

THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS (Part 2)

(Friday morning – 5th October 2001)
Nelson College for Girls

WELCOME

A te whanau a te Karaiti
Naumai, haere mai
Haere mai!

I'd like to welcome you to this year's synod and in doing so remind us all, once again of those essential things we must take cognizance of as we gather like this.

- Jesus Christ is the Head of this Church. He is Lord. It is His church before it's ours.
- We must listen to one another carefully and with loving respect as sisters and brothers, we are members of the same family.

Acknowledging these things we can expect God the Holy Spirit to move among us, inspiring and guiding us in all we are seeking to do for his kingdom.

Once again we welcome to our synod those from other churches and denominations in the city. Their presence reminds us that together we are called to bring people to a living faith in God through Jesus Christ. The task belongs to us all. We cannot do it in isolation or alone.

A. THE CALL TO CHANGE THE WORLD THROUGH THE LOCAL

CHURCH.

INTRODUCTION

Our theme for this year's synod is "a call to change the world". We reflected on this at our synod service in the Cathedral last night. This morning, as promised, we add the words "through the local church." As Christians and as local churches we are called to change our world. We are to be, as the Lord of the Church said, "salt" and "light" to the world – to our communities.

Let me begin by saying, never has there been a period in the history of the world when the message of the love of God through Jesus Christ is so needed. It's here we have a paradox. On the one hand the remarkable growth of the Church worldwide (though less seen in the west) and on the other, increasing violence, not only with international terrorism, but also on our streets and in our homes. In the face of this paradox I want to

say that I feel more excited than at any other time in my ministry about the possibilities of the future for our churches.

The world and the Church are not the same as they were even ten years ago. In our diocese we saw fast growth through the middle years of the last decade, but those days of easy gains are over. There has been a considerable slowing down of numerical growth, but I believe we have, never the less seen a maturing, a growing in spiritual depth and also a strengthening of the resources of many parishes. We have also had an opportunity to take a realistic look at where we are heading.

REFOCUS

Over the past few months some of us have talked much about the diocesan refocus. I have always felt, along with others in our beloved Anglican Communion, that there are huge plusses and minuses about the structures we have inherited – about the way we organize ourselves. These structures can serve both as a hindrance and a help in the task of making Christ known in a needy world.

For centuries we have been a church that so often gives the impression of serving itself. That's the way we are sometimes perceived by those on the outside. Our committees and boards can appear to take on a life of their own. I know that is not always the truth of the matter – there is a lot of committed hard work done, but, never the less, that's the perception of many, both inside and outside the Church. Clergy and parishioners alike, when asked the question: "What is the diocese?" can see it as something separate from themselves and the parish. And at times, even to be combated. Very few can confidently draw a picture that excites, let alone one that can be understood. The time has come to refocus - to simplify.

I long for the day when every parishioner; pastor and lay person, can whole-heartedly and with enthusiasm not only articulate their parish's vision and goals, but also those we own together as a diocese. Articulating them with confidence, understanding the structures to be genuinely and honestly there to serve the local church in its mission to the whole community and to the world.

VISION AND MISSION STATEMENTS

Let me say a word about our vision statement. Over the past decade we have learned much about this. Ours has served us well over the years since synod adopted it in the early 90's. But now we realize it's too long – none of us could quote it verbatim.

The original Diocesan Vision statement is more of a document outlining our core values. The refocused Vision and Mission statements sum up the old one succinctly.

The Vision Statement:

"To be a network of local churches that are vibrant, Christ-centred communities of faith"

The Mission Statement:

“To inspire, equip, resource and support each local church to achieve its vision and mission to the world as followers of Christ.”

Very simply these two statements zero in on our purpose and our aim. They clearly show that the diocese is there to support the local church in its mission to the world – not the other way around.

That is the way it was always meant to be and it’s manifestly biblical; the primacy of the local church when it comes to mission. It means that everything we do both in the parish, the local church and the diocese should be measured alongside these two statements.

I hope we can each feel some real excitement about all this.

This is what it looks like: *See Appendix 4.*

Let me re-iterate, the diocese is there to support the local church in its ministry to the world. That’s what the diagram is trying to illustrate.

B . MISSION THROUGH THE LOCAL CHURCH

This morning I want to speak chiefly about the principles of local church mission in reaching the community and beyond.

Mission through the local church is not the only form of legitimate outreach. Ever since Jesus spoke to the woman beside the well at Sychar or Philip sat beside the Ethiopian in his chariot and shared with him the good news, personal evangelism has been a legitimate means of spreading the Gospel. Mass evangelism too is legitimate. The preaching of one evangelist to large crowds of people is after all what Jesus did in first century Galilee. It’s what Wesley, Whitefield and others have done. Nevertheless, although personal and mass evangelism are both legitimate forms, I want to argue that outreach through the local church is the most normal, the most natural and the most effective of all forms of evangelism.

TWO REASONS FOR THE PRIMACY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH IN MISSION

Scripture.

The first is the argument from scripture. The Church is of course the people of God and they declare themselves to be God’s people chiefly by two activities; worship and witness. One is directed towards God and the other towards people. You will be familiar with those important verses in 1 Peter 2 where on the one hand he describes the Church as a “holy priesthood” (verse 4) and on the other as a “holy nation” (verse 9). “A holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” – which is of course worship. But, they are also called “a holy nation” – made such in order “that they may spread abroad the mighty acts of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light”. And that is witness or evangelism.

So the offering of “spiritual sacrifices” is worship and the “spreading abroad of His mighty acts” is witness. Thus worship and witness are the two major functions of God’s people – the local church. Further, and this is very important, each involves the other. Worship and witness cannot be divorced from one another.

Why not? Well, worship is an acknowledgement of the worth of Almighty God. We all know that etymologically speaking the word “worship” comes from “worth-ship” - it is recognition of the infinite worth of the living God.

Now if we come together in worship and recognize God’s infinite worth, it’s absolutely inconceivable that we should not bother whether other people recognize His infinite worth or not. If we recognize the infinite worth of God it will surely drive us out to bring other people in to worship Him also. So why do we want to go out and win people to Christ? Simply to bring them in so that they may worship Him also.

Worship, if it’s true worship, should drive us out to witness; and witness if it’s true, should bring people in to worship. There is this continuous cycle of worship leading to witness and witness leading to worship.

The Thessalonian Church is an excellent example of local church mission. Have you ever noticed the sequence of thought in the first chapter of 1 Thessalonians? Paul says, “our Gospel came to you” (verse 5) and he goes on to say, “you received it”. (verse 6) Then he says, “the word of the Lord sounded forth from you” (verse 8). It is a marvelous sequence that the local church must take note of. Those three phrases eloquently demonstrate the role of the local Church, “our Gospel came to you”, “you received it”, and “the word of the Lord sounded forth from you”. It rang out from them as if the Thessalonian church was a sounding board from which the Gospel bounced. It came to them and then it echoed from them to the community around. That’s God’s evangelistic method for the local church.

