

Candour



Presbyterian Church
of Aotearoa New Zealand

NEWS AND VIEWS FOR MINISTERS

ISSUE 7 // AUGUST 2011

Ministering in more than one congregation



www.presbyterian.org.nz

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Candour is a monthly magazine about ministry and leadership.

ISSN 1171-1027 (Print)

ISSN 1179-402X (Online)

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Contributions

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

The editor on (04) 801-6000 or candour@presbyterian.org.nz

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One-quarter page: \$80 plus gst

One-third page: \$95 plus gst

Half page: \$130 plus gst

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The next deadline (for the September issue) is Wednesday, 31 August.

The theme will be:
Preacher and the poet.

Cover image

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The Status of Creeds and Confessions today

Lloyd Geering, Minister Emeritus, Wellington Presbytery

The creeds and confessions of the churches have played an important role in the past to help define the evolving Christian tradition. They were developed in a time when it was believed that truth could be expressed in the form of absolute statements and, further, that the absolute truths possessed by Christians were guaranteed since they had been received by divine revelation.

In the last two centuries, ever since the time of Schleiermacher in fact, theologians have been abandoning that view of divine revelation. This move has radically changed, if not actually rendered obsolete, the role once played by confessions and creeds. Contemporary statements of faith can play a useful role in promoting understanding, and clarifying issues, but they must always be recognised as temporary and limited in scope and role. They must never be appealed to as standards.

A further reason why the role of creeds and confessions has changed so radically is that theologians have learned in the last two centuries to make a clear distinction between faith and belief. When Jesus said, "Your faith has made you whole", he was not referring to beliefs but to that person's attitude of trust. Just as our beliefs change and mature during the course of our lives, so the beliefs commonly held in the 21st century are of necessity different from those held in the 1st century or 16th century. That is why the Westminster Confession has become so severely dated as to be outmoded.

The Westminster documents have been an embarrassment to the Church since the late 19th century. (Who wants to own a document that denounces other churches as "synagogues of Satan" and declares the Pope to be "that antichrist, that man of sin and son of perdition"?) It was only by passing the Declaratory Act in the late 19th century that ministers on ordination could retain their integrity. This Act gave ministers and elders freedom of opinion on matters not central to the Christian faith. What was deemed to be central was left to the Assembly to decide in any particular instance.

When charges of doctrinal error were laid against me in 1967, the Westminster documents were never appealed to by my accusers. Indeed, if they had done so, in such a public trial as that became, the Church would have made itself the laughing stock of the country to be found appealing to a standard drawn up in 1648!

So the current move by the Church to have a look at its subordinate standards is both commendable and long overdue. But the proposed Kupu Whakapono and accompanying commentary is quite unsatisfactory, either as an addition to, or as a replacement of, the Westminster documents. Apart from the few references to New Zealand this could have been written any time between 1600 and 1800. It fails to express the faith in 21st century terms. (Do we really look forward to the return of Christ and a new heaven and earth now that we find ourselves living within the cultural context of our space-time universe?) The reason why the new document fails is that it has ignored completely the creative theological exploration of the last two centuries.

Yes, it is biblical and that is partly its trouble. It completely ignores the revolution in our understanding of the Bible that has been brought about by our biblical scholars in the last two centuries. The Bible can no longer be appealed to as "the eternal Word of God in written form" and hence to be treated as absolute and infallible in every statement it made. The Bible is still to be highly valued for what it is – an irreplaceable set of documents that enable us to understand the deeds and beliefs of our spiritual ancestors. The Bible remains a valuable resource, but it can no longer be appealed to as an absolute standard of what Christians should believe in the 21st century. To treat it as such is to turn the Bible into an idol. The Bible is a set of ancient documents written by fallible humans in a cultural context very different from our own. These have to be interpreted if they are to be made relevant to our time and this is just what our theologians and biblical scholars are endeavouring to do. But their efforts are not at all reflected in the Kupu Whakapono.

