

GREVILLEA

June, 2014

Welcome to the twenty third edition of **Grevillea** an e-magazine to stimulate your thinking!

Why "Grevillea"? The Macquarie Dictionary defines "grevillea" as any shrub or tree of the very large, mainly Australian genus Grevillea family. Many are attractive ornamentals and a number are useful trees. It is also worth noting that grevillea can be very toxic.

So Grevillea is an Australian e-magazine which will cover a large range of subjects as time goes on. We trust they will be interesting (not just ornamental), useful and stimulate (not irritate) your thinking. We aim to have articles that will be short, practical and worth your opening them as attachments.

This edition focuses on **Turning the Church Around.**

Ruthmary Bond speaks out of her experience of CitySoul, a fresh expression of ministry in South Australia. Then Gordon Ramsay shares out of his long involvement in ministry at Kippax Uniting Church in Canberra where he has helped it develop into a multifaceted effective ministry. Malcolm and Nerida Drake focus on the importance of personal spiritual disciplines for the church will only turn around as we show the difference Christ makes in our lives and continue to develop our spirituality. Martin Levine, originally from South Africa and now a Uniting Church minister serving as principal of the Alan Walker College of Evangelism, provides a perceptive analysis of the subject. Finally Chris Lockley speaks about changing ourselves as well as changing the church.

Email me if you have some thoughts to share. My email address is chrisw@nat.uca.org.au.

I hope you are stimulated by this edition of Grevillea.

Grace and peace
Chris Walker

Let me again point people to significant papers from the WCC. Contact me if you would like to receive a copy.

The Church: Towards a Common Vision
Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes
Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World
An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace

Turning the Church Around – Fresh Expressions

Ruthmary Bond

Minister of the Word- CitySoul

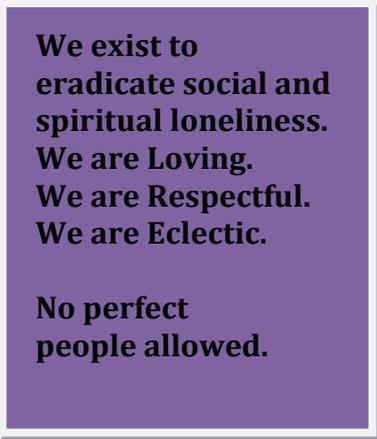
Fresh Expression and Evangelism officer for the Synod of South Australia

I am not sure where to begin with turning the Church around. There are so many things that come to mind, good ideas, even better ideas, things that I have seen or read. But really none of these things are the answer in every situation. There really is only one thing that will work, it worked in the early church and I believe it is the hope for turning the church around today. What is this one thing? Love.

I know that sounds very simple and understated. But if we look at the life of Jesus, we see what Jesus did best was love people and out of his great love for them came healing, wholeness, forgiveness, acceptance and lives that were changed. It is that love, the love of Jesus that will turn not only the church around but the world. I don't know your context and so don't know what this love would look like in your setting but I would like to share with you what we are doing and the reason we do what we do. Not so that you can "do as we do" because I don't believe that is the answer but maybe what we do will resonate with you or offer a springboard for you to consider what you should do about love and loving.

CitySoul

Where do I begin to explain who we are? Perhaps what we have painted on our wall will help. It says:



**We exist to
eradicate social and
spiritual loneliness.
We are Loving.
We are Respectful.
We are Eclectic.**

**No perfect
people allowed.**

Everything we do goes through this statement. We are one community with many facets. We started as a group of young adults who wanted to reach young people in the Adelaide City area. Over four years we have had two ministers, of which I am the second and because of the age group who are transient we are on our third group of people who are the official worshipping congregation. Although on the ground we don't make a distinction between "the spiritual and the secular". We believe that all of life is the spiritual just expressed in different ways so we are just one big eclectic family. So we have a group that gathers on a Wednesday night for "feast", called this because we do communion every week. It is our form of Church. It is a time set aside to look at spiritual things as they relate to God as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. Many who gather come from non-church backgrounds so our discussions are deep and wide, our focus is around Jesus and all are welcome to interject in a way that is loving and respectful. We accept that we will be different because we are an eclectic community. It is from this community while praying for our city and our young adults that we felt God asking us to add another dimension to CitySoul.