I believe that if each church or parish had been a true sounding board for the Gospel, receiving and transmitting the message, our communities and perhaps the world would long since have been reached. It is because so many local churches receive the message but fail to pass it on for various reasons, that the world, let alone our local communities, is far from evangelized today.

That’s the first argument for mission through the local church – the argument from Scripture.

Strategy

The second is the argument from strategy. Each parish or local church is set by God in its own particular geographical situation. Therefore it stands to reason that its first responsibility under God is to the people who live in the area in which the church is situated. We cannot allow ourselves the luxury of gathering together to worship and ignore the spiritual needs of people in the locality where we worship. The local church is strategically placed to reach the people of the area.

Parishes should be the envy of any political party, because of the plant and the personnel that we have. The whole of our country is literally honeycombed with churches, peopled by Christians. The local church is strategically situated in rural – areas, small towns, larger

towns and cities across our nation. We should be the envy of any political organization! We have the means and the unique opportunity to disseminate the good news of Jesus Christ throughout our land.

Scripture and strategy combine to make the local church the primary agent for the spread of the good news.

C. THE CHALLENGE

Our diocesan refocus, places the local church at the centre for mission to the world. There are four things that will be necessary if the local church is to fulfill its God-given task.

- It must understand itself – that is the theology of the church.
- It must organize itself – that is the structure of the church.
- It must express itself – that is the message of the church.
- It must be itself – that is the life of the church.

Those are the four essential things I want to concentrate on in my address. There will be opportunity to discuss them and how they relate to your specific local church context when we meet in small groups later this morning.

THE THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH – understanding ourselves.

I make no apology for beginning here. We must always begin theologically, that is have a correct biblical understanding. There are churches today, which are unhealthy and even sick because they have a false self-image. They understand neither who they are – their identity, nor what they are meant to be – their vocation.

The vital importance of an accurate self-image for mental health is well known. There are individuals who are mentally sick because they have a false self-image – a false sense of their own identity. They don't understand who they are. Now what is true of individuals can be equally true of churches. There are two prevalent self-images of the church today.

The Religious Club.

The first is the religious club. There are those who think of their local church as a club. A little like the local golf club except that the common interest of members happens to be God instead of golf. They see themselves as religious people who are doing religious things together. Some concentrate on their status and the privilege of club membership. Subscriptions have been paid, sometimes with reluctance and these entitle them to certain privileges and there are those who don't take too kindly to any changes that might be deemed necessary. They forget that great Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple's very perceptive phrase, that "the church is the only society in the world that exists primarily for the benefit of its non-members". All other clubs and societies exist for the benefit of their members but Archbishop Temple insists that the church exists

primarily for the benefit of its non-members. Is he right in saying that? Is that true? It is, theologically speaking, at least. The Church exists for the glory of God and to serve the world and not primarily for ourselves. It's tragic how self-centred some churches become. The Church exists for those who as yet have never come. But is that really how we see it? I don't think so! We may say we do but we don't live that way. Try making changes to remove obstacles for people to come and often the faithful riot. We want our needs met first!

Without pointing the finger at anyone there is a good example from history. Hudson Taylor, the founder of the China Inland Mission (which later became the Overseas Missionary Fellowship), went to church in Brighton, one of the rich south coast resorts of 19th century England. Taylor was heavily burdened for the huge nation of China. He went to church Sunday morning and found, and I am quoting his biographer, "the self-satisfied hymn singing congregation to be intolerable. Looking around him he saw pew upon pew of prosperous bearded merchants, shop-keepers visitors, demure wives in bonnets and crinolines well scrubbed children, trained to hide their impatience. The atmosphere of smug piety sickened him. He seized his hat and left."

I wonder if any of us have ever stomped out of a church service infuriated by the smug self-satisfaction we saw. That was Hudson Taylor's reaction, which you might think extreme in these tolerant days. What follows next are Taylor's own words from his journal. "Unable to bear the sight of a congregation of a thousand or more Christian people rejoicing in their own security while millions were perishing through lack of knowledge, I wandered out onto the sands alone in great spiritual agony". And there on Brighton beach he prayed for twenty-four willing skillful labourers to go to China. And his prayers were answered."

That's a good example of a person who couldn't stand the self-centredness of the Church – the religious club image.

Secular Mission

The second image of the Church is the exact opposite, which could be called "the secular mission". It may not be so common but it's there. Some people drop right out of church going not necessarily because they have stopped believing but because they go on to develop, what someone has called, a "religion-less" Christianity – a secular Christianity. These people say they are no longer interested in worship services, they want action and there have arisen organizations that have done away with religious trappings. These groups have taken over and replaced much of what the church was involved in. They exchanged the church as the vehicle of service, or reaching out, for secular vehicles. They were no longer interested in worship services but only in service. They said there isn't any such thing as love for God in a vacuum. Love for God can only be interpreted as love for your neighbour. Therefore there's no such thing as prayer to God apart from encounter with your neighbour. So they abandoned the church for the secular world.

Some of you, who trained at St. John's College, have told me that you were ordained alongside a number of these clergy who are now no longer in ministry within the framework of the Church. They abandoned the Church for the secular world. I want to say that their distaste for selfish religion was right. Selfish Christianity is nauseating to

God and it ought to be nauseating to us also. But to abandon the Church for “religionless” service is a gross over-reaction and biblically wrong.

So we reject those false images of the church – the “religious club” and the totally “secular mission”. However they aren’t the only options. I want to suggest to you that there is another way.

The Double Identity of the Church

What we need to recover is the New Testament emphasis on the double identity of the Church. What is this double identity? On the one hand it is a people called out of the world by God to worship him. And on the other, sent back into that same world arena to witness and to serve.

Together these two constitute the double identity of the Church. The first is its “holiness”, that is a people called out of the world to belong to God and to worship Him. The second part of the church’s identity is its ‘worldliness’, not in the sense that we adopt worldly standards but using “worldliness” as the opposite of “other worldliness”. “Worldliness”, meaning the immersion of the Church in the life of the secular world – the community in which it finds itself. The local church must penetrate the life of the local community. It was this that led the theologian Bonhoeffer to coin a phrase, which I think we need to bring back into usage, “the holy worldliness of the Church”. It’s a fascinating phrase because the Church is a people called simultaneously to be “holy” and to be “worldly”. Holy, in the sense of being distinct from the world and belonging to God – worldly in the sense of being immersed in the life of the world.

Seldom in its history has the Church remembered and preserved this double identity. Usually it has emphasized one at the expense of the other. Sometimes it has over-emphasized its holiness and withdrawn from the world in order to preserve itself, developing a false kind of piety and in doing so has neglected its mission in the world and to the community. At other times the Church has over-emphasized its worldliness – being so eager to get involved that it has assimilated the world’s values and standards. Neglecting its holiness, there was no difference between itself and the world. It lost its distinctness. If we are to be effectively involved in mission to the world and to our local communities, we must preserve our double identity.

Mission arises out of the biblical doctrine of the Church. If we are not the called out, holy people of God, then we’ve nothing to say – we’ve compromised. And if we are not the Church in the world and immersed in its secular affairs then nobody will listen to us, because we are insulated and isolated from the life of the community in which we live. So without this biblical understanding of the double identity of the church, we will never be effective in our God given mission.

