such as "security", "alone", "disappeared". No statistics are

given to show that 99 percent of people are safe and not affected by these events. If the news is watched daily, a viewer may be left with a palpable sense of "doom and destruction" regarding society. There needs to be balance.

Some political pundits have noticed that since the terrorist strikes of 9/11 there has been a heightened sense in the media that the world is a dangerous place (some argue this is Bush's legacy from the "war on terrorism"). HC Gunther of the Public Media Centre in San Francisco noted that after the 9/11 events his fellow citizens were easily manipulated:

"[Americans] have been slapped silly by the dizzying effects of larger-than-life issues, especially 9/11. They don't feel confident in making complex decisions. They have a

tendency to look for the 'tough cop on the beat' to take care of them." The chances of being hit by a terrorist strike in America anytime after the

Christians are not isolated nor protected from their surrounding culture

9/11 events were very slim (it was still more dangerous to drive a car) but people began to think that there could be an attack right next door, whereas in reality, the local traffic was more dangerous. When people are over-exposed to traumatic events, they may look for leaders to take a stand.

Politicians easily step into this role, and by employing the language of hyperbole, they may easily work the minds of their constituents into a continuous state of fear. "Axis of Evil" anyone?

There is a further worry that people in a vulnerable state of anxiety will tend to parentify the government or the media personally. The "voices of authority" become just that; voices of authority. Who would have thought that a news reader like Judy Bailey would become a de facto "mother of the nation"? Transference of responsibility and a non-questioning subservience create robotic citizens who constantly live in a state of fear, although the actual crises may change. Even if the threats do not occur in their daily lives, and in fact appear ridiculous, they are too afraid to question the majority opinion. Even fear of oneself becomes a factor – ever worry you might be

breaking an OSH rule when you core an apple, or discipline your children and look over your left shoulder to see if anyone's watching?

Christians are not isolated nor protected from their surrounding culture. They watch the reports of these alarming events, and live within the rules that the government of the day has deemed important for a safe and just society. Has this any effect on the Christian? Christ has changed their lives and offered them the Kingdom of God and yet they have to live in a culture that has a history of twisting the Gospel for its own agenda of fear and compliance. The question arises as to what role the Church and church leadership have for living in these times. Is the church merely a relay device for the modern media/government, or does it regularly say something to the contrary? Does the Church sit comfortably with the both the State and popular culture or does it confront?

Christians are called to be salt and light: at conversion, there is the challenge of following the way of Christ, not the way of the world. Identifying the way of Christ is often seen as a key function for the church. Teaching how to live as a spirit-filled Christian is high on the agenda of many churches, and so it should be. What about the flip side to this, identifying the intersection where the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world meet and are at odds with each other? Are Christians in churches quiet and accepting of the pervading culture or do they question and challenge what is being said? Who has more influence in the Christian home, Mark Sainsbury or St Mark? The question arises of the role church leadership plays in the intersection of the two kingdoms. It can be easier to avoid confrontation, the reasons are many and varied, but subservience to another god is the price to pay.

Take a practical example: the issue of global warming has seen many churches take this topic on board, from sermons on ecology to home groups planning for a better eco-footprint. Will turning off your towel rail heater make you a better global citizen (read Christian)? Is anyone raising the issues that surround this issue? Who is providing an oppositional opinion on the science, the history, the future, the economics, even the view from the majority world? The Church should engage with, not simply swallow, what comes its way. It may be that Christians agree with the central premise of an issue, but the important thing is that debate and questioning occurred before decision-making took place. How many churches seriously question our own Aotearoa New Zealand culture, on issues like consumerism, waste, media bias and government control, and seek to provide a real and viable alternative opinion.

Recently in the United Kingdom a group of swimmers won a legal battle to bathe outdoors without the presence of lifeguards on London's Hampstead Heath. They had to wage a legal battle to exercise their own ability to estimate risk, their own common sense. Such an example shows that despite the culture of fear, which has morphed into a "nanny state", humans want to be treated as adults, to make decisions themselves, to take risks. Christians do just that when they make the decision to follow Christ. They decide to become like salt and light, to be unpopular, to be different. To be truly different is to think and to question, to challenge and if need be, to disagree.

Living in a modern culture that gives a priority of space to violence and fear and seeks to take away the decision-making abilities of adults requires Christians to rethink their role as salt and light. Our minds are like open boxes; what goes in affects how we think and how we act. Exactly who or what most influences your parishioners? A good question to ask yourself is to name your top five sources of news. Then check who controls those sources: were there any alternative media present, what are the main messages, and about whom, from those sources? Take time to check what's coming in via your cultural antennae and above all, question it and be prepared to find alternative sources; you may find them more accurate.

Being open to challenge the view of "that's just the way it is" may make some Christians consider what they accept as the norm, and what they should challenge. It should be hoped that churches are supporting dissidence to the prevailing culture, if that culture is at odds with the Gospel. Perhaps its time to evaluate how salty we are.

References

"Grappling with the Politics of Fear", Don Hazen, www.alternet.org/story/14639

Interview with Frank Furedi by Jennie Bristow, 15 Sept 2005, www.spiked-online.com

* Rachel Tallon is an education officer at the Global Education Centre in Wellington, a not for profit organisation that offers training and resources for teachers, teacher trainees, young people, youth workers and community groups. She provides teaching resources on global and development issues.

A theology of risk and adventure

Simon McLeay, St Columba at Botany, South Auckland

A friend of mine once asked parishioners during a sermon whether they would prefer joy or safety; I voted for joy but the majority of the congregation voted for safety.

I think as a culture we have become obsessed with “our safety” but the tools we are using to build our safety are actually making the world less safe for others. I see too many fences. It’s funny, the fences that get tagged in South Auckland where I live are generally the six foot ones that say to neighbours “go to hell as long as I’m safe in here”. I think there are two types of safety, the safety I create for myself at your expense, and the safety I create for you at my expense. Theologically I think Jesus is in the business of the second.

I generally don’t like the word “safe”; it smells of kill-joy and boring, and yet I’ve found myself increasingly drawn into the world of health and safety this year. What’s that all about, God? Then I see that Candour’s theme for this month is faith and hope in the modern climate of fear and I want to scream out, “we need to take more risks in faith, and be less pedestrian”! Our churches are dying for the courage to risk our faith. I’m concerned that what we often do is ask other people to take risks in faith, while we keep it safe for ourselves.