What has been too little recognised is that the Creeds and Confessions of the past, though intended to be unitive, turned out to be divisive. In the long run they were sectarian in character, setting one group against another. The Nicene Creed cut off the Nestorians and the Coptics from the Catholic or Universal church. The addition of the *Filioque* clause to the Nicene Creed helped to make permanent the growing division between the Latin church of the West and the Greek church of the East. In the end the Westminster Confession also became sectarian in role even though, paradoxically, the whole purpose of the Westminster Assembly was to find a way of uniting the churches of England, Scotland and Wales.

In the light of the above, the move to adopt the Kupu Whakapono (Confession of Faith) must be judged a backward step in time. The commentary attached to it runs completely counter to all theology since Schleiermacher. Its sectarian and anti-ecumenical character manifests a complete reversal of the forward-looking direction in which the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand was moving in the first three-quarters of the 20th century.

** The Rev Dr Sir Lloyd Geering ONZ, GNZM, PCNZM, CBE, is a lecturer and a commentator on religion. He is a former Principal of the Theological Hall, Dunedin, and is Emeritus Professor of Religious Studies at Victoria University of Wellington. He is an Honorary Assistant at St Andrew's on the Terrace, Wellington.*



Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership MINISTERS' STUDY GRANTS

Are you a Presbyterian minister planning on further study? Do you know that you can apply for a study grant from the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership?

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 Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership.

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.

Please note: successful applicants who move to ministries or other positions outside of the PCANZ within two years of receiving a grant may be required to repay up to 50% of the grant received.

HOW DO I APPLY?

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ENQUIRIES TO:

The Registrar, Knox Centre for Ministry & Leadership, Knox College,
Arden Street Opoho, Dunedin. Email: registrar@knoxcentre.ac.nz

Closing date for the next round of applications: 30 September 2011

Reflections on ministry in a multi-congregational setting

Phyll Harris, Lincoln Union Church, Christchurch

When I was approached to write on ministry in a multi-congregational setting I wasn't sure what I would bring to the discussion. This was due to the 4 September earthquake which left one of our church buildings unusable. So any Sunday now I am only in one place of worship. But I was happy to offer my reflections and this is simply that, reflections of a minister who came out of Knox Centre for Leadership and Ministry into a multi-congregational setting.

When I first received the parish profile I was immediately struck with the picture of three church buildings on the front cover. Being a minister in a multi-congregational setting was something that hadn't crossed my horizons. I had little understanding of their workings as I had only ever been involved in mono-congregational settings. In addition to this it was a union church not just Presbyterian, again something I had no working knowledge of. I seriously wondered how God could ever use me in such a setting. God's call was confirmed, and God was able to use me.

A description of the parishes

Let me give a brief description to help you picture this parish. It is made up of three bodies of people, but now only two church buildings. The main church is found in Lincoln, 20 minutes southwest of Christchurch CBD. Seven kilometres closer to Christchurch is Prebbleton, the location of the second church that is no longer usable due to earthquake damage. The third church, Rolleston, is fifteen kilometres southwest again from Lincoln. Lincoln is the largest congregation with Prebbleton and Rolleston varying in numbers, but consistently around half the size of Lincoln.

The logistics of leading worship in multiple places

Lincoln and Prebbleton are Methodist and Presbyterian Union churches, where as Rolleston is an unusual mix. In Rolleston, the responsibility for two Sundays a month belongs with the Lincoln Anglican Parish and the other two Sundays with the Lincoln Union Parish. Up until September I was at either Rolleston and Prebbleton, or Lincoln and Prebbleton, each Sunday. I would usually be at Rolleston one Sunday a month and have someone else fill that spot for the third Sunday each month. Currently I am at Rolleston once a month and Lincoln the other Sundays, so worship has to be covered at Lincoln on the first Sunday of each month. Every fifth Sunday is combined worship bringing the three churches together, rotating the gathering place throughout the year.

Governance in a multi-congregational setting

When I came to Lincoln, the system in use for church governance had been put in place during the vacancy. Rolleston and Prebbleton had separate steering committees that met monthly. Parish council and property and finance comprised representatives from each church, and met bi-monthly. Pastoral care was informal with no structured pastoral care given through parish council or a pastoral care team. Rolleston steering committee continues to meet monthly and parish council and property and finance meet monthly.