Let me put it another way. This double identity of the Church is derived from the teaching of Jesus. Jesus said to his father, “I pray that you will not take them out of the world, but that you will keep them from evil” (John 17:15). And then went on to say, “As the Father sent me into the world, so I send them into the world” (John 17:18) There’s the famous paradox that we know so well. To be in the world but not of the world – that’s the double identity of the church and it’s derived from the teaching of Jesus.

But it's also derived from his example. The incarnation is the supreme example of the principles we are talking about. When Jesus, the eternal Son of God entered our world, he emptied himself of his glory and his status and he identified himself with our humanity in all its weakness, vulnerability and pain. He lived our life, bore our sin, died our death. He could not have identified himself more with us than he did. But, in identifying himself with us he did not lose his own identity. It was identification without loss of identity. He became one of us without ceasing to be himself. He remained Son of God, but he became fully human.

Now it is that identification without loss of identity, which is really the key to the theology of the Church and its mission and it is so seldom understood. "As the Father sent me into the world, so I send you into the world." Can you see what I am getting at? His coming into the world is to be the pattern of our going into the world – identification with people without losing our Christian identity. It's costly, there are tremendous risks, but this is true mission. It's the mission that we must undertake in our communities and in the world where we live if we are going to cut any ice.

Here's a wonderful phrase used by one time Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsay a number of years ago. He said, "we state and commend the faith only in so far as we go out and put ourselves with loving sympathy inside the doubts of the doubting, the questions of the questioners, the loneliness of those who have lost the way." Put simply, that is incarnational mission or evangelism. Going out as Jesus went out from his glory, putting ourselves inside other people's world view, inside their lost-ness and alienation – not standing aloof from them. The Pharisees, (as some Christians and churches do today) had a false understanding of holiness. They stood apart from people. They thought that they would be contaminated if they got too close. But Jesus actually entered into our grubby risky world, our humanity, our vulnerability – and we have to do the same! It's very costly. Evangelism and mission is much, much more costly than most of us imagine. It isn't just giving out tracts to strangers on street corners or preaching over the radio and TV, that's arm's length evangelism and it may have its place, but that's not incarnational evangelism. What we have to do is to enter into other people's worlds as Jesus entered into our world. It will be uncomfortable.

THE STRUCTURES OF THE CHURCH – organizing ourselves.

The Church must not only understand itself but also organize itself in such a way as to reflect its identity. I believe the Church must learn to live ex-centredly (if there's such a word), that is, it must define its mission outside itself, not sitting round in a circle finding its centre inside its own fellowship – having a pre-occupation with its own interior life. That's not the Church according to the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. In other words, the Church must turn itself outwards, towards the world – towards the community in which it finds itself. It has got to learn to live ex-centredly. Perhaps one might say the ex-centricity of the church. Not because we're a bunch of weirdoes or eccentrics but because we are called to live this ex-centred life. We've got to turn the Church inside out to serve the world out there – a world that needs the love of God in Christ.

Heretical Structures

Now it's possible for dioceses and parishes to have what I would call "heretical structures". The doctrines and beliefs might be orthodox, they may be absolutely correct,

but the structures are heretical. Why do I say that? Listen carefully. Because their structures actually deny the gospel that they say they proclaim. For a church not to be heretically structured it must determine its ministry, its programmes and its mission, not by its own self-centredness but by the service to which it is called to by God in the world. Now this may be a new idea for many of us – that some of our structures could be heretical.

In our diocesan refocusing I believe we are endeavoring to bring our structures into line with the New Testament and in line with the founders of the Anglican Church.

There are plenty of examples of heretical structures. For example, some churches, even enthusiastic and lively churches, organize an over-full programme of church based activities. Every night of the week something is organized for the faithful and they are expected to be there. A church centred programme like that has many draw-backs and dangers. It's very detrimental to family life, and there are families that actually break up because dad is never at home, the family is neglected. Also, it effectively inhibits the mission of the local church. It stops people getting involved in the local community. That kind of structure is an heretical structure. It embodies only one part of the church's identity – its holiness, but it can also deny and contradict the other part – its ability to penetrate the community where it exists.

Let me exaggerate to make my point. Perhaps the church family ought to only meet on Sunday and then bid farewell to one another and not meet again from Monday to Saturday. (Of course I'm not denying that there is a place for mid-week meetings – for people to meet in cell groups for bible study, prayer and support – and some people have to work on Sundays). I'm overstating the case, but I do believe that we need to reduce the number of meetings so that our people can be out in the community, being salt and light. Supposing we did only meet once and then went out into the world the rest of the week. That structure would reflect the double identity of the Church. Sundays we gather and Mondays scatter – the "holiness" of the Church and the "worldliness" of the Church. Coming and going. This is the rhythm of the New Testament Church – gathering and scattering – Sunday and weekday. That structure embodies the New Testament doctrine of the Church.

Dioceses too, must look at their structures. As I said earlier, some people feel that the parish is there to support the diocese. If that's so, then that is an heretical structure. The reverse is true and we must see that it is true. The diocese is there to support the local church in its ministry to the local community and on out into the world – not the other way around.

Evaluating our Structures

Ideally I think every parish, ought to regularly examine and evaluate its structures to see how far it has embodied the biblical ideal. Perhaps this should be done every year. Two surveys could be helpful, one of the local community and the other of its own church life. We often canvas parish membership about its likes, wants and needs, but what about the needs of those who have never darkened the doors of our buildings – the needs of the community. It's necessary to survey the community and our own church life in order to see how far the church is actually penetrating and impacting the community. Again, in your small groups and parishes, you might want to discuss what sort of questions would lead to being able to answer the question of penetration.

THE MESSAGE OF THE CHURCH – expressing ourselves.

It is not enough for the Church to just understand and organize itself; it has to articulate its message. It must express itself meaningfully. The Church is the product of the Gospel, which has brought it into being. Mission and evangelism at its very simplest is sharing the evangel. I don't think we need elaborate definitions of evangelism; it's simply sharing the Good News. Whether it's shared with individuals, in print, film or by word of mouth, whenever the gospel is being shared, there is evangelism. I believe we must avoid defining evangelism in terms of methods or results. Rather it should be defined in terms of the message. Of course we must evaluate the results to see whether we are effective, but evangelism must always be defined by the message. You cannot have evangelism without the evangel and biblical evangelism requires the biblical evangel.

Formulating the Gospel

So then how shall we formulate the good news? Is the Gospel big enough to speak to humankind in all its variety? In the community where the local church finds itself there are people of very many different cultural backgrounds. I'm not necessarily talking only about ethnic groups. There are children, young people, the elderly, the disadvantaged, the rich and the poor and so on. Is the Good News relevant to all such people? The answer is obviously yes! And I trust we all believe that. But, in saying that, there are two extremes that we must avoid. What we could call "total fixity" and "total fluidity". Let me explain what I mean and I hope that you will find this helpful as we grapple with the problem of what is Good News for today.