We started something new last month, real simple, Faith @ the Pub! We got a group of guys together one Sunday night, booked a few tables at a local bar in Botany and had a meal together and then had a speaker. I asked three friends who don’t usually come, and they all came. We’re hoping to do it again next month.

I’ve been thinking about how we used to do that at church, but then all the safety would have been for me, and all the risk would have been for them. Going to a bar made it a public place, they knew “we’re going to be able to trap them”. The risk was for us, fronting up to the pub and asking to do a faith thing, in public! The idea’s nothing new, but I’ve been really challenged by that thought – how often do we make it safe for the insiders but leave it risky for the newcomer.

I guess this is one of the things that propels me to be involved in “Well Church”, which is a programme involving a health and safety resource for churches. When we did some research a few years ago about what would be

important to newcomers visiting a church, part of what came out was a need for the church to be “safe for our kids”. I think there is a missiological imperative for us to make our churches physically safe. Of course the Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992 also requires every church to have an active health and safety programme and take all practicable steps to keep their employees, volunteers and visitors safe. Would that distract us from our main task? As I’ve begun this work, I’ve started to hear some of the awful stories of accidents in the past: children left behind, youth suffering hypothermia, and yes people dying or being maimed on church properties. I’m starting to get passionate about this. It’s not about going to ridiculous lengths, but it is about churches stopping taking known risks with other people’s safety, and taking a few more risks with the way we’re always done things, and spending a little of our wealth on preparing for mission. Of course providing a safe building and environment won’t in itself bring new people to faith, but every time we think about the needs of a newcomer we change our culture. Come along to our Well Church workshops, and have a think about what you would risk to make your guests (and employees) safe.

Finally, my senior colleague Andrew is off to Myanmar this month. We’ve been talking about developing a church-to-church mission relationship for a while. We’ve supported missionaries in the traditional sense for many years, and we’ll continue to do that, but now we feel called to get our feet wet. We’re working with Andrew Bell and we’re not looking for a one-off mission trip, where the cost could be high for our hosts and the benefit high for us. We’re wanting to build an ongoing relationship, a two-way relationship, where we befriend brothers and sisters on the other side of the global economy and see what God can do through this partnership in mission. Again we’re struck by the challenge to let the risk be ours, and the safety be theirs.

In conclusion, I’m certain that the Western world’s current headlong pursuit of safety at the expense of mortal danger for every Iraqi will not yield us safety. I think we need more brave souls like the Korean missionaries who took the risk themselves, that some Afghan children might be healed. Yes, it’s mad, but it’s also good news. Where can I be less safe, so that my friend can be more safe to explore the Gospel?

Young adults and Presbyterian futures

Kevin Ward, School of Ministry, Dunedin

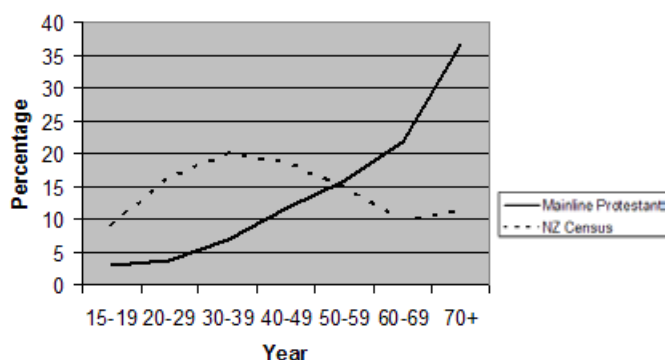
This article is based on a paper given at the International Society for the Sociology of Religion Conference held in Leipzig, Germany, in July this year. The conference attracted over 500 academics, from 55 countries and five continents. I was invited to give a paper in a section on church attenders' beliefs and behaviours, which involved people working in this area from the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Among other things, it reinforced for me a growing belief that the critical issue for the future of our churches is that of young adult involvement. US research on the importance of having a match between internal church factors and external community factors for church vitality showed that by far the most important factor was having young adults (the 18-44 age group) involved. Australian research on church vitality showed the three most important factors were the percentage of young adults attending, openness to innovation and having quality leadership.

My own research has shifted to focus on the 15-39 age group in New Zealand. This came out of my analysis of data from the Church Life Survey New Zealand (CLSNZ) 2001. This provided responses from considerable samples of Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Catholic and Baptist churches, as well as some smaller groups, including Cooperating Parishes. I was particularly interested in the mainline Protestant data and its comparisons with that of Baptist churches (where I previously belonged) and with the general population of New Zealand.

The graph below pictures how mainline Protestant churches are heavily overrepresented in the older age groups and underrepresented in the younger age groups.

Census 2001 & CLSNZ 2001 mainline Protestant age profile



Percentage of total population of New Zealand as a function of age categories from the Census 2001 and 2001 Church Life Survey New Zealand for mainline Protestant churches.

For Anglicans the average age was 58 years, Presbyterians 62 years, Cooperating Parishes 65 years and Methodists 66 years. This compared with an average age for Catholics of 54 years, for Baptists 43 years and for the general population 41 years.

Percentage of attenders by age categories for the 2001 CLSNZ and 2001 NZ Census

	15-39	40-59	Over 60
Anglican	15	34	52
Presbyterian	16	31	56
Methodist	12	22	65
Cooperating Parishes	11	28	61
Catholic	25	36	40
Baptist	41	38	22
NZ Census 2001	46	33	21

The results of the research indicate that the mainline Protestant churches have in all cases more than double the percentage of attenders over 60 years of age (pre-boomers), than does the general population. The Catholic figure is slightly less than double and the Baptist figure only slightly higher than the general population. In every case, including the Baptists, the percentage is higher in the 2001 survey than it was in the 1997 survey. Mainline Protestant churches have a slightly lower percentage of attenders in the 40-59 age group, baby boomers (significantly lower for Methodists), while for both Catholics and Baptists the percentage is slightly higher than the Census profile. In all of the groups the percentage in this age group has declined slightly.

When we come to the 15-39 age group, post-boomers, they are less than half of that in the general population for Anglicans and Presbyterians, and less than one third

for Methodists and Cooperating Parishes. Catholics are slightly more than half of and Baptists just slightly less than that of the general population profile. In all cases the percentage in this age group has fallen slightly.