Pastoral care

One of the early tensions I identified was the inability to be able to provide good pastoral care after worship because of the need to rush to get to the next church. One service started at 9.30 and the next at 11am. This was more of an issue going from Rolleston to Prebbleton as the distance was greater. Also because I was only at Rolleston one Sunday a month that time was important. Coming into a new ministry setting it took longer to get to know the people at Lincoln and Rolleston. This issue was addressed for Rolleston towards the end of my first year. Someone else would lead worship at Prebbleton and I was then free to arrive when it suited.

Similarly this was an issue for the people of Lincoln. Eighteen months into my ministry I was also very conscious of the energy being used to replicate the same worship in two places every Sunday that were only seven kilometres, or five minutes apart by car. Two questions were becoming more

pressing. Firstly, is this the best use of our resources? And secondly, is this the best use of my time? These questions along with the issue of always rushing off from Lincoln saw discussions started with Prebbleton. We were looking to see if we could find a way to use Prebbleton for outreach or teaching and to try combining Sunday morning worship at Lincoln, purely because Lincoln has the biggest building and would be able to accommodate everyone.

This was June, and after a time of seeking God and wrestling with these issues it was decided to look further into different suggestions, carrying on the same in the meantime and to meet again in three months. Well 4 September answered one part of the issue for us. We now meet at Lincoln every Sunday changing the time to 10am. While it has been a difficult time for those from Prebbleton, as there has been very real grief in the loss of their spiritual home, there has been a real strengthening of the parish with the two churches coming together in worship.

“One of the early tensions I identified was the inability to be able to provide good pastoral care after worship because of the need to rush to get to the next church.”

Mission and outreach

Another area where there was initially some tension on my part was how to foster an environment of growth in three churches at once. There was some expectation that with the coming of a new minister each church would suddenly flourish! There has been a lot of prayer and seeking to discern God’s vision for the parish; often my prayer is simply: “Help: where to now God, because I haven’t got a clue”. It soon became evident, with a predominantly aging congregation mission was going to have to be targeted as the energy levels, particularly in Lincoln and Prebbleton, were not huge. Building-wise we were also limited as Prebbleton and Rolleston are physically small with no extra rooms whereas Lincoln has an old manse that has been turned into meeting rooms which are well used.

After much prayer and spending time finding out what was needed in the community (that the other local churches weren’t already doing), it became obvious there was a need for mums and preschoolers. We have a wealth of hospitality and great baking so we started a Mainly Music program that runs weekly. We drew help from across the parish and even though it’s based in Lincoln it has been the whole parish that has made it successful and interestingly the mums and Grandmas come from all three areas. Because it was a need identified by the local district council, we applied for council funding to set up and received a five hundred dollar grant to get us going. Similarly our other outreach of providing bi-monthly lunches for the elderly is run from Lincoln but uses Lincoln and Prebbleton parish to provide the workers and the food.

Being predominantly based in Lincoln/ Prebbleton and because of the nature of governance in Rolleston, it has taken longer to build a mission focus and understand the needs of the Rolleston community. God is good, however, as last year we were approached by the local enviro-town committee to ask if they could use some of our land to build a community garden. This has been an opportunity for the Rolleston people to work with the community in building relationship and allowing the seeds of mission as well as veges to grow!

Parish buildings

I was struck very early in the piece with the need to refocus the identity of the church as being the people gathered as the body of Jesus Christ, not the place or the building for that gathering. Having three sets of buildings to maintain is a big focus which can drain a lot of energy and resources. It's easy to slip into maintenance mode and forget we are here to build God's Kingdom. For me personally the earthquakes, painful though they have been, have brought a very real reminder of this. Many church buildings are no longer habitable, but the Church, the people, continue to worship and work together as God's people in this city.