"Total Fixity"

By "total fixity" I mean that some people are prisoners of Gospel stereotypes. They are in bondage to particular words and formulas. They try to wrap and package the biblical Gospel into a neat little parcel, labeled and price tagged as if it was going to be displayed on the super-market shelf. And unless their favourite terminology is used such as, "the kingdom of God", the "blood of Jesus", "liberation", or "being born again"– they declare the Gospel has not been shared. They don't seem to have noticed the diversity of Gospel formulation in the New Testament. The Good News is expressed in many different ways – there are many expressions. The "kingdom of God" was a common term used by Jesus however later, although Paul refers to it, you don't often find it in the Epistles. It's found in the first three Gospels but in John it has largely been replaced by the expression "eternal life". "The blood of Jesus" is common in Hebrews, which we all know expresses the Gospel in terms of the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. Again Paul talks a great deal about "justification by faith" and the universal lordship of Jesus. John, in his letters talks much about "being born of God" or being "born from above".

There are many different models of the Good News and unfortunately some people, in their determination to recite their set piece, have it down to a set formula – cut and dried. So determined are they to get over their formula of the Gospel that they become insensitive to the person or people they are endeavouring to reach. They are not being sensitive to that particular person's felt need nor to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Sensitivity to people and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit is really of the essence of biblical evangelism. So let us avoid “total fixity”.

“Total Fluidity”

Secondly, we need to avoid “total fluidity”. At the Lambeth Conference in 1998 I was assigned to a small group with other bishops. As you might imagine we were very diverse, theologically speaking. One of them made the comment that there was no such thing as the Gospel in vacuum. He went on to say, “You don’t even know what the Gospel is, until you enter each particular situation. You must enter the situation first and then discover the Gospel when you are there.” I think it was an incredible thing for a church leader to say, let alone a bishop. If what he meant was, that we need to be sensitive so that the Gospel will be meaningful to the person we are engaging with, then he’s right. But to say that there is no such thing as the Gospel is an absurd overstatement. It is to deny the fact of divine revelation – God has revealed certain truths. So if the “total fixity” group misses the diversity of Gospel terminology, then the “total fluidity” group misses the unity of the message in the New Testament, which despite its diversity binds the different formulations of the Gospel together.

Finding the Balance

However let say, both extremes, “total fixity” and “total fluidity” express an important concern. I find that in talking with people it is very important not just to listen to what they are saying, but also to struggle to understand why they are saying it. When people are defending a position and digging in their heels it is very important to try to discover what it is they are trying to safeguard or defend. Why is it that they get “hot under the collar” about a particular thing?

If we ask that question about these two extremes then I think that we will see this. Firstly the “total fixity” position is anxious to defend the truth that the Gospel has been revealed and given. It’s the ‘given-ness’ of the Gospel that is of great concern because it is the Word of God and not merely the invention of human beings. Therefore we have no liberty to tamper with it or to edit it. This is a very important truth the “given-ness” of the Gospel.

Secondly, the “total fluidity” position emphasizes that the Gospel should be contextualised. The “fixity” position emphasizes that it comes from above – it has been given. Whereas the “fluidity” position emphasizes that the Gospel must be related to earth – it must be related to the context of the people with whom you are speaking otherwise it will be meaningless.

Both views are laying claim to two important facts: the ‘given-ness’ of the Gospel and the fact that the Gospel must be understood to be received. In other words there must be a connection between God’s Word and our world – between Scripture and culture – between divine revelation and human need.

This is very important and at the risk of labouring the point let me say; on the one hand the Gospel has been revealed and therefore we have no liberty to ditch it or to manipulate it to suit contemporary tastes. It focuses on certain historical events in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus which are forever true and which have been recorded and interpreted for us in the New Testament. These events belong to the unalterable deposit

of faith. But, on the other hand, the New Testament presents these unalterable facts in different ways and with different emphases.

So how do we articulate this unchanging biblical Gospel? The “how” must be dictated by each particular and specific situation. That’s the enormous challenge to the local church – we must use our God-given brains – we must be creative. That’s why in local church mission or evangelism we have to look, listen, think, learn and understand where people are at in the communities where God has placed us. Their cries of pain and alienation, their quest for meaning and for reality, their search for personal significance in a world that presumes to call some people redundant and without value, their hunger for love and authentic relationships, their longing for freedom, for justice, for peace, for authentic human-ness. These are the cries of the human heart and we have to listen and listen and listen.

Has the Church got a message that can meet those needs? As someone wisely said, “God has given us two ears but only one mouth, so he obviously intends us to listen twice as much as we speak”. We need to learn to listen in evangelism to understand where people are in our communities – to understand their misunderstandings of the Gospel in order that we may speak of Jesus meaningfully; in a way that is both faithful to biblical revelation and relevant to their own particular situation.

I trust we can see that it is not one without the other. It isn’t faithfulness to Scripture without sensitivity to people. Nor is it sensitivity to people without faithfulness to Scripture. We need both. The local church must learn to be sensitive and faithful at the same time.

So how does the Church learn to express itself and articulate its message in a way that combines fidelity to revelation and sensitivity to people? The answer is that there is no short cut! There is only one way, and that is listening to both, listening to Scripture, and listening to the modern world – the society that surrounds us. That does not mean that we agree with everything in our world, but we must soak ourselves in both. What we, as individuals and as local churches, are called to, is a much deeper penetration into both the richness of Scripture and into the complexities of the modern world. The message must not only be articulated it has to be received meaningfully.

THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH – being what we claim

The local church must be a living embodiment of the Gospel. It is no use proclaiming the love of God, or new life in Christ, if we don’t exhibit these things in our own lives, individually as Christians and together as the local church. People have to see what we we’re talking about otherwise the Gospel lacks credibility. I have no doubt at all that one of the greatest hindrances to the spread of the Gospel today is the Church. Now I realize that that’s an incredible, if not devastating, thing to say. The Church, which ought to be a stepping-stone to faith, is often a stumbling block. If only the Church was living the Good News that it proclaims, I believe that all over the world people would be pouring into it.

Let me give you just one biblical example. It comes from John’s first letter (1 John 4:12). He writes: “No-one has ever seen God”, that is, God is invisible, “but if we love one another God lives in us and his love is perfected in us.” To me, that verse and its implications are absolutely sensational. They are breath-taking in their significance.

The Invisibility of God

John says, “Nobody has ever seen God.” The invisibility of God has always been a problem to faith. It was a problem to the Israelites in Old Testament days because all around them were heathen nations who worshipped idols. Their god’s were extremely visible and tangible. They had eyes, ears, noses, mouths, hands, feet and the rest. The surrounding nations used to tease and taunt the Jews for actually worshipping a God that couldn’t be seen. To them it was incredible. They used to say to the Jews, “You believe in God? I can’t see him. Where is he? Is he asleep, is he really there?” And throughout the Psalms and the Prophets, you will hear the cry, “why should the heathen say, where is your God?” “Where is he?” “We can’t see him”. So the Jews would cry to the Almighty, “Rend the heavens and come down and show yourself and demonstrate that you are real to these heathen who can’t see you.”