In our city we have a catch 22: you can't get a job if you don't have experience and you can't get experience. This includes all young people whether they grew up here or are recent arrivals. So we have a cafe that runs 7 days a week, it is called the "Experience Cafe" and we have been in operation just over a year. The cafe's goal is to give young people under the age of 30 a place to get work experience so that they can get paid employment. We have 25 volunteers every week. We are one big family supporting people in getting confidence, skills and making friends. We work in partnership with the Red Cross for asylum seekers, The Royal society for the blind, the local Tafe, senior colleges in the area for students studying hospitality and a group that supports immigrants when they arrive. We also have those travelling through who come into community with us. Every person when they volunteer know that we are a Christian cafe run by the church. It is always stated at the first interview that in this place people do talk about God but you don't have to join the conversations or believe. We just want to be upfront so you never feel uncomfortable. We do ask that you are respectful of others and know that who you are and what you believe will be respected here. So far no one has said no to volunteering at the cafe. Why? Because the moment they walk through the door, we love them, respect them and are up front about our faith with them and we encourage them to be upfront with us about what they believe or how they feel about God knowing that even though we may be different they are loved and respected.

We also have community groups who use our space but always in partnership with us - never just as renters. We want them to know that we are there for them and we have an expectation that they will be there for us, it is always mutual.

We hold band nights to offer young musicians an opportunity to perform and we have art pieces done by local young people on the wall. Both things add to our eclecticism and we love it!

Oh did I mention that we rent an old house that was converted into a serviceman's club and is now a place we call home. We are situated at the quite end of a fashionable area just before you hit the parklands and the city central.

When doing anything in ministry we want to be able to measure what we do. For the church the first two are finances and numbers attending worship. These are the only things or the most important. It is important to have measurable outcomes.

For us we measure:

How many faith conversations do we have? These conversations are not about us preaching but usually about us listening but it is where God is engaged in the normality of life.

I would like to tell you a story of a young man who had previously said he didn't really have a faith. I walked in late one day to be confronted by: "Where have you been? The coffee machine has broken down." I asked what measures had been taken to fix it and he said he had called the technician but then it broke down again! Again I asked what he had done to get it working, as I could hear it in the back ground. He replied "I said to Michael this is a church and they usually pray about things like this, so I prayed and it worked!" It was a great moment for me, inside I was rejoicing but I just said "Well that is just how we roll around here." This young man now comes to our Feast gathering.

The goal of what we do is not to grow Feast on a Wednesday night but if we are to eradicate spiritual loneliness then we must provide a place for people to explore God and faith. So a

measure is: are people connecting from the Cafe into Feast? We have had 5 of our volunteers come to our Wednesday night gatherings and they are a wonderful blessing.

We ask ourselves if we closed down tomorrow would the community miss us? We see this one being answered by the statistics that come through the Cafe. Last year we had 70 young people volunteer, 45 of them now have paid employment, 10 have gone back to study, others have gone home to their countries but still communicate with us on Facebook and some are still with us. At this time we have no knowledge of anyone just being back in no man's land. When someone gets a job we rejoice.

The venue costs us dearly so we have to make money. We have no funding of any kind so we do have a financial measure. Each month we pay the rent, outgoings and running costs. No one is paid, not even me. But what we have is growing in financial sustainability and so we believe by next year we will be able to pay some salaries but we aren't planning to have anyone full time.

Numbers are always tricky. I always struggle to answer people when they ask me how many people belong to your church. Do they mean the 20 that gather on a Wednesday night (if everyone rocks up!)? Do they mean the 25 who serve in the cafe each week? Or do they mean people who would put their hand up and say, this is my community, this is where I am loved and this is where I give of my time? Then we would have about 75 people. 80% would not call themselves Christians and each of them I am proud to say belongs to us. Our line for being in or out is defined by those who say they belong - not the organisation saying who is in and who is out.

If you volunteer, attend, help in a support role or are in anyway connected to what we do you are in! We will love you, respect you, support you through thick and thin but I think the real key is that we expect that in return. It is never us just giving out but always a mutual giving and receiving. And it works I can honestly say I have never been so cared for as I am here!

(Note: Ruthmary Bond is paid part time to be the Fresh Expressions and Evangelism officer for the SA Synod. In this role she fosters and encourages fresh expressions of ministry across SA. She puts into practice fresh expressions and evangelism by being the unpaid Minister of the Word at CitySoul using her entrepreneurial and hospitality skills.)