This clearly indicates that the age profile for all the churches identified is older than that for the general population, and is becoming more aged. The figures are particularly concerning for mainline Protestant Churches, while those for Catholics and Baptists point clearly in the same direction. But for mainline Protestant churches the question must be asked as to how tenable even a short term future may be for many local congregations, when more than 50 percent of attenders are over 60 years of age. This would also indicate that while the rates of decline may have been significant over the past few decades, the rates may increase even more with so many nearing the end of their life. Many congregations are kept going by a small group of aged members who have lived in the same locality for most of their adult lives and for whom loyalty to the church they have known for most of that life is a key factor in their personal identity. These are not characteristics of the generations that follow.

The age profile also indicates that the decline in attendance for those churches can be explained to a significant degree by looking at the patterns of the middle of these three age groups; the baby boomers. It is this generation and their children (the post-boomers) who are largely missing. In addition, when historic patterns of attendance are examined, the figures begin to show serious decline from the middle of the 1960s: the years that the first of the baby boomers hit young adulthood. The decline can first be seen in youth group and Bible class numbers. Then, because baby boomers were significantly absent from church in their child rearing years, Sunday School numbers began to decline in the early 1970s. This had a particularly strong impact on mainline Protestant churches. For their ongoing vitality they have relied on the repetitive cycle of reproduction in families who belong to the parish. Children are baptised, proceed through Sunday School and youth group, are confirmed and eventually become adult members who, when married, have their own children and so the cycle continues. This cycle which had been perpetuated for centuries was broken when baby boomers, as late teenagers and young adults, exited these established churches in large numbers. As a consequence the significant absence of young adults in their child-rearing years has had a major affect on church participation figures ever since.

The difficulty now is that many of these congregations are beyond the reproductive cycle. There are insufficient

people of child-rearing age for replenishment to happen this way, even if they did develop forms that kept the children and young people that they already have. As it is, data collected from other questions in the CLSNZ 2001 indicate these mainline churches are less successful at doing this than are some other churches, such as the Baptists.

Percentage of attenders' children (still living at home) who are also attending church

	Children (10-14)	Youth (15-25)
Anglican	75	53
Presbyterian	79	59
Methodist	79	55
Cooperating Parishes	71	47
Baptists	87	68
Brethren	92	75

Looking at the percentage of children aged 10-14, whose parents are themselves attending church, and who are attending church, the figures for mainline Protestant churches range from 71 percent to 79 percent. For Baptists it is somewhat higher at 87 percent and for Brethren higher still at 92 percent. When we move to the young people living at home, the figures for mainline Protestants are between 47 percent and 59 percent, compared with a significantly higher figure of 68 percent of Baptists and 75 percent of Brethren.

In looking at how young people feel about what their church offers for them, the results again indicate greater problems for the mainline Protestant denominations in holding on to the youth they have, let alone attracting others. The percentage of those either satisfied or very satisfied with what their church offers for young people ranges between 30 percent and 42 percent for mainline Protestant churches, while for Baptists the figure was significantly higher at 54 percent and for Brethren 63 percent.

A survey in 2004 by Presbyterian Youth Ministries found that there were 5016 young people aged 11-14 under pastoral care of churches. This had fallen to 3327 for those 15-17 and to 1723 by the 18-25 age group. When we realise the last age band is more than twice the length of the first it demonstrates even more the significant challenge

these churches face in turning around their aged and aging profile. Another indication of the problem is the fact that 28 percent of churches had no young people, and another 21 percent less than ten.

The next analysis breaks down the census figures for religious affiliation into similar age groups so that comparison with attendance data can be made.

Percentage of religious affiliation for Census 2001 and CLSNZ 2001 by age categories

		15-39	40-59	over 60
Anglican	Census NZ	29	37	34
	CLSNZ	15	32	52
Presbyterian	Census NZ	30	37	33
	CLSNZ	16	28	56
Methodist	Census NZ	32	37	32
	CLSNZ	12	23	66
Catholic	Census NZ	45	34	22
	CLSNZ	25	36	40
Baptist	Census NZ	42	36	23
	CLSNZ	40	38	22

I anticipated a similar pattern but the figures did not bear this out. Age representation was much more evenly spread in the Census figures of affiliation. Much recent sociology of religion uses the framework of believing without belonging, arguing that to a significant degree religious believing has been detached from religious belonging. This is suggested to be so particularly among younger generations. If census affiliation is primarily an indication of religious belief or identity, and the CLSNZ attendance figures of religious belonging or participation, then this data indicates that this pattern of believing without belonging is particularly strong in mainline Protestant denominations (as well as Catholics) but less so amongst Baptists, where the age profiles for each set of data are very similar. Younger people still identify themselves in

significant numbers as Anglicans, Presbyterians or Methodists, even if they do not choose to belong.

The significance of this is even more apparent when the actual numbers are looked at. In Census 2001, 142,939 people aged 15-39 identified as Anglicans, 110,514 as Presbyterians and 31,326 as Methodists, compared with only 16,764 as Baptists. For those 15 to 29 it is 91,823 and 55,039 for Anglicans and Presbyterians compared with 9216 for Baptists. Attendance at Baptist churches in New Zealand on a Sunday is now roughly equal to that of Anglicans or Presbyterians. Given this, the much younger age profile for Baptists indicates they have significantly higher actual numbers of young attenders regularly in their churches. Consequently the relatively small number identifying as Baptists compared with the high numbers of Presbyterians or Anglicans is somewhat surprising. Baptist churches (along with Pentecostal churches) are the churches that are regarded as more attractive to younger people, and in terms of participation this is clearly true. However, these Census figures indicate that there is still at least some considerable attraction for younger people in what these mainline denominations are seen to represent. They still identify with them in considerable numbers. If I can use the somewhat crude analogy sometimes used for evangelism of fishing, churches like Baptists have a rather small pool to fish in but are rather successful at landing fish, whereas mainline churches have a vastly larger pool but are not very successful at the task.

I have argued elsewhere that the religious challenge for churches, such as our Presbyterian Church, is not so much how do they get people to believe but how do they connect with those who still continue to believe in such ways that they might want to belong. I had in mind primarily baby boomers who had ceased belonging but continued to believe. The data certainly supports this, but further indicates it might also be true for post boomer generations as well.