The invisibility of God was a problem back then and it’s a problem today, not only in other cultures and religions but also in the Western world brought up on the scientific or empirical method. Most of us were taught from a very early age not to believe in anything that cannot be scientifically proven. The things you cannot see, touch, taste, smell or hear – that are not amenable to investigation by the senses – need not be believed in. And now we the Church come along and say, “You should believe in a God you cannot see. Who is invisible, intangible and isn’t really reached through the five senses.” So people in our communities say, “How can I believe in a God like that?”

Let’s be very clear that for evangelism and the mission of the local church, the invisibility of God is a problem. People may rush to places of worship after a disaster such as the destruction of the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon but its not long before the rushing to places of worship turns to questions like, “How could God, if there is one, allow such a thing to happen?” And they turn for answers from the God they cannot see, to extreme forms of patriotism and nationalism that can be felt and that will act.

Problem Solved!

So we must ask the question, “How has God solved the question of his own invisibility?” And there are two answers to that question. The first and obvious answer is that He solved the problem in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God. In Jesus, God offered Himself to physical investigation. As John says, “He is the one we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands”. We listen to it every Christmas at least – the prologue to John’s letters (1 John 1:1-4). The Apostle John claims that this invisible God has made Himself available for physical investigation. Jesus himself said, “He who has seen me has seen the Father.” And St. Paul calls him elsewhere, “The image of the invisible God.” (Colossians 1.15) Again John says, “Nobody has ever seen God but the only begotten of the Father, He has made Him known.” (John 1”18)

So we say, “that’s wonderful – the invisible God made himself visible in Jesus”. It’s a tremendous truth, but that’s two thousand years ago! Is there no way in which the invisible God makes Himself visible today?” And the apostle John replies, “Yes, there is! He who once made himself visible in Christ now makes himself visible in Christians – if we love one another”. There’s the challenge for the local church! There’s the challenge for us. “If we love one another God dwells in us and His love is perfected in

us”, and the implication is that He is seen in us when we manifest to one another and to the world the love that is not human but divine.

Bishop Stephen Neil, the great Anglican missiologist who died about a decade ago, puts its very eloquently. “Within the fellowship of those who are bound together by personal loyalty to Jesus Christ, the relationship of love reaches an intimacy and an intensity unknown elsewhere. Friendship between the friends of Jesus of Nazareth is unlike any other friendship”. He goes on to say, “this ought to be the normal experience within the Christian community” – that is the local church. “But in existing Christian congregations it is so rare that it is a measure of the failure of the Church as a whole to live up to the purpose of its founder for it. However where it is experienced, this special kind of love, especially across the barriers of race, nationality and language, it is one of the most convincing evidences of the continuing activity of Jesus among men.”

I want to say that I am personally convinced of that. The most successful local churches are those who have been able to penetrate their local communities. They are loving Christian communities and that is true anywhere around the world. Where the local church is torn by strife and is at sixes and sevens with infighting, arguing, bickering and division – that church cannot evangelize. It’s mission to the community and the world has failed. The Lord of the Church has told us that it is by our love for one another that the world will know that we are his followers. This truth cannot be underscored enough.

Of course we will have conflicts and differences within churches, but there are ways of dealing with them, for example, help is available through Bishopdale College with seminars on conflict management. And that’s good, it has its place but it’s still not enough. We must have loving relationships, even if we hold different views and different opinions about certain things. The quality of our love for one another is the most powerful mission tool that is available to any local church. We can have the best buildings, we can have great programmes, we can be successful in so many different ways, but if we fail in this one thing, not only do we dishonour the Lord, but we raise barriers which makes it virtually impossible for those on the outside to believe. We have to take this very seriously and look at ourselves. The Church must embody what it proclaims. It must walk the talk. Our relationships with one another are of paramount importance.

SUMMARY

Those are the four things about the local church that I wanted to bring you. This has been a different type of synod address but I believe with all my heart at the beginning of this new Millennium, as we refocus, as we endeavour to put the local church right at the very centre of our outreach into the communities in which we find ourselves these four things are absolutely crucial for the life of the Church and its mission to the world today.

- The local church must understand itself theologically. It must grasp its double identity.
- The local church must organize itself structurally, developing a strategy that reflects its identity.
- The local church must express itself verbally, articulating a message that is both faithful to Scripture and relevant to the modern world.
- The local church must be itself spiritually, a community of love through which the invisible God makes himself visible again today.

In your discussion groups I hope you will begin to be able to set these things in the context of your local church – your parish.

If we put the local church at the centre and dare to be different, for the sake of our communities – for those who as yet haven't experienced the love of God through Jesus Christ – it will take us out of our zones of safety and comfort. But with our eyes on the Lord of the Church we can do it with His enabling.

I have invited three people to briefly express an opinion and to give examples of how this is working, or might work, in two areas among the many.

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APPENDIX 1

CHILDREN AND FAMILY MINISTRY

Alice Eaton

I have been given the task of sharing with you some thoughts about the topic that I am probably most passionate about: Children and Family Ministry.

Let me begin by giving you some facts and figures.

“If a child hasn't been introduced to Jesus Christ by the time he or she is 14, there is only a 4 percent chance that such conversion will happen between ages 14 and 18 and a 6 percent chance that it will occur in the remainder of life. It comes down to this indisputable fact: The family is critical to the propagation of the faith.” George Barna.

Families Today

Traditional families in our society are fast becoming obsolete. Census figures from the US show that traditional nuclear families are now less than 25% of households. Children may grow up with several caregivers, more than four grandparents and dozens of half siblings. Children can be shuffled about from pillar to post in an ever-changing pattern of living arrangements. This present situation has certainly not advantaged our society one little bit.

To give you just one example let me quote from an article written by Bruce Logan and published in the Christchurch Press last year: *“It is no coincidence that as we have progressively devalued marriage over recent decades we discover a corresponding increase in domestic and other kinds of violence. Male de facto partners, for example, are four times more likely to abuse their partners than men who are married.”* And in case you think that this doesn't apply to Christians then let me quote from “Focus on the Family” August edition 2001 where Dr James Dobson analyses the 2001 Census figures for the US. He says: *“The divorce rate is actually higher by a small margin among born-again Christians than for those who profess no faith at all:”*

Nevertheless, children come in packages called families. Every child is born into a family. There are, however, many many scenarios of what today's family actually consists of:

- Some children live with their mother or their father
- Some children live with a grandparent
- Some children live with an aunt or an uncle
- Some children live in foster homes with an unrelated caregiver.
- Some children are adopted

Even if a child has been abandoned at birth our society makes sure that someone will look after that child and whoever that person or group of people is, they become that child's family. Everyone agrees that a child, put to one side, left out in the cold will die.

So, whether we like it or not, whether it is dysfunctional or not, whether it is in reality a 'safe place' or not - the family is the cornerstone of our society. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights says that: *"the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State."*

If the family is the fundamental unit of society then I would contend that the church must consider ministering to families in our communities a very high priority.