Turning the Church Around – Multifaceted Ministry

Gordon Ramsay

Minister of the Word, Kippax Uniting Church, Canberra

It feels like it requires a rather presumptuous person to write an article on 'turning the church around'. It feels as if it goes close to requiring hubris to do it by talking about some of the things that are going on in the congregation I am part of. But that is the task set before me and so here it goes.

"Turning the church around" draws well on the biblical imagery of repentance - best understood not so much as confessing or apologizing, but of changing a direction. It's not primarily an image that suggests personal success but rather a realization that the path that is being followed is not the path that speaks best of the movement of God. So I hope that I

am never found to be talking about ‘turning the church around’ with the explicit or even implicit meaning that it will stop declining church membership numbers, or help us reach a more ‘financially sustainable’ future. I fear that if we turn the church so that we can make that happen then we have turned the church the wrong way.

My home congregation is Kippax, in West Belconnen in the ACT. It sits out on the edge of the ACT – in fact the housing development for another 22,000 people that is planned to start next year will spread across the outlying green fields estates and over the border into NSW. West Belconnen is a community that has had historical difficulties with poverty, disadvantage and community exclusion. It is also a community with great strengths and which is making substantial changes as people across the community work together so that everyone has the opportunity to live a decent life.

Kippax Uniting is both a congregation and a UnitingCare community service body. It’s not a congregation that has partnered with a community services body; it is one and the same thing. It’s like the proverbial elephant: what you see and how you describe it depends on where you stand and where you look.

What we *do* is that we hopefully reflect who we *are*. We think of ourselves as a community of communities rather than as a congregation or agency. We try to be grounded and consistent. We have a single vision, or sense of calling – *we are called to create a loving nurturing community* – though what that will look like must depend on the immediate context.

At Kippax we have tried to put into expression our corporate theology. It isn’t necessarily the theology of the majority of people (or even any individual person here), but the Church Council has discerned, and recently re-affirmed that the answer to three questions helps to ground who we are as part of the movement of God.

- What is our primary corporate understanding of God? – *Trinitarian: God expressed in community*
- What is our primary corporate understanding of humanity? – *Communal: People in relationship with others*
- What is our primary corporate understanding of the way that God interacts with humanity? – *Incarnational: God coming alongside in relationships of inclusion, welcome, trust and respect.*

We know that this isn’t the only theology around, or the only good theology around (at least we hope it is good), or the only theology that is consistent with the Basis of Union (again, we hope and believe it is!). We also know that our answers to these three questions aren’t necessarily *better* answers than others. But it is *our* answer. It is *our* theological flavour. It is *our* identity. And when you mix those answers with the context of West Belconnen in the ACT, you get Kippax.

The one last piece of important background in terms of whatever it means for Kippax to be part of ‘turning the church around’ comes from two decisions made by the Church Council years and years ago. I like to remind Church Councils and leaders from time to time that it really *does* matter the sorts of principle decisions that you make. Maybe part of turning

the church around is to ensure that the councils are released to be able to concentrate on discerning God's voice and God's direction and not get caught in the minutiae that too often take over.

So, what were those two decisions?

Firstly, as we were aware that people were linking and relating with us in all sorts of ways, the Church Council affirmed that *all people are equally important, no matter how they linked with Kippax, and so we would seek to provide the same quality of care for all*. It means that we don't place higher (or lower) importance on people who come to gathered worship on Sunday mornings, or people who have been connected for a long time, or who give more money, or time, or prayers to the work of the organisation. *All people are important*.

And the second principle is like it: *all aspects of life are equally important – physical, emotional, social, mental, spiritual*. If we are going to be a caring community, we will be caring in all of these areas.

Both of those statements have wads of biblical and theological foundation for them. And what's more they make good common sense. And they have plenty of implications.

For some time – about 25 years - Kippax has been a place for playgroups. And about 15 or so years ago the playgroups became our first real deliberate expansion into working with the community around us. With a small seeding grant for a part-time coordinator we moved from 3 playgroups a week to 12. Two members of the congregation worked voluntarily with each playgroup – or as at least as many playgroups as we had volunteers for. One person would pray for the families in their playgroup (we gave families the option to ask that they not be included in the prayers, but to my knowledge no family has ever done that). The other person would come along to the group as a helper – someone to be there as a friend to the parent, a wise voice when it came to matters of parenting issues and an extra hand when it came to being with the children.