As a result of this, I recently began a research project to identify the religious beliefs and commitments of people in the 15 to 39 age group. The results from an initial pilot survey in three university halls of residence have been completed. It is acknowledged at this stage these might be slightly skewed results since there is now a considerable amount of evidence that levels of religious involvement may be higher in that context than other contexts in which young adults live and work. However, these results do confirm some interesting patterns that seem to have been emerging in religious identity and participation in New Zealand.

Of those surveyed, 59 percent indicated a Christian affiliation compared with 49 percent of 15-29 year olds in Census returns. Of these, 19 percent were Anglican, 12 percent Presbyterian, 10 percent Roman Catholic, 6 percent Baptist and 5 percent Pentecostal. Only 37 percent indicated they never attended church. Twenty-five percent were weekly, 3 percent fortnightly, 12 percent once a month, and 26 percent a few times. These are somewhat higher than national average figures, but three recent national polls indicate about 20 percent of the population say they attend at least monthly and a total of between 46 percent and 50 percent at least once a year (apart from for funerals and weddings).

I was particularly concerned to find those who indicated a Christian census identity but never attend. I thought from looking at the gap between attendance figures and census identity for mainline Protestants that this would be a large pool. To my surprise it was only 7 percent of the total. Two percent said because it was the religion of parents or grandchildren, 3 percent because they went to church schools and 2 percent were baptised or christened. Only 3 percent of those who gave a religious identity said their parents never attended church, and only 5 percent indicated they had not attended Sunday School or Youth Group at least occasionally. These figures support the argument that I have been making in New Zealand from research among church attenders that people are primarily socialised into the faith, and the finding that only about 4 percent (at most) of adult attenders at growing evangelical (and largely baby boomer) churches came to faith as adults without some previous childhood or youth experience of church. This pattern seems to be continuing with post boomer generations. A study of a student church plant (Studentsoul) on the University of Otago campus found that only 5 percent had not attended church, Sunday school or a church youth group regularly at some point prior to coming to this church.

In the wider student survey, 46 percent said they definitely believed in God, 8 percent probably, 22 percent were unsure, and only 26 percent did not (of New Zealand's total population, 67 percent indicate belief in God). 42 percent of the total sample believed in God as a personal being involved in the world but only a surprisingly small 15 percent felt they had been influenced by New Age, Eastern Beliefs or Alternative spiritualities. Twenty-three percent indicate they pray daily or more, another 19 percent once a week or more, 29 percent occasionally and 32 percent never pray. For the total population, 30 percent say they never pray, and 30 percent pray weekly or more. What do we make of all this? Firstly it indicates that the percentage of post boomer young adults in NZ who con-

tinue to hold religious beliefs and identities is not markedly lower than for the whole population, and in some areas may be even higher. This despite the fact that they were not socialised in churches through the same patterns of regular attendance that older generations were. Much of this takes place through the more diffuse cultural forms that religion now takes, particularly in the media.

Secondly it seems to indicate a much wider number of young adults show up at churches at least occasionally than numbers indicated by counting weekly attendance would suggest. More recent polls indicate this is true for NZ as a whole. What does appear to have changed significantly is a move away from regular or weekly attendance. While research indicates this pattern has also occurred among older generations, it may be much more marked among young adults, and surveys of patterns in some congregations indicates this. One thing this suggests is that perhaps we are over focussed on counting weekly, and especially Sunday, attendance as the main marker of religious commitment.

These initial results then would indicate that, so far as young adults are concerned, it might not be completely a case of identity without participation, or believing without belonging, but rather of identity with occasional participation, or believing while hanging loose, but still hanging on. Much of this appears to be with mainline churches rather than more conservative groups. These are patterns of behaviour many would say are characteristics of this age cohort in many areas of life, not just religion. The problem for churches such as ours is not necessarily that young adults do not have an interest in the religious dimension of life, or more specifically the Christian faith, but that they do not have an interest in investing themselves in the kind of institutional expressions of church life we have developed. The future of any institution depends on having a sufficient body of each new generation interested in that investment. What kind of communal forms and expressions of faith will they want to invest in? If our churches are going to have an ongoing and vital future, this is the most important question we need to answer.

We can only find out by asking those who are in that age cohort, seeking to help them discover ways of expressing it and channelling a significant proportion of our resources into enabling them to do so, rather than propping up the forms that have been developed by previous generations, including my own baby boomer cohort. I believe the evidence is clear; the only questionmark hangs over our courage to act.

The enemy of hope that dances to death's tune

Martin Stewart, St Stephen's, Christchurch

As I recall it, Alvin Toffler predicted in his 1970s book *Future Shock* that fear and anxiety would be some of the by-products of our crazy, fast-changing technological world, with people getting left behind because the future will come at them too fast. It looks like he was right... the proliferation of Prozac and other anti-depressants among people in the so-called developed world would suggest that depression and anxiety are part of the cost of change.

But I wonder if along with fear being a by-product of our peculiar society, fear is also being used as a mechanism to manipulate people. Here are a few examples I can think of:

The fear-mongering about a possible bird-flu epidemic. A year or so ago we were "done for" and people were stockpiling tamiflu pills, even though there was next-to-no evidence that those pills would be able to treat a virus that didn't yet exist. Why the panic when there wasn't anything we could do about it anyway?

The projection of worse-case scenarios as actuality. We saw an example of this last month with President Bush announcing that inaction against Iran is likely to result in nuclear holocaust. But more commonly we see this in the use of statistics as a way of projecting the future, with the results almost always bleak. We even see these worse-case scenarios being used to provoke certain kinds of mission-action in the Church. I find this use of statistics to predict the future of the Church highly speculative and rather manipulative. A colleague listening to such stuff was reminded of a frequent comment from one of the characters in *Dad's Army* who, speaking out of his congenital pessimism, would announce in almost every episode: "We're doomed Captain Mannerling". Statistics usually suggest we are doomed – and they get us all scrambling around in a dance of death. I think it was Lloyd Geering who suggested in the 1960s that the last Presbyterian and Anglican would be meeting to close the door of the last church in the year 2000. Um... not quite; I like to think that God had another idea about that.