The Biblical View of the Family.

From a biblical point of view the family is also central. The pinnacle of God's creation is people and his intention is that people should live together - Gen 2:18 - *"It is not good for a man to be alone!"* - God created people to live in community. Look at Gen 12:3 and God's promise to Abraham. *"All the families of the earth will be blessed through you."* He didn't say - all the individuals of the earth will be blessed but he said - all the families will be blessed. God didn't ever say I will bless you, full stop. God always added, "you and your children and your children's children".

He knows us all individually - every hair on our head is numbered - but he also made the second commandment - immediately after loving God Himself with all our heart and soul and mind and strength - he said we are to love one another. We are to love our neighbour. If we look at the Ten Commandments we notice that the first four commands deal with our love for God and the very next one tells us to honour our parents? In God's order of things the family takes priority.

So from a Social point of view and a Biblical point of view the family must be placed right at the centre. Surely the Church must do the same.

The Family and the Church

Obviously God Himself must be at the centre - Lord of our lives, our hopes and our dreams. The one we come together to worship and to serve. I am sure that we all accept that as an indisputable fact.

But then right next to that must come the family. The family must be right at the heart of the Church's life and ministry.

If the family is as central as that, then all ministries can flow from that premise: Why?

- Families are units including the young, middle aged and the elderly – babies, children, parents and grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends and caregivers etc all of whom are part of the church of today
- Families usually have children who grow up – they become teenagers and young adults
- Children have older brothers and sisters who are teenagers and young adults
- Reaching out to families, I think, should be the first and arguably the easiest way to reach out into the community.

The parish's ministry must have people (families) at the centre not programmes. Families must be at the centre of the church's life and the centre of its outreach. God wants consecrated people not effective machines. We don't take care of God, God takes care of us and then he uses us to help care for people.

So when I come to church I want to learn about God, to be trained in knowledge and obedience and prayer. I want to discover truth that centers me, words that comfort and also command, rituals that stabilize me, work that has purpose, a community of relationships that strengthens me, forgiveness that frees me. I want to be part of this family discovering God together and reaching out together so that all these things that the church offers are made available and attainable for all the families in my community.

I believe that if we put families right at the centre then all ministry would naturally flow out from there. Whatever we do we must guard against trying to compartmentalize various ministries. Don't put children's ministry out on a limb. Don't put youth ministry out on a limb. Don't put music or prayer ministry out on a limb. We cannot compartmentalize the things that we do in church.

Recently in the Nelson Mail there was a page devoted to Nelson's quilting craze. – The church is like that. We must discover how the pieces fit together – let's be part of that quilting craze in our region and enjoy allowing God to fashion and design us.

God says – put families in the centre and the spokes of the wheel go out from there. I recently read a wonderful quote by Iraneaus, one of the early Church fathers. He said, *"The glory of God is humans fully alive"*

That can only be done if the family comes back to the centre of our life and our outreach.

What does this mean for the Church?

- Encourage marriage - Model liberating not controlling marriages
- Find ways to affirm and support marriage
 - Couples seminars
 - Weddings - Have you ever known a couple coming for a marriage who didn't want it to work?
 - Marriage Counseling.
 - A library of helpful books

Welcome all – whatever their situation:

- Solo parents – married or never married
- Singles

- Fostered children etc.

Support families with young children:

- Model healthy family life where children are secure with clear boundaries.
- Sunday programmes (safe crèche areas, exciting Sunday Schools and Family services.)
- Teach the Scriptures so that parents become well taught and thereby excited about their faith.
- Weekday 'hanging out' - kids and coffee programmes, Depending on your gifts – tramping, walking, music appreciation, music 'hands-on' groups, Games, films, appreciation of the arts and crafts.
- Welcome those who seek baptism for their children – even if they have never darkened the doors of the church before.
- Offer support programmes to the community ie. Coping with divorce - (Nativity and Bishopdale parishes' – Divorce recovery programme) CFM is trying to resource the library with a programme that can be used in parishes for children coping with divorced parents.
- Care for the hurting and the bereaved – (services for those who have lost a loved one during the year.)
- Share your story and allow others to share theirs – there is nothing more powerful than testimony.
- Be outward focused - each parish group is not complete in itself. We have been placed in the world.

Encourage our youth

Value our elderly.

Don't control people and their gifts – encourage people to develop and express them, allowing God to multiply those gifts.

Affirm those who minister

Allow people to fail

In other words let's **Love families** – place them at the heart of our church's ministry – don't control them – set them free to worship, learn, dream, laugh, cry, reach out and together serve the community. That's ministry that is not compartmentalized. In our changing world this is ministering the unchanging gospel.

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APPENDIX 2**CHILDREN'S MINISTRY**

Sheryll Gwynne – St. Christopher's, Blenheim.

Skit: "A dollar mix please!"

Yes, we are certainly a mixed bag in the Church! Generation Y, generation X, Baby Boomers, and the Builders (the pre war) generation. How on earth are we all supposed to get along together? Is it possible? Is it even desirable?

Let us look at the skit. It shows that some of us choose painfully and with much thought, while others of us take the package and sort out our favourites as we go. In both cases the MIX is important, we don't all want the same thing!!

Looking into the mix, the under 5's are the "jellybeans" – bright, colourful, with soft centers and easily digested.

The 5-9 year olds are the "wine gums", round and round they go. They are full of flavour and a bit chewy but still soft centred.

The teens are the "coke bottles". They enjoy life; it must be fun, cool and very enjoyable. Life certainly centers around 'me'!

The adults are the "gobstoppers" with a hard exterior. They need a lot of sucking to find maybe a small soft centre.

Don't let our hearts be hardened. Let's not choke the young on the hard, or, give denture trouble to the old on the soft – but when the mix is put together carefully we can tolerate and enjoy. We can sing each others songs and so on.

For the church or parish to truly believe in "every member ministry" it will need to totally transform its "climate of understanding" assuming and acting on the fact that the ministry belongs to every member.

How do we get children to belong? How do we know what they believe? How do we involve children in the life of the church?

While we need to recognize the obvious rich diversity within our parishes, particularly in worship styles, parish size, rural and city and so on, we also need to recognize that there are common factors we share and which contribute to building children's ministry.

In a recent radio interview, well known Christian commentator, Ian Grant was asked about his intentions for organizing a "Breakfast for Men" in Auckland city. The mayor, who was interviewed with him, criticized his stand, questioning why the breakfast was only for men.

Ian's reply was, "I may desire to be a nun, but I can't be – I haven't got the right credentials. I'm a man". The point he was making was that this breakfast was organized

for men to encourage them to be good fathers – better fathers, so on this occasion it would be inappropriate to have women present.

The Church can learn from this. We tend to have well organized programmes for women. The AAW, coffee mornings and playgroups for mums and toddlers, but few parishes have similar programmes for men.

Today, businesses are budgeting for and spending big dollars on running men's programmes to show the benefits for children and fathers doing things together. Making time for relationship and seeing the children's needs being met by them.