For a minister there is also a tension between recognising and working with the unique gifts each church brings, while trying to work together for the good of the whole parish and the building of God's Kingdom. It's very easy for people to become determined to hold onto their place of worship, and see only the needs of each individual church. As a minister I have had to learn to keep asking, as we work through issues with individual parishes, how will this work for this church in this community, how will it work for the parish as a whole and how will it work towards the growth of God's Kingdom? It has been important for me to stay differentiated from many conversations to be able to discern the way ahead for the whole parish.

Having three sets of buildings to maintain is a big focus which can drain a lot of energy and resources."

So, what does it take to be multi-congregational?

So, what does it take to be a multi-congregational minister? Simple answer, God's calling. Why did God call me here? I'm not sure I can answer that one yet, but my personality is ENFP for those of you who have done Myer's Briggs, for those who have done Network Course I am unstructured, people-orientated. Being more fluid and less structured has probably been an asset for this season in time.

There are both challenges and opportunities to be found in a multi-congregational setting. I find the challenge of working with the unusual governance in Rolleston hard, as I believe they suffer from a lack of coherent leadership due to the responsibility being split between denominations. There are also the challenges of trying to split yourself and your time fairly to each church along with getting to know and understand each community that the church is situated in. Having said that, there are also exciting opportunities. We have connections with three communities instead of one, and all three are growing areas. There is also a greater emphasis on growing each community in their own gifting. As I am not in every place every Sunday, there is the opportunity to grow team ministry instead of minister-reliant ministry.

What place does the multi-congregational church hold in the future of God's Kingdom? This question continues to sit with me. One thing is clear and we know it in a very literal sense here; the multi-congregational church is being shaken, shaken to find a way of surviving in many places, shaken to find a way of communicating the gospel afresh. Leon Sweet in *Aqua Church* offers some advice easily adapted to our context "To find your way in a post-modern [post mono-congregational, post quake] country you need a different eye, ear, compass and map."¹ The big question determining the multi-congregational churches survival might be, are we willing to follow God's direction when the compass directs us to new and uncharted territory? This is both a challenging and exciting opportunity. One which might allow us to, once again, find ourselves as a missional apostolic people movement of God with a very real part in the future of God's Kingdom.

1 L. Sweet, *Aqua Church*, (U.S.A: Group Publishing, 1999), 21.

Multi-What?

John Turton, Hutt City Uniting Congregations, Wellington

Diversity – Asset or Liability?

Various points of view exist within our churches about the value and downside of diversity. One positive aspect is the option diversity brings for celebrating the life of the church by drawing from all the threads we bring together as we weave our life in a multi-congregational setting. The liabilities, in my view, hinge around the clash of perceptions about how things should be done and the conflict of ideas that occur. In the case of HCUC, we have three major cultural inputs – European, Samoan and Tongan. These cultural influences are mixed together with the denomination of origin and together these things influence how we are as a Cooperating Venture (CV). Then overlaid on this, are the various ways the denominations carve us up for the purpose of levies and control.

That's before we get to the mixing pot of theologies held within the various cultures and denominations! One measurable factor for our CV, and likely most others, is the cost in dollars of the delays in trying to touch all the bases for decision-making. For instance \$100,000 was added to one of our projects with the costs of materials rising over the period of time taken to decide and give permission among the various denominational church courts.

In my ministry position we're juggling in and out of these courts of decision-making while we're juggling our ministry requirements to each of the congregations we're divided between. Somewhat akin to a Gilbert and Sullivan musical comedy apart from the emotional and financial pain it incurs. On the positive side, during August the ministry team are preaching a circuit where at the end of the month we will have preached to all seven congregations on the theme of the Holy Spirit which is an opportunity only really available within this kind of setting.

Governance – so who calls the shots in our CV or multiple-congregational setting?

In the HCUC we have a parish forum that presides over the seven church councils that are the courts of decision-making for each congregation. This means that those of us who have two congregations each, we have two church council meetings to attend as well as the Parish Forum, and we also takes turns as the ordained member of the parish executive who make decisions in between parish forums.