Fear of the enemy being used to stimulate nationalism and economic growth. This has been a consistent feature of the way in which successive United States administrations have behaved since World War II. As I understand it, from my geo-politics studies at university, the US has

operated on a war economy since 1941. The economic growth from being almost constantly involved in warring has been astounding, and has, in the eyes of the powers that be, justified hideously large sums being used to manufacture the machinery and armaments of war, as well as popping up to the moon and back. Whether the enemy exists or not isn't all that important – enemies can be created (do you remember President Reagan invading Grenada?). Iraq is one such creation. The irony of the first Gulf War was that the missiles being directed at US aircraft by Iraqi forces were made in the US! It turns out that for many years Iraq had been supplied US arms as a buffer against Iran. While I am cautious about conspiracy theories, is it too much to imagine that the first President Bush deliberately left Iraq's leadership intact for another day when it would be more convenient to invade? But then a problem emerged... there needed to be a reason to invade. Umm... what if we say that Iraq had Weapons of Mass Destruction? Now we are being told that Vietnam wasn't so bad, but that it was the leaving of it that was a problem!

The proliferation of end-times theory as fact (the worst of these can be found in the hideous *Left Behind* novels), and the associated justification of violence, prejudice, intolerance, scapegoating and ignorance, as well as a laziness when it comes to attending to the tasks of making peace, caring for the environment, loving one's neighbour, etc.

Of course there are many more examples, but what is most disturbing is the complicity of the Church in this fear-mongering. I believe that hope is the attitude that Christians are called to exhibit in a fearful world that seems to bow to the triumph of death. Christian hope is not blind optimism or reality avoidance, but a living demonstration of there being a bigger story; a meta-narrative as some theologians describe it.

This big story is the narrative of God's saving work in the world; the presence of the kingdom of God among us, yet still to come in its fullness; and a living into the reality of the victory of Christ over the powers of this world that seek to dominate us [see *Colossians 2:13-15*].

I believe that there is an explicit call for the people of God, who find themselves to be strangers in a strange land, to nevertheless live fearlessly, confidently and hopefully in God's promises [*Isaiah 43* etc].

It is our calling as the Church of Jesus Christ to demonstrate to the fearful world that there is another way of seeing things this side of the incarnation; we live this side of the ministry of Jesus, we live this side of his death on the cross, we live this side of his resurrection and we live this side of his ascension. Thus we live hopefully, not fearfully. We live to the tune of life in its fullness and not to the march of death in all its fearfulness.

William Stringfellow, a lawyer and theologian, offered these words for the Church in a world where the powers of fear and death seem to be reigning:

“In the face of death, live humanly. In the middle of chaos, celebrate the Word. Amidst babel... speak the truth. Confront the noise and verbiage and falsehood of death with the truth and potency and efficacy of the Word of God. Know the Word, teach the Word, nurture the Word, preach the Word, defend the Word, incarnate the Word, do the Word, live the Word. And more than that, in the Word of God, expose death and all death's works and wiles, rebuke lies, cast out demons, exorcise, cleanse the possessed, raise those who are dead in mind and conscience.” [An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land. 1973 p143]

Bush Telegraph

Are you on the list?

Bush Telegraph contains news from the Moderator, Assembly Office, Presbyterian Youth Ministry, and the Global Mission Office, among others, as well as notices and job vacancies.

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Coordinator of Ministry Formation and Leadership Development, Auckland



Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand is setting up a Centre for Ministry and Leadership to train and equip people for ordained ministry and other leadership positions in the Church. From 2008, the Centre, which is in Dunedin, will replace the current School of Ministry.

We are seeking a Coordinator of the Centre's activities in the Auckland region, and other areas of the North Island as required. These activities will include overseeing Ministry Internships, fostering other ministry formation and leadership development opportunities, contributing to the delivery of the Centre's theological programme, and establishing and maintaining constructive working relationships with a broad range of groups within the Church.

The Coordinator will be a full member of staff of the Centre for Ministry and Leadership and will report to the Principal.

The successful candidate will have a suitable blend of high level theological qualifications and proven experience in ministry and leadership. Knowledge of the Reformed tradition and the ability to work within the theological and ethnic diversity of the Church are essential.

A position description may be obtained from the Registrar: registrar@schoolofministry.ac.nz

Applications should be sent to the Principal, School of Ministry, Knox College, Arden Street, Opoho, Dunedin by **20 September 2007**.

Lessons from living in a climate of fear

Glenn Jetta Barclay, minister within the bounds, Wellington

A friend brought me the gift of a rose bush recently. As I looked at its winter branches I immediately pictured, beyond the thorns, the prospect of beauty – an apt example of our theme – “faith and hope in the modern climate of fear”. Indeed!

The words “faith and hope”, so overly familiar, can trip off the tongue glibly unchallenged. That is, until the thorniness of the modern era of international terror and suspicion and the happenings of daily life test their authenticity to us individually and as neighbourhoods and nations. The vocation of Christians is to be people of faith and hope. Can this be true in practice under pressure?

Hope is shaped by an envisioning of a greater good, of an eventual positive outcome. Faith in this context means something akin to hope but links to active trust. They are both the dynamic means towards the desired end and are part of the solution. Vague hope and faint faith is of little use to God and the world.

Alternatively there is deep despair. “It is all for nothing anyway,” says the nihilist. This brings an inevitable depression. If a person’s creation story and worldview promise fulfilment, security and fruitfulness during life on earth and they are forced to live in a climate of fear and restriction, then disillusion and depression can set in, colouring every attitude and action. They themselves can become dangerous people.

Deadly serious doubt about faith/hope outcomes can become cancerous in mind and spirit, leading to confusion, cynicism and powerlessness. Despair and doubt feed on fear. Possible consequences of these are the mindless projection of hatred by retaliation. Stances of righteousness and superiority can cloak despair. This is not over-stating this damaging condition. It is observable and occurs within all of us to various degrees.

I saw and experienced these behaviours first hand in my years overseas. Never can I be casual about faith and hope, for my own have been tested to the utmost when I lived in environments where humans were pitted against other humans in all-consuming hatred and fear, performing acts of deliberate and prolonged cruelty, rejoicing in the suffering they had inflicted and planning to exceed it at the next opportunity.

When I lived in Northern Ireland and Palestine/Israel, my trust in the essential goodness of all human beings was shaken to the core. The long-term consequences were evident. People retained the memory of injustice and brutality from generations back, carrying it like an old wound that would not heal. The immediate effect was more than sobering – it was heartbreaking and spirit destroying.