Each person is as important as anyone else. Each aspect of life is equally important. And we had people in the playgroups to develop relationships and to offer and provide care. In our context that led to the discovery that a lot of the families were struggling. Many were struggling financially. Many were finding things difficult with parenting. Many were struggling with things like children's sleeping patterns or how to help provide good nutrition. Scratching a little further below the surface and we were finding that many were struggling with housing costs, heating costs or being able to get around Canberra – a city definitely built for cars.

We started arranging for parenting support times, and then, through congregational generosity and some external funding, we provided some food assistance. And it was out of that response that a couple of years later we were approached by the ACT Government about taking on one of the major contracts for providing Emergency Relief. These days we support about 4500 people per year through Emergency Relief.

Other services that have grown alongside this, and the playgroups, include a range of parenting and child support services. These community services along with our times of gathered worship, our small group discussions, our advocacy for justice, our pastoral care and things like our work with a major housing development about how to create community, are all equally important. We have a staffing team of 24 and a volunteer (or discipleship) team of over 100. They are all part of who we are. They are all part of the way that we express being 'church'.

In our setting we have learnt the importance of holding worship, witness, formation and service together. We have learnt the importance of not being too precious about membership or numbers, and certainly don't measure the size or success of a congregation by Sunday worship attendance. We have learnt the importance of having a sense of where we are going – or at least who we are called to be – and constantly trying to stay true to that call. We have learnt the difficulty and complexity that comes with moving outside a more 'traditional' expression of congregational life, and we have learnt the joy that this difficulty and complexity carries with it.

None of this makes Kippax *the* model for the future of the church. Nor does it make it a place that shows how to 'turn the church around'. There are many wonderful expressions of the church these days, both within and beyond the Uniting Church. There are probably things that others can learn from our story as there are definitely many things that we can learn from others. But if we are going to turn anywhere, I hope that we are constantly turning towards a way of being the body of Christ that looks like the way of Jesus of Nazareth.

Turning The Church Around- Attending to the Spirit

Nerida and Malcolm Drake

Ministers of the Word involved in fostering Spiritual Disciplines

"We are definitely in a transitional period of society. When the formal traditions of Christianity, Judaism and Islam understand that the hunger is for spiritual experience of God, and not simply talk about God, they may find young people are getting attracted to the traditions." (David Tacey quoted in Sydney Morning Herald article, "The Search for Meaning.")

Not only the society is in a transitional period, but the church also seems to be living through a transitional time, the time in between times, a time when institutional Christianity is dying and something new is being born. We are not quite sure what this new "church" will be like, if indeed it will be a church at all...

As leaders in the church, these are times when we are called upon to be nursemaids to the past model of church and midwives to the new, yet-to-be, future, waiting on the Spirit of God to make clear where we are heading. It is an uncomfortable transition, when people look to their church leaders for reassurance in the face of massive societal and institutional change.

NSW Moderator Rev. Dr Brian Brown wrote in the May edition of "Insights", "I am convinced that leadership is the number one issue for the Uniting Church as it seeks to meet the challenges of the new era."

So, the future, or turning the church around has something to do with spiritual experiences of God, and leadership. Leaders, we expect, have some knowledge of spiritual experience. People are our most valuable resource in the church. Most of us look to leaders who have some experience in the spiritual life so that she or he can lead others in their faith journey- their evolving, developing and deepening relationship with Jesus Christ.

A way forward

1. Renewed vision of Eldership

Every Church and Christian organisation has to have a spiritual heart. In UCA this is to be held by the minister and the Elders. We seem to have some confusion about the role of Elder. Their primary task is to hold the spiritual heart of the congregation(s). This can be called 'tending the Holy', attending to where the Spirit is moving. In agencies this can be called 'Spiritual Accompaniment' where someone is responsible for noticing the action of God in the organisation.

The UCA has tried to streamline the management of congregations by mandating that 50% of Church councillors be Elders. Some congregations do not have Elders and those that do easily assign them to Pastoral care. In the Church Council (CC) meeting, 'Tending the Spiritual Heart' of the congregation tends to be the last item on the agenda, overwhelmed by important business decisions.