For the first 10 or more years of the life of the HCUC the focus was on selling off property that was not needed and consolidating congregations and other assets. In doing so, mission became the poor cousin. I came to the HCUC with the idea I would grow and experience working on a team for ministry and that has certainly occurred. My leadership skills have been stretched, challenged, and added to. For instance, when I came I was used to the Westminster style of voting for decision-making whereas in the HCUC the preferred model is "consensus" decision-making. That challenged me somewhat as the model I saw being expressed fell short of what I understood consensus to be. Five years later I've learned how to lead a meeting with consensus decision-making that engages more people and motivates more participation. That is valuable, although consensus decision-making is not suitable for all types of decision.

Self-care – lifting by the shoe strings?

I think by now you've got the drift of how complicated ministry within this particular multi-congregational setting is, and the potential to be torn apart by all the various calls on your abilities, energy, and everything else you have to offer including your household if you do not wisely set boundaries.

For example if you were to view my average time management map aiming at working the normal number of units per week/month you'd see that when I touch all the bases apart from preparation for ministry I have only 10-12 units available outside of meetings to do pastoral and other work. That's only if I do not get weddings, funerals and other normal events occurring or imposed on us by both denominations and various other para-church organisations who all see their call as the cutting-edge call on my time, effort and finances. What response would you make if you were me?

One of my first responses to this enormous call on my time was to sharpen up my time management skills because if I did not, then I would be the eight-ball bouncing around to the various requests that gave no regard to my overall situation of spirituality and health.

Physical self-care needs to be in there and I express this belief from observation of my own excess weight and from what I see at any one presbytery among my colleagues. The neglect of study and just doing the “Aunty Google” cut and paste to quickly put together a service digested in someone else’s mind is also a risk. This sort of approach will lead you to be fairly plastic in the pulpit, and you will risk being replaced by a Youtube clip!

Devotional life is a part of the study, but for me more important is the sense of the presence of Christ in all I am involved; this is a top priority for me. It’s pretty lifeless otherwise and you’ll see it reflected in the overall life of the congregations you minister. Recent reading included a book called *Preaching as Spiritual Direction* which refreshed me somewhat and gave me new encouragement. I would also include as part of your self-care regime time to play or recreation – just letting your inner child come out and play instead of shutting him or her away in a cupboard. Self-care has to include your family and spouse. I learned years ago that the Chinese symbol for trouble was a picture of a house with two women in it. By this I do not demean women but rather see it as the church wanting to be the “other woman” or spouse in my life and competing with my true spouse.

“One of my first responses to this enormous call on my time was to sharpen up my time management skills...”

Mission or survival – engagement and engaging?

Last year I did two weeks study leave which included heading over to Sydney to study the teaching of resilience to youth and children. It was fairly apparent to me that the material needed to be translated and migrate over to church and discipleship as it presented some fundamental truths we appear to be missing as churches.

Whether multi-congregational or not, our need is for some healthy optimism from a strengths-based approach. It gave me a new paradigm for mission and now, for me, mission is about engaging – the engaging of our community around us and providing opportunities for them to engage us. It is not an invitation to cross the moat when our draw-bridge is down, but you and I going out into the community with a fresh approach that engages it, and also lets them engage us and see that we’re not a fortress church huddled in behind our walls. The alternative is you and I looking for new measuring devices to tell us what we already know in a new way, but ultimately focusing on our weaknesses, using a language of pessimism, and neglecting the building of our existing strengths like the Church at Ephesus who neglected their strength of their first love to their demise.

John has worked for five years within the Hutt City Uniting Congregations which is a large Cooperating Venture covering Hutt City near Wellington.

Is it really a Great New Story?

Alan Goss, Minister Emeritus, Gisborne-Hawke's Bay Presbytery

A Great New Story, Don Cupitt, (Salem: Polebridge Press, 2010)

Readers of Don Cupitt's numerous publications who think that he has surely said the last word will not be altogether surprised – there is yet another book!

In this slim volume, Cupitt's purpose is to give us a new story about how we humans have gotten to be where we are now. It ends like a great symphony with a resounding hallelujah – Jesus is the top, the *summum bonum*, the highest good, the Mount Everest of humanity's religious quest.