Fear is too weak a word for the possibility and consequences of terror. For hatred is indeed tangible. It grows rapidly spreading like a virus and entangling the very people who seek goodness and holiness. How subtle it is, for it disguises itself in justification and righteousness. All sides in Northern Ireland believed themselves to be the victims and sought to be the victors. Likewise in Israel - Palestine.

Daunting fear brings gross insecurity. It restricts. It grows wings of imagination suggesting demons where demons might not exist. It causes huddles of humanity – instead of fluid, mixed groupings. Fear creates things like border control, diverse symbols of sectarian or national identity such as flags, enforced official languages and territories under authorities not necessarily the legal one. Use of such things are weapons against the dreadful Other. Especially walls. These are seldom walls of peace nor really of protection but are walls of separation, and become the means to subdue, punish and control populaces reacting negatively to life in war zones. As for the prisons – those within had few if any rights, often had had no trial. Fear of their sons being unjustly captured caused parents to virtually imprison their sons within their homes and villages. What a mighty symbol of hope must be the unexpected fall of the Berlin Wall.

Threats raise levels of fear – the perceived possibility of punishing action is almost as destructive as the action itself. Fear is not just a climate in today’s world but is the daily *environment* for the majority of people. Faith and hope are either lost or diminished for many as they live with these uncertainties and view evidence of dangerous world conditions. Conversely the very worst situation can strengthen the faith and hope of some individuals and groups.

In Northern Ireland, while working to build peace with people from all sides of ‘The Troubles’ I came to respect the sheer courage of those who, despite current situations

of daily injustice and terrorising, hearkened to God's teachings and chose to move beyond sectarian and historic hatred. This was far from a simple process as people would fluctuate, swinging back to bitterness and entrenched positions especially when something happened to re-enforce them. It was their perseverance I so admired. They shared their stories, their versions of events, their perspectives, their differences. They acknowledged their wounded-ness, their biases and assumptions and their struggle to forgive. If they were a Christian gathering, they worshipped and prayed together. This both helped and damaged, for it accentuated important differences. Community groups also did sterling reconciliation work. It was dangerous and it was sacrificial of other dearly held relationships. In this largely unreported peace work, faith, hope and love were necessary to the process.

The people of Northern Ireland found it hard to believe in any official peace process or resolve – treated any announcement with cynicism and indifference, joking with black humour about the likely ineffectiveness. The true work of deliverance from evil was achieved by those who had allowed conversion of their old understandings to build a healed and hopeful community as a dynamic for good within the sick sectarian one. As we have seen, their hopes for a better tomorrow have been fulfilled. "We are cautiously optimistic," Belfast friends have told me. Even this limited reaction is a big step forward in trust.

I saw how the media would often shape up the bullets for other people to fire; how a community can get almost addicted to terrible news and to continual shocking events; addicted to the attention given by the international world because of the drama of their torment. It was far less interesting to be a country without extreme trauma. This deadly consequence to the mental and emotional health of a nation is seldom noted. The wider world needs to beware looking for the worst and almost enjoying the horror of bad news. Good news needs publishing abroad by every available method.

In the Middle East, regardless of readers' views of the rights and wrongs of the Palestinian Israeli conflict, there were peace-builders from both sides who interpreted the highest values of their faiths - Christian, Jewish, Moslem – and who realised they could not live by these codes and hate the enemy. Again my cosy faith in the basic goodwill and fairness of humans was blitzed by the evidence of evil perpetrated against the innocent as if they were a lower form of life. These peace workers prevented me from falling into hopelessness and bitterness for, they were, and remain, signs of love dangerously and vitally expressed.

Any sensationalist or twisted reporting by media deepens the paranoia of humanity with its hidden or likely enemy. The responsibility for unprejudiced journalism is one of the great ethical requirements of the news saturated modern world.

Let us take a hard look at some reasons for loss of faith and hope. One cause is betrayal of promise and hopes – betrayal hits people in the gut, is like a blow below the belt. Reports of betrayal by individuals, families, official groups, nations and even religious leaders and groups contribute to a general dismay and loss of trust and security. "Is no-one to be trusted?" people declare glumly. This climate of fear has partly been caused by the betrayal of basic codes of ethical and just conduct. The so-called reign of terror betrays all sense of freedom to travel, to move safely between and within countries, lessening any expectation of being treated like a welcome and trusted guest in a foreign country.

My observation is that arrogance can smother faith and hope. When people in the highest positions of power portray a smug arrogance and act unilaterally, the world is universally weakened. Hope for the present and future then receives a serious knock-back. Powerlessness, rage and despair result. Such people, such nations refuse to listen and will not compromise. Consultation is abhorrent and alien to such people who consider that they know most and therefore know best. This is a condition of besetting evil.

Isolation amongst non-believers, pessimists or amongst reactionaries or isolation within prison and isolation by the enemy can cause a break-down of faith and hope of the holy kind. *There can be evil faith and evil hope!* A strategy of spiritual survival is needed. Magnificent examples prove this is possible, such as Nelson Mandela. Acting out of duty to express faith and hope in a grim, determined way - such teeth-clenched, ought-to-show faith and ought-to-have hope attitudes are soul-destroying for all involved. It evidences a people made fraught with fear. These are some causes whereby faith and hope may be diminished or extinguished entirely.

What did I learn and what am I still learning about the strengthening of faith and hope in the present environment of fear? I am convinced that brave challenge and courageous stands against that which creates fear are vital for human welfare. Advocacy for justice. Objective reportage. The good news is that more and more people are making such stands and insisting on finding as near a truth as is possible. The inner energy which follows allows for further faith and hope activities.

I saw the great Christian teachings about forgiveness, repentance, compassion, reconciliation and love being put into practice in the most testing of situations and I saw the consequences when they were not practised. Under the worst of pressure I found that if I stayed deeply tuned into Christ's saving Spirit of grace, these expressions grew more surely within me while I recognised these graces in others. I do not want to wallow in pious sentimentality. It was like going through fire then water – zing! zing! - testing the basic concepts of faith far from my comfort zone..