The climate has to change. Often men have not been there for their children because of their jobs. This has been to the detriment of wife and family. Roles have changed, the family has changed and the world struggles for the answers to help men change for the benefit of the children.

Research has shown that if a husband/father comes to church it is more likely that the whole family will come. This therefore impacts on the children.

It was God's original intention that the father bring forth the spirit in the child! We need men to be involved in our children's programmes – to be role models (this is particularly important for boys). We need to recognize that the family unit today is often broken; therefore we need to help cater for the needs of the children in our parish families.

Past generations have thought, "children should be seen and not heard". Now children are "heard and not seen"!

Sadly we hear the cries – all too late – in suicide and homicide. The wounded spirit (slumbering and imprisoned), the soul bricked in. The body functioning in dysfunction.

For every member ministry we have to "transform the climate of understanding". We have to understand the wounded spirit, to understand the function of fathers, mothers and indeed the child. We have to look to where the children flock.

McDonalds

Where do children flock? To McDonalds!

The child comes in and goes straight to the play area, where it's a child's world for letting it all out – throw, bounce, dig, dive, slide – till they've had enough and their emotions, sad and glad, have been released. Then it's out to dine on the food we love, made especially with kids in mind. They sit with their parents albeit because they pay the price!

McDonalds is worldwide (to the uttermost parts). It's clean and fresh, you get what you expect and the rules are clearly visible. They are expected and inspected. It's a functioning unit with its mission outreach in Ronald McDonald House for children's health. They plan for the future with their 'on the job' training for young people – "learn as you earn" policy – training and management are given top priority.

Where is the Church?

So where is the church? We have good training in the Nelson Diocese thanks to Bishopdale College. Where is your church in the McChatter of decisions about children's ministry? Do we have a "McSpirit Sundae" on our Sunday menu?

Here are some questions to ponder:

- Do we have programmes that attract children, which excite, feed and nourish them?
- Are our church environments inviting for children, with clean, fresh, bright, rooms and not cluttered, messy, old and unattractive?
- Do we have a "mixed bag" – of games, fun, teaching, discussion, prayer, worship, etc?
- Do the children invite their friends along? That's a sure test of how well we are doing.
- Are there opportunities for children to actively participate in worship services, through drama, reading, dance, music, prayers etc? Do we recognize and utilize their God-given giftings, or are they given just a few minutes – "lip-service"?
- Are there opportunities in our parish life for families to dine together on the "living bread"? Holy Communion, the greatest feast of all – love at its highest, designed with us in mind, because our Heavenly Father has paid the price.

Yes, we have more to give than McDonalds ever will! But we will need to keep the focus on our mission through our environments, climates, research and marketing. The answers will not be found in individuals, but rather together in "every member ministry" each doing their part.

May your children's programme make families thirsty so that they will want to come and drink the living water.

Be encouraged, keep up the good work.

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APPENDIX 3

MINISTRY TO THE YOUNG GENERATION

Greg Latham, Youth Consultant

Jealousy our motivation

At our clergy and lay staff conference at St Arnaud a couple of months ago Bishop Derek confirmed yet again how complete the good news of Jesus is. We have the greatest message, we know the greatest person ever. Our Bishop urged us to respond to the thousands who live in this pluralistic society but don't know Christ both with vigour and an over abundance of humility. Just like Jesus during his earthly ministry. Bishop Derek

challenged us that our root motivation for witnessing the Christ story both locally and globally must lie in jealousy – jealousy for the honour and praise of Jesus in the lives of all. Or to look at it another way we must resent the gods in people's lives that are rivals to the Lordship of Christ. That we make people aware of this goes without saying, *how* we do it is going to be critical.

We must build such relationships with the world that in humility our relationship with ever-loving-God can ultimately overshadow the worship of any other gods in the hearts and minds of his created beings. And those created beings are our neighbours and our workmates, our children's friends and our mechanic. It is God's desire that all would honour him. It is our responsibility to love all, unconditionally. Hell is a time and space where God in Christ is continually and totally dishonoured. We all know this, we know it deep within us. Our heart's ache for so many that don't know God must cause us to action, as we see so many rival gods being made lord.

Culture Connecting

The question we long to answer is how do we make that happen. At that same clergy and lay staff conference Kevin Ward helped us grapple with this question. You would have read in the September Witness some of the ideas that Kevin is putting out to the church. Most of these revolve around the nature of the culture we live in. Kevin in a very thoughtful yet challenging way, is asking us to examine the global and tribal world we live in and try to find an answer that helps us be change-agents in the communities we live. How do we present the message of the gospel today where the key values in society revolve around self? Individualism, privatism, pluralism, relativism, and anti-institutionalism are all pervasive aren't they? How do we preach the message of the cross where absolutes are not all popular, where what *you* believe can be accommodated into what *I* believe even if they are incompatible?

The only way that I can see it happening is through relationships. Not just hi-how-are-you-its-lovely-to-see-you relationships, but sacrificial-time-spent-getting-to-know-and-love-you relationships that cost. With individualism creeping through our communities the kind of relationships that Jesus proposed becomes the only possible way forward. Without them we will not connect with the world in which we move, and worse still we won't connect the Christ with a living soul.

But what must we be -and as an outflow from that- do, (or perhaps more importantly *not* be and do) to avoid missing these connections? Ward suggests that people need a sense of belonging, and this will often happen before a change in belief. If belonging before belief is a real way for pre-Christians to begin a journey towards 'Jesus as Lord' how does that shape our activities as Christians both individually and corporately? And more importantly, and perhaps far more uncomfortably, how far would we be prepared to go, how far would you be prepared to go? How far would the church be prepared to go to reach this world with the love of the life-changer? How far would you and I be prepared to go to save one soul, to influence one neighbourhood, to affect one town for the sake of Christ the jealous one?

Emerging from the Shadows

I think Kevin Ward is a brave man. He likes to stick his neck on the block when it comes to challenging the church, to challenging you and me. He issued some serious challenges to the church if it is going to be relevant -and one would be hoping like mad that that may mean effective as well- in helping people move to a place of declaring Jesus as Lord. He suggests we need to look at the shadow of Christendom that is all around us: The forms, the rituals, and the language of church culture that may not be relevant or helpful to the dwellers of the emerging culture. I suspect many of us have never even thought about these issues let alone begun to figure out what they might mean? Have a think about it for a moment.

Imagine you are an alien visiting this earth. What could be your reaction to the things we do and say as church? How would you react do you think to some of the things we do and say? Would what you see be about relationships – relationships one with another, and one with God? Would the things we do corporately and individually reflect that, or would they seem strange and foreign?

In many ways the person on the street *is* from another world, and if we as the church are to connect with them and provide opportunities to connect them with God we need to get to know them. We need to get to know their strange otherworld customs. We need to find out what makes them tick, whether they are full of green slime or made just like us.