But it is not the Jesus who the early church dressed up in ornate clothing – not the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the resurrected and ascended Jesus who will come again. Rather it is Jesus the man, the sage of Galilee, whose teaching is recorded in his parables and pithy sayings that wait to be rediscovered and applied in our modern secular age. So while Jesus' message was at first distorted and misunderstood it was never wholly lost. Cries for a more moral and humanitarian world are still heard. Maybe the world is now ready to hear the Galilean message with a new ear and clearer eye more than ever before.

“Cupitt wants to give us a Christianity stripped of other-worldly baggage.”

In his book, Cupitt confronts a number of problems which are common to many people today. The word “Christian” is one of them; it is more likely to be associated with those holding more conservative, even fundamentalist, views. Also Cupitt has dropped both the titles “Messiah” and “Christ” believing that they have supernatural overtones and were labels pinned on Jesus by his early followers. Cupitt wants to give us a Christianity stripped of other-worldly baggage, more open, more outgoing, and wholly directed towards our life in this world. That life is all that we have!

The author goes over ground that he has stressed before in his various publications – life is short and it is passing away; when it is over that is all; we have finished the race. There are no rewards or prizes waiting for us in the Great Beyond. There is no little bit (soul) inside us that is indestructible and that goes on forever. As Cupitt puts it, we burn for a short while and then we burn out. That is what happened to Jesus, and it will happen to us. Our task – religion's task – is to “rediscover that way of living Jesus happened to be the first to discover and teach”.

How did we get to this point? Cupitt maintains that religion set us on the path: “it is our mother, our old nurse and we should respect it”. The Bible story shows how God gradually engineered his own exit from the earthly scene and handed the reins over to us. We have come into our inheritance, to live our life in this world. As we confront the big environmental, social, political and ethical challenges of our age we should not get too starry-eyed about our future survival, nor should we lose hope.

Cupitt regrets that Protestantism has lost its old intellectual diversity. It has been hijacked by conservative Evangelicalism: “It is becoming fossilized, sentimental and kitschy”. He believes its best creative thinkers are no longer in the church, or are at a safe distance on the margins. Where communities look for compassion and unity – as in earthquake-shattered Christchurch – denominational divisions still prevail. Critical thinking along with modern scientific and rapid social change “is leaving the Church stranded in a world it can no longer understand”.



Is Cupitt's *Great New Story* too bare, too bleak? Is there no beautiful day beyond the blue horizon? Would we not be better off to accept Ecclesiastes' advice and enjoy ourselves, a sort of perpetual party central *a la* the World Cup? There is, I feel, an unwritten addendum to Cupitt's book which brings us back to Jesus and his message about the Kingdom of God. This was a call to live a new way of life in which our base instincts like greed and prejudice were overcome by love. Today this means acting globally as well as locally. It also means acting fast. Now we must act on our inheritance, now we must play God. New technologies must be invented and used so that our planet will not be irreparably damaged and destroyed. We humans are milking the earth's resources willy-nilly beyond its capacity to sustain us. So we need to build a community spirit at all levels which will constrain our worst excesses and guarantee a better future for the generations to come.

Jesus' message of the kingdom also means that we must find new ways of "doing church". This is already happening. Groups are emerging that share a radically different view of what is usually meant by church. They have adopted names that express this: Explorers, Sea of Faith, Cutting Edge, Groove, Learning and Discovery, Ephesus, Xploration NZ. Many of their members are still church-goers, or were so in the past. Maybe this is Cupitt's unwritten addendum; maybe it's not.

Let Richard Holloway, with these fine last words in one of his books, sum it up: "... some among the living will miss us for a while, but the earth will go on without us. Its day is longer than ours, though we now know that it too will die. Our brief finitude is but a beautiful spark in the vast darkness of space. So we should live the fleeting day with passion and, when the night comes, depart from it with grace".

APPLICATIONS OPEN For Faith Funding

Presbyterian Support New Zealand is a Faith Funding Manager for The Tindall Foundation.