I found that an anguished and authentic repentance and confession truly can provide space for forgiveness given and received. Two ex-prisoners of either side in Northern Ireland confessed, repented, forgave and were reconciled to work publicly together for peace. I met them, heard their amazing story and saw the reality of their faith and hope in a holy future for their country. I saw that reconciliation is a task without end for there are layers hidden which emerge over time and need dealing with tenderly.

I recognised the presence of humility – a gracious presence that simply appears when people are doing the work of restoration and re-generation through God's grace. A gentleness develops amid the resilience required to persevere with the Way of Peace. I felt humble to be part of this.

I found a welling up of God-given compassion for all the people concerned no matter what side they belonged to; no matter how they felt driven to act. The saying "condemn the sin and not the sinner" is pertinent. Our human kin deserve compassion not judgment. Born into a dreadful situation, brain-washed with propaganda, their hatred increasing with every abuse given and received (for no-one is a greater victim than the perpetrator and no-one more encouraged to retaliate than those treated cruelly and unjustly) I discovered myself wanting their happiness and peace, for them to experience release from their present selves to become holy people in God's image.

Most of all I felt a growing love – the greatest power of all to overcome hatred and fear. It allows one to see the other as God sees that person. Love exudes wisdom and courage. It takes courage to have faith and hope in a climate of fear. It takes wisdom to recognise that it is essential to health to express faith and envisage positive hope

Perspective helps as people face their life span and its particular situation. A constant sense of being beyond-this-time, beyond-these-circumstances pervaded me. The sense of the holy and the awareness of the ancient stories

of God's Revelation and Faithfulness helped provide that perspective which brought inner assurance and peace.

Action can help. During Easter week 2004, I went to the Garden Tomb, then the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, then went backwards (not literally) through the places of Jesus' passion, back to each site gradually unravelling the story to its origins of ministry in Galilee. From trauma, tragedy and mystery to mission life, to the places where Jesus taught the Way of God and post-crucifixion, returned in spirit to his followers who were dealing with grief and fear. How soon they displayed re-energised faith, hope and love!

What can we do to model to the world the value of faith, hope and love?

- We can dare to enjoy life and praise God sincerely – Despite!
- We can dare to trust in God and respond to God's Words. Despite!
- We can dare to face fear squarely not letting circumstances intimidate and restrict. Despite!
- We can dare to hope creatively with a forward vision beyond mere survival. Despite!
- We can dare to challenge grave wrong. Despite!
- We can dare to look for the positive. Despite!
- We can dare to befriend the seeming enemy. Despite!
- We can dare to set up public signs of hope eg peace gardens and projects Despite!

Energy comes from all these expressions of daring, an energy that links to the natural gusto within humans which allows hope to survive and thrive.

Through these, a freedom is acquired and joy emerges. Faith and hope are incomplete without love. Perfect love allows no power to fear. We, the Christian Church, have a mandate to console and encourage all God's people so they can thrive in today's environment. We do this initially by modelling faith and hope ourselves.

Senior minister position

We are looking for a Senior Minister to lead the **Mosgiel/North Taieri Parish** into new mission directions. The parish has a history of significantly impacting the fabric of the Presbyterian Church life nationally but is now needing someone with a fresh vision and leadership skills.

The town of Mosgiel is still experiencing significant growth and is a major contributor to the greater Dunedin economy. It is a young town with a growing retirement village industry, a very good College and several excellent primary schools and pre-school facilities. The town and church are ripe for further development and we are looking for someone with energy and the desire to lead a church into the 21st century.

The church has almost completed a large building and remodeling project which will leave it poised wonderfully for new things. The position includes an associate ministry and is full time.

Please contact
Nominator: Rev Richard Dawson
rdawson@ihug.co.nz



Presbyterian Church
of Aotearoa New Zealand

National Assessment date changes

20 December 2007: Presbytery recommendations and student papers to be sent to the Registrar, School of Ministry, Knox College, Arden Street, Dunedin 9010.

May 2008: National Assessment weekend. Location and dates etc to be advised.

For more information, see
www.schoolofministry.ac.nz/nationalassessment.htm

School of Ministry Scholarships

Ministry Study Grants

Are you a Presbyterian minister planning on further study? Do you know that you can apply for a study grant from the School of Ministry?

Applications are invited in March and September each year for post-ordination study grants for ministers in good standing of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. These grants are made possible through the generosity of the Mary Ann Morrison and M S Robertson estates and are administered by the Senatus of the School of Ministry.

What are the rules?

1. The proposed course of study will aid the applicant's professional development.
2. There is a potential benefit to the Church and the probability of significant service to the Church.
3. Parish and presbytery approval has been obtained for the study, where appropriate.

In normal circumstances grants do not exceed one-third of the study costs involved and may be held in conjunction with other scholarships and grants other than the Postgraduate Scholarship. Grants are not made retrospectively and relate only to costs to be incurred by the scholarship holder themselves.

How do I apply?

Applicants are asked to address the criteria and set out their expected costs including conference fees, tuition fees, basic accommodation and travel, and to supply any other information that may be relevant.

Enquiries to:

the Registrar
School of Ministry
Knox College
Arden Street
Opoho
Dunedin
registrar@schoolofministry.ac.nz

Next due date: 30 September

Reviews

Letter to a Christian Nation by Sam Harris (Alfred A. Knopf NY)

Reviewed by Alan Goss

This little book, along with Richard Dawkins *The God Delusion* and Christopher Hitchens's *God is Not Great*, caused quite a stir when it was released in the United States. All three books are vehemently opposed to religion, especially in its extreme conservative and fundamentalist forms.

And this in a country that is overtly very religious, with the chances of any candidate for the American Presidency declaring himself or herself an agnostic or atheist virtually negligible. *Time* magazine estimates 30 percent of Americans believe in an authoritarian God who will punish mankind for its sins, while according to Harris 53 percent of the population are creationists opposed to evolution, and 44 percent expect Jesus will return to judge mankind "sometime in the next 50 years". He writes, "our nation now appears, as at no other time in her history, like a lumbering, bellicose dim-witted giant".