There needs to be an identified group of people whose task is to take the spiritual temperature of the congregation and alongside the minister provide opportunities for the spiritual life of the congregation and individuals in it to grow in their faith. The meeting of this group whether Elders or not should focus on spiritual growth. This group isn't a decision making body which has power to make things happen. There is no business as such except encouragement to grow in the noticing of God's action in the individuals and the congregation. Those on CC bring a honed spiritual perspective to the discussion and decisions made at CC meetings.

Naturally not everyone is called to be a spiritual leader. Those that are need to be on a spiritual journey themselves. They must have a deep desire for connection with the Divine through Jesus Christ. This desire is the dynamo of the Church as it is the spiritual life. This desire or longing transcends our rational mind calling people to develop their heart knowledge. This isn't contrary to good sound sensible advice but takes decision making into a deeper realm, developing a Jesus/God consciousness.

The longest journey a person can take is from the head to the heart.

Developing a God consciousness requires desire, intention and attention. Ultimately it is a gift of God given by Grace.

Those that hold the heart of a congregation have to be seekers. There are many ways to grow in faith. Here are a few you may like to consider.....

CENTRING PRAYER is a simple form of silent prayer where one chooses a "sacred word" and begins a time of quiet with that word in mind. Whenever thoughts or

distractions come, one returns to the sacred word. It differs from Christian meditation in that the sacred word is not repeated over and over like a mantra- but is gently introduced when a thought comes, as inevitably it will. (see the writings of Fr Thomas Keating)

LECTIO DIVINA OR SACRED READING. Most of our Bible reading results in a sermon or Bible study. Lectio is a process of contemplating or “chewing over “ the Word and letting it speak to us.

SIMPLICITY Simplifying our life by lessening our obligations and material possessions can be a detaching process, that allows us to be more open to the Spirit in our everyday life. De-cluttering is a purposeful letting go of things so that we can be more open to treasuring the Sacred.

JUSTICE One simple action taken on behalf of one other person in need may transform that person's life and our own.

FASTING Usually associated with the Lenten period, but was recently encouraged as part of our week of prayer for Reconciliation. Fasting doesn't have to revolve around food, we may fast from sarcasm or negative self -talk. There are lots of possibilities here.

JOURNALLING Writing a journal has been a life-saver for many people. We can use drawing or creative writing as we pray our day or our challenging situations.

EXAMEN PRAYER A prayer to end the day, where we let go of concerns and joys of the day, by remembering what drew us closer to God in our day, and what drew us away from God, and by giving thanks for all that happened during the day.

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION Finding someone to share deeply about our relationship with God, and ourselves in a conversational setting. Being listened to is a wonderful gift, especially for leaders who work closely with other people.

RETREATS. These provide an opportunity to focus on our relationship with God and with ourselves, in a relaxed setting with provision for quiet and relaxation.

This is not an exhaustive list.

No doubt, some readers are already having doubts about doing any of these, as they don't have time, or it doesn't suit their personality, or they just don't think it's necessary. The writers of this article are very committed to these practices and find them transformative. We want to encourage you to undertake at least one of these practices as a result of reading this article. Such practices will help you to discern where the Spirit of God is leading you.

2. Encouragement and Support for Leaders

The Benedictine nun, Joan Chittister writes in her little book “The Sacred In-Between”, “After Vatican II- when we began to encourage sisters to do the ministries to which they were most called, both by the needs around them and by the natural

talents within them- the community itself became more a centre of spiritual dynamism that stretched far beyond itself than simply a parochial labour force, however good the work.”

Many of our leaders don't have a chance to follow their passion to which they feel called in ministry. The Spirit cannot move very well when there is a mismatch. When the congregation is working well there is a spiritual energy which drives the ministry along.

Recently we were at a local congregation CC meeting consulting with them about how to move forward in their ministry. At the end of the night it was suggested that they needed support and encouragement. In Business today many people use Coaching as a means of getting better at their job. Coaching is a means of support as well as mentoring and professional supervision for paid workers. These ways of encouragement need to be embraced more fully to help us move forward.

God is always asking us for attention. As we become more aware of noticing God's action in the world through our daily experiences then God will become more present to us and to the Church.

So this uncertain and uncomfortable transitional time can become a releasing and liberating time, when we are able to experience the presence of God and discern the calling of God into relationship with Godself, with community and with ourselves.

Turn the Ship or Stay the Course?