In the latest edition of the journal *Stimulus* Mark Pierson, pastor to the Cityside Baptist Church in Auckland, identifies some key issues regarding this (and he is referring to churched people – so the mission to the un-churched, pre-Christian, pre-maybe-any-contact-at-all-with-the-church person I suspect is even further off). He writes, “I am regularly contacted by people who have left their church home of many years because it can no longer provide a place of spiritual growth for them. The boundaries have become too tight and narrow and they feel unable to be who they are and follow Christ as they believe they need to.” (Remember the ideas Kevin Ward is throwing at us- individualism, privatism, pluralism, relativism, anti-institutionalism). Here it all is. Lets not spend too much time debating whether its right or wrong, lets instead focus on understand how it affects the way people think and act, what they hold dear, what they long for because of it, and begin to work out how to love them into a relationship with Christ- both with vigour and humility.

Mark Pierson continues: “They feel that their church doesn’t support them in the place they find themselves. Rather, they feel that it does the opposite, by expecting them to follow a particular line of behaviour, doctrine and worship style, without questioning anything. Where is the maturing to be found in that sort of environment? Why are we not able to allow and even encourage robust debate and accept differences of opinion in our churches without feeling that we need to attack people? What are we afraid of? Diversity? Until we can grow communities of faith that encourage real diversity we will have little to offer those ‘outside’”. Pierson sums it up with this simple statement: “We impact the world for Christ when our following of him is integrated into who we are out in the world, not what we do in the church.”

Pierson is saying this: Both gospel and culture must shape what we do. For example we might view Sunday as a special day, the Lord’s day, where we join together for worship. But really how does the rest of society feel about it. How does the family next door to you

view it. For them is it just another workday, or their only chance for family time because of work or other factors?

Tim Pratt writing in the New Zealand Baptist in a short article entitled 'Confessions of a non-attende' has this to say:

'So I've been thinking... what about a church for 'weekend working, city people', one that meets on say Tuesday evening, leaving Sunday for family, brunching, sleeping in, attending the kids soccer or dance class, even working. One that acknowledges that Sundays just don't work for all of us. What if we met after work and instead of drinks with colleagues, perhaps the family could join us. We could begin with a reasonably priced, catered meal (glorified fish and chips). Then at say 6.45 we could start with some creative contemporary worship to help us reflect and experience on where God fits in with our world." Such thoughts aren't that new but are we taking them serious enough? Are we thinking outside the box for the sake of Christ's death? Are we prepared to rethink church?

Widening our focus

Kevin Ward would challenge us with the suggestion that church has become in many cases an idol, the entire focus of our attention. He would put the question to us: "What does it mean to be an authentic follower of Jesus?" He would then suggest that with that answer we work out the form of the church, what we do, how we behave, and our priorities. Ward suggests that one of the key things the church should be doing is resourcing you and I to live in the world. What world – a world that has as its central values individualism, privatism, pluralism, relativism, anti-institutionalism. Here lies the challenge. Central to what we do as church is an emphasis on open discussion, shared experience and attention to spiritual development. Ward suggests the thing that people struggling along in our post-modern age desperately need and desire is sacred space, mystery, places and times just to be, and transcendence.

In a letter to the editor of the *New Zealand Baptist* Marjorie Tiller wrote these words "I have found in the church I attend a truly loving and welcoming spirit of friendliness that is precious to me. It is not the culture or arranged programme or music that draws people into a church –it is the Spirit-filled, loving Christians who create an atmosphere where one feels welcomed and accepted". I agree wholeheartedly Marjorie but could I add that there is a very large percentage of the population who will never get near a church door except for old Uncle Harry's funeral. We must as the people of God exude that same loving, accepting, welcoming spirit in our homes, our places of work and recreation, take it into our neighbour's home and out onto the streets.

Someone has put it this way: "Perhaps the next wave of the spirit is as obvious as our noses, and perhaps it's got absolutely nothing to do with the way we have done church for the last thirty years. Perhaps this church would see 'outsiders' not as scalps for God to be gathered by well-intentioned raiding parties into their sacred spaces. Perhaps church could be more a place of freedom to act out and think about and struggle with our lives with honest people who need the same".

Holding up not holding out

In March of this year I was fortunate to travel to the United Kingdom and see a number of churches addressing such issues in a variety of ways. I came away feeling that whether it was multi-media this or techno that, the key to reaching anyone for Christ is integrity, relationships that are authentic and real, outworkings of faith that are outward focussed, together with expressions of worship and decision making that are participatory and inclusive. Trendy alternative high tech anything without relationships is a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal.

Perhaps our response to these issues is one of inadequacy. Especially when we begin to consider how they might impact the church and how we might begin to bring them to fruition. That's okay. In fact it's pretty understandable. It's difficult to embrace new ideas, its difficult to step outside the thinking and behaving that has made up a large portion of our lives. But the key thing to grasp in all this is that the younger generation doesn't have to think half as hard about this stuff as we might because they are in the midst of it. It is their world. What we as leaders, and purse holders, and long time members of the church must do is give them permission to do what they must to reach the culture of today. If we hold on to the way it was, the way its been done then we may very well lose the opportunity to reach people for Jesus.

An integral aspect of the Bishop's charges over the last few synods has been focused on youth. Bishop Derek has challenged and encouraged us to see the young people in our Diocese as integral to the ongoing health and future direction of the Church. Many have heard that call and praise God many have responded. But we must continue to let our young people speak forth about the direction of the church, to let our young people have their voice, and their opinions heard – maybe its time to support and encourage those around us and for us not to do it all. The younger generation may want to do it differently from us, are we ready to let them? What if nothing stays the same -although I very much doubt that will happen. What if it doesn't come out quite as we would like or think that it should? What if it's messy, disruptive? That sounds a little like the way Jesus worked here on earth. Are we brave enough to let that sort of thing happen? If we're serious about our faith and being evangelists, good news bearers, then I believe we must.

Within our Diocese there are many exciting and wonderful things happening. Young people are hungry to know God; they're desperate to make contact with a God that they sense is real. And it is happening. It's taking place in Greymouth where one hundred and fifty people gather each month for the youth-led Pulse events. Its happening at the Cathedral where a wonderful group of young people meet and seek to find out who they are in Christ. Its happening in Blenheim where so many young people are wanting to gather and check out the God stuff that it's a nightmare for those in leadership. I believe its going to happen in Golden Bay because of the faith and obedience of those there. Its going to happen in Motueka and Brightwater because they have a desire to reach the young people of their communities, evidenced in their moves to develop further their ministry to young people by employing experienced youth workers. It's happening at All Saints because they have both a commitment and long term approach to relational ministry with young people. Maybe it's going to happen in places where it's not happening yet, and it will happen because of you. Because you will allow and make allowances, you will give permission, and encourage. What we have done thus far is not enough because our jealous God desires many more to turn to Him.

In closing I would like to play you a short video of this year's Winter Camp, 'Shifting Gear'. Two hundred and sixty young people and leaders from across the Diocese gathered for four days to celebrate together, to learn more of God and His desire for us to have a close intimate relationship with Him, and to just be together. These are the people we need to focus on, these faces will be the ones that connect with the emerging culture. Far more than you or I can. These are the ones that will keep the church alive and Christ's name honoured. With our help and God's grace.