The book is largely a litany of protests against the extremes and excesses of religion, for example:

- The Bible and its teachings are muddled and self-contradictory and contain episodes of violence like stoning and sexual slavery.
- Christians have abused, oppressed, enslaved, insulted, tortured and killed people in the name of God for centuries. Harris gives examples such as the Inquisition, the Crusades.
- The Religious Right is opposed to Stem Cell research and the use of HIV vaccine to treat Aids. The sufferings caused by sexual disease are largely ignored.
- Belief in God does not ensure a nation's health. In the Southern and Midwestern States of America (known as the Bible belt), homicide, teenage pregnancy and infant mortality are high. (Secular New Zealand probably conforms more to European norms.)
- Hurricane Katrina devastated the city of New Orleans in spite of all the prayers offered up to save it. Other examples are quoted, such as the Holocaust, to show that God is neither omnipotent nor omniscient.
- Religion is a divisive force, Harris cites the conflict in Northern Ireland (Catholics v Protestants), Shi-ites v Sunnis in Iraq, Muslims v Christians, and others. He sees religion as a barrier to building a global civilisation.

Whatever the merits of Harris' case, my main criticism of the book is that, like Dawkins, he directs his fire mostly

against the ravers, the ranters and the extremists on the Religious Right. Religion needs to be seen in the round and not just on its tatty edges. As Lloyd Geering reminds us, religion was once the superglue that held society together; it gave people a shared view of reality, a purpose to live for, rituals to observe, and values to live by. Now the old religion has lost its viscosity, its stickiness, and the world looks and waits for a new religion for the new global age. There are signs that this new religion is already emerging on a worldwide scale.

Whereas traditional religion has previously been captive to the church, the synagogue, the mosque and the temple, and largely the preserve of these institutions, this is no longer the case. Religion in all its colours is now diffused right through all sectors of society - in art, in music (including modern popular songwriters like Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen), in poetry (for example, Joy Cowley), on television and on the internet. Elements of religion such as wonder, awe and transcendence are plainly visible at All Black Test matches where celebrities render stirring versions of the National Anthem and our rugged heroes bond before facing a daunting foe. The crowd's expectancy mirrors the faithful waiting for the Second Coming.

Some church congregations are evolving into smaller groupings that are more open, more participatory, and more secular in the sense that current events are discussed and debated in addition to pondering the Big Questions of Life. Church buildings are being leased to community support groups, for example, St Stephens, Napier, a sign that the institutional fetters are slowly losing their grip and that religion is now gradually becoming public property. Many will argue that this is how it should be.

I suggest that the focus of the new global religion will not be the Father God above but planet Earth below in all its mystery and wonder and on which our very life depends. That is where God, however understood, is present and leaves his indelible mark. Harris and his cohorts can be rest assured that religion is here to stay.

Registration as a charity

The deadline for Presbytery applications to be received by Assembly Office is 31 October 2007.

More information, including downloads of letters sent to parishes and presbyteries, can be found at www.presbyterian.org.nz under parish tools.

Dear Ministry Colleagues

This new monthly column in *Candour* allows an opportunity for me to write more directly to those who are providing key leadership and service roles within the life and activity of our Church. Many of us know each other on some personal level and most of us know one another in more indirect ways – and so it is to you, those in recognised leadership positions, with whom I share a sense of God’s enduring call on our lives to ministry, and a commitment to the Presbyterian Church and its future, that I write.

I thought, as an introduction to this column, I would tell you a little about my work. In doing this I want to express something of the nature of this extraordinary Church of which we are a part. In my privileged role I am presented with a kaleidoscopic experience of our Church – a perspective of changing shapes and colours that in some way form a pattern of what it means to be part of the Presbyterian Church here in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In the space of the past four weeks, for example, I have attended the three-day Council of Assembly meeting – focused this time on an extended discussion on the development of new Church strategy document; at the conclusion of the meeting I preached at St John’s here in Wellington; a few days later there was a meeting with the PSDS Board to discuss how they can further enhance the Church’s mission; I spoke briefly at the Pacific Island Synod annual meeting, attended a three-day event committed to supporting and mentoring 50 Presbyterian ministers and church workers from around the country; this was followed by an extraordinary ceremony handing back Presbyterian Church-owned land to the iwi at Maungophatu; then I spent time at an annual conference of the private and integrated schools around New Zealand who identify with the Presbyterian Church; after this came a ceremony at Parliament to celebrate the service of the retiring head of the Prison Chaplaincy and to induct the incumbent into this demanding role; a few days later I lead a monthly “theology and wine” discussion group (we talked about the nature of intercessory prayer) based at the church I attend; then preached a couple of days later at the annual founders’ service for two Presbyterian Schools; next came a couple of days in the office, and then I attended our Service Team Leaders’ meeting in Dunedin of the six key Assembly-employed leaders of our Church.

My calendar shows that every day next week I am having meetings with a diverse range of people and groups to discuss aspects of our Church’s life and mission, before

flying to Pago Pago the following week for a few days to join with members of the Komiti Moana Nui to represent the regional interests of the Church at the five-yearly Pacific Conference of Churches. I’ll have an opportunity there to catch up with Kerry Enright and discuss his new role in leading the overseas aid and mission work of the Uniting Church of Australia. Maybe there are opportunities here for some sort of cooperation?

I try to represent our church as faithfully and positively as I can while also looking for opportunities to support, extend and grow our Gospel mission. A good number of these events I have described provide that opportunity – and I do have to say that within this diversity I find consistent encouragement and interest and support of our Church’s work. In fact there are overwhelming possibilities here for us.

Through all this I come across so many people who are faithfully getting on with the job of bringing Christ’s seeking, saving and healing presence to others. These people, our ministry colleagues, are really fantastic people. They are interesting, often quite complicated, intelligent, sometimes funny, and passionate about what they do – and most often impossible to fit within the stereotypes of the categories that we have used to describe the divisions within our Church.

Over the coming months I and our Service Team and members of the Council and others are going to be speaking more and more about the changes that need to happen for us to build our Church and fulfil the call that we discern God is making on us at this time. It has become very clear to me that a serious commitment to growth and building of our Church and its mission is something that we cannot do alone or as isolated congregations – we can’t do this without God’s help nor without the support of one another.

I think a lot about both the survival and the growth question. We have keenly felt differences, pain and anger. There are important faith issues of justice and righteousness that sit at the heart of our Church’s integrity. I am pretty certain though that matters of trust and respect, kindness and the kind of hospitality that Jesus embodies will be critical in the time ahead.

Ministers around our country are doing a great job – often in difficult and isolated situations. I pray for your work and God’s blessings on your life and the lives of those who you love and serve.