Martin Levine

Principal of Alan Walker College of Evangelism

I took up the position of Principal of the Alan Walker College of Evangelism five years ago. The situation of the College was tricky and I have spent those five years with my head down. Two years ago we changed the way the College functions and this allowed me to put my head up and get a sense of the Church both here in Australia and in the Pacific. Three months ago I was received as a minister of the Uniting Church. This was a special service for me as I have been working in the UCA for the past ten years. Another milestone that is coming up next year is thirty years since I began at theological college. It is with some sadness then that we are still talking about “Turning the Church Around”. It seems that this idea has been around for my whole ministry.

At my ordination, my mentor Rev Rod Botsis said that I was joining a profession that mothers no longer encouraged their children to join. He said that the security of tenure that once was the reality for ministers was no longer going to be the reality for many church ministers. He seems to have been able to read the signs pretty well even 24 years ago.

As I look at my role in the College and my role as a UCA minister I would humbly want to offer three areas that I would think we need to at least debate and interact with if we are going to deal with the current crisis in the Church with regard to declining membership and financial insecurity.

Clarifying the Terms

I think there is significant confusion with the terms ministry, mission, discipleship and evangelism. When I told some of my friends that I was becoming the Principal of an Evangelism College the first thing they said was that evangelism was finished. It is no longer vogue in the multifaith, multicultural society to talk about evangelism, especially if we define it in terms of conversion. It has become much more acceptable to talk about mission. We are to go out into the world and be the blessing to it that Jesus had been to his society. There is nothing wrong with this but it still skirts the issue of how we are to present the Gospel. I think that Jesus did tell us to feed the hungry and clothe the naked but the implication is that we will do these not as good deeds of blessing but as part of the process of bringing these people into community both with us and with God. If there is no sharing of the person of Jesus with those we are helping then is it not too easy for our good deeds to just be dealing with our guilt and not really seeking to build up real relationship?

We also need to rethink the way in which mission and evangelism connect with ministry. It is no use seeking to bring people into the church when the church they find is inhospitable and unfriendly. We have had many a seminar on making the church a safe place but what about a friendly and welcoming place where strangers are connected with and drawn into fellowship? In all this we can seek to bring discipleship into the forefront of what we are trying to do in the church. This is evident in the lack of biblical debate let alone knowledge in the church. We are often left with the quick fix solution of learning the Old Testament in a weekend and thinking that this will make any difference in the way it is read and taught.

Stop Trying to be Relevant

I am somewhat frustrated when I hear people say that the reason why our churches are empty is because we are not relevant. I am unsure whether this is the case. When you talk to people on the street we find that they hardly even think about us rather than having made any kind of decision that we are not relevant. It would seem that we in the church are so unhappy with it that maybe we are projecting our unhappiness onto those who do not come. If we look at the growing churches in Sydney, and yes there are many, the one overriding emotion that accompanies them is joy and pride. If we are not proud of our church and what it stands for and if we do not find a place of joy and celebration there then why would we bring anyone to it? The church growth theorists all tell us that churches grow by invitation. Maybe that's the reason why many of our churches don't grow because our people do not feel that they want to invite anyone into it.

All this talk about relevance, money and decline fills us with insecurity and fear. Where there is fear, love and joy are squeezed out. This creates a self-fulfilling reality where we become that which we fear and the decline becomes the reality. We will never be able to compete with the world, and we shouldn't try. When we do try we often try so hard that our message gets lost. The early church lived their Christianity not in a desire to emulate the world they lived in. It was the fact that they were counter-cultural that made them so appealing. Our message is the timeless Good News that God wants to be in relationship with us. This message is still as relevant as it ever was. To say that our services of worship are irrelevant is to say that the work of the Spirit on a people gathered together to worship the

God who has come near to us in the person of his Son is not relevant. If we think that, then maybe we have to examine again what that Good News actually means to us.

Training for Vocation

As we find more and more congregations unable to afford full-time ministry agents we increasingly are asking more from our lay leaders. They have to lead the councils, services and even think strategically about the future of the church in their area. The problem is that we began as a church where much of this was done by ministry agents and the lay leadership often functioned as a consulting board for their ideas. Now, even though they are given the responsibility, they are often not given the training they need to do the job. Without training many of these leadership positions can become so onerous that they do not bring any joy to the person and this is evidenced in the quality and often conflict that arises.