The Foundation allocated bulk funding to PSNZ for distribution to projects undertaken by Presbyterian Support regions and/or Presbyterian parishes for Supporting Families and Communities.

Donations of up to \$10,000 (typically between \$6,000 and \$10,000) per project can be made for projects that best meet the Foundation's criteria.

PSNZ invites applications for this year's funding round, which closes on **30 September 2011**. For an application pack, please email admin@ps.org.nz

AES Column

Martin Baker

It may mean absolutely nothing to you that Lieutenant Uhura (Nicelle Nichols) and Captain Kirk (William Shatner) are famous for the first televised interracial kiss, in *Star Trek* episode 65, *Plato's Stepchildren*, first broadcast on November 22, 1968.

Gene Roddenberry, the writer of the earlier *Star Trek* episodes, set out to explore the issues of each series' respective decades. These include war and peace, the value of personal loyalty, authoritarianism, imperialism, class warfare, economics, racism, religion, human rights, sexism and feminism, and the role of technology

There have been 11 *Star Trek* feature films, including the last and most financially successful, titled simply *Star Trek*, which was released in May 2009. The *Star Trek* film's marketing campaign used the phrase "this is not your father's *Star Trek*" in its advertisements. How worrying a phrase that was for me. I wanted Spock and Captain Kirk and Uhura, and I wanted them to deal to the Klingons in the way they used to.

A particular vision of heaven, relevance for the issues faced by each generation, and a re-launch based on a strategy affirming a new, contemporary expression: "this is not your father's church". Maybe there is a lesson here for us. It would be a gutsy thing to put a big sign out front next Sunday saying, one way or another, "this is not your parent's church".

Intoned solemnly by Captain Kirk at the beginning of each *Star Trek* episode are the words: "Space: the final frontier. These are the voyages of the star ship Enterprise. Its five-year mission to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man (changed in 1987 to no *one*) has gone before". Words, which were inspired by another Captain a couple of centuries earlier on board the sailing ship *Endeavour*, James Cook declared that he intended to go not only "... farther than any man has been before me, but as far as I think it is possible for a man to go."

There is a forlorn photo on the front page of last week's *Economist*: a shadowy looking *Atlantis* heading back to earth on its last flight; the end of the era of space flights. The astronaut school has been closed, and the Houston control room lights have been switched off. While there is some talk of privately funded space flight and low orbit space tourism, there is little political will to spend vast amounts of public money on supporting the kind of space journeys that filled the imaginations of every 1960s would-be space cadet. I thought by now I would, at the very least, be flying to work in my very own little helicopter-type-thing. What happened to that dream? *The Jetsons* were so cool.

Hardly a day goes past when we are not reminded of the rate and nature of change about us, but could we also have come to a place where change and newness have become so much a part of our lives, that nothing really surprises us anymore? While knowing that technology will inevitably continue to develop and provide a continuously changing array of new things, we are still faced with the question of what is actually going to make a difference.

Francis Fukuyama (*The End of History and the Last Man*, 1992) wrote that, "What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalisation of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government." So perhaps even at an ideological level we can detect, in the proliferation of liberal democracies, an end to the differences that defined and described different perspectives and their associated visions of humanity.

What then, is new? I have found Paul Tillich's writing about the Biblical understanding of that question to be very helpful. He reminds me that Biblical newness is not contingent on the narratives of the past, or their hopeless and often death dealing assumptions. He reminds me that Gospel newness is not ultimately about progress or development or improvement or winning a battle, but is to do with a new act of creation. Some event that redefines what is real.

You have to know a little about *Star Trek* to appreciate the bumper sticker wisdom of a caption that reads, "beam me up Scotty, there is no intelligent life on this planet". But in the discussions we have about the future of our Church, and especially in the coming weeks about what to do with new insurance premiums, getting beamed up might seem like a pretty good alternative. We can put so much energy, time and worry into thinking and doing the same old things, but our primary calling is to the ministry of the Word with all its hope, creativity and transformative possibilities.