In ministry, too, there has always been an emphasis on a solid theological training in which our candidates emerge from college with a good theological skill set. However, this is not the only toolbox they need. Those who have been in the secular world for some time may have developed other skills, but the particular skills necessary for our peculiar environment can only be learnt at the shoulder of a wise and learned mentor. There is no doubt that the best training for vocation comes from an environment where we are able to observe and interact with a mentor and learn from their experience.

Seeking Excellence

Every time there is a crisis we seek to blame the structures of the Church. Some might say that the system is too unwieldy; we need bishops to be able to make the decisions. Others will say we need fewer people in the head office. Will a change in structure really turn the ship around? I have visited many churches in my ministry life and too often what I find is a lack of hospitality and welcome. Often, what is presented from the pulpit or lectern has been hastily put together and lacks the joy and celebration that the Good News should be. Can we truly blame the structure or even the order of the service if we have imbued it with our life and preparation?

Paul tells us in Philippians that we need to think on that which is excellent and I think that that might be a lesson for all of us. Are we thinking of that which is excellent and praiseworthy when it comes to the things that we do in the church? If we are to do this then we as clergy and laity need to dedicate ourselves to ongoing learning and training. We need to seek out the new ideas and revitalise the old ones.

I don't think the church needs to be turned around. I think we need to turn around our thinking about the church and the message we are offering to the community. What makes us different is not the multimedia extravaganza of our morning worship, or the worldly entertainment value of our children's program. What makes us different is that the church seeks to bring people into the presence of God and help people to know the Good News we have been tasked to share. When we do this in a way that connects and enlightens, and in an attitude of excellence,

I think we will see the increase that we long for and the community involvement that we crave.

CHANGING THE CHURCH, CHANGING OURSELVES

Chris Lockley

Mission Resource Officer, Parramatta-Nepean Presbytery

The church is always in transition, whether it be intentional, strategic change or the natural ebb and flow of family, community and congregational life. Life is simply not static. Social commentators have observed that even change has changed, in that the pace of change has increased over the past few generations. Whether we are acting as change agents, or responding to forces of change beyond our control, we always bring ourself as a person to this engagement. And we are always affected by it. Change brings a cost to us personally, and requires personal investment if it is to be meaningful. We are not just in the business of bringing change to the church. We change in the process. Reflective leadership is conscious of this personal component, and will take it into account.

In his book *Heart, Mind and Strength*, Jeffrey Jones writes about the 'who and what of leadership'. Jeff recognises that there is always a personal component to leadership alongside the task of 'what' needs to be done. He writes that leadership is *never* about us, but it is also *always* about us.

Change leadership is not just about what we *do* in the change process, such as designing and implementing strategies, developing congregational ownership of change and empowering new leaders. It is also about who we *are*. We can never separate ourselves, our hopes and dreams, fears and anxieties from the change process. We bring previous experiences of effective change as well as past frustrations and what we may think of as failures. We bring our personal vision of what we understand to be the mission of God and our place in it. We bring our theological perspective which shapes our understanding of the church. We also bring subconscious motivations and needs, some of which may have nothing to do with the well-being of the church, but have everything to do with our own sense of self. We are not objective, dispassionate participants. Part of our practice as reflective practitioners is therefore to examine our motivations, to consider which are helpful for the change process and which may in fact be about fulfilling our personal needs rather than the larger agenda of God's mission. It is easy to recognise such personal motivations in those who may be resistant to the change we are working for. If we are to maintain integrity in the process, it's important we ask the same questions of ourselves.

I have found the insights of Roy Oswald helpful in this. In *Managing polarities in the church* he describes a number of conflicts in churches that are caused by treating opposing viewpoints as problems to be solved rather than interdependent polarities which work together to build a healthy church. Eight apparently opposing polarities are identified, among them tradition and innovation. The theory of organisational polarities is that each of the apparently opposing factors has an upside which leads us toward our higher purpose as a congregation, but also a downside which moves us toward our deep fears. This downside occurs when we emphasise one polarity, e.g. tradition, to the detriment of the other, innovation and change. The only way to move a congregation away from the downside of (in this case, tradition) is to take action that will move it towards the upside of innovation. However the same can happen if we put too much emphasis on change and neglect

tradition. There is a downside to an overemphasis on change which can only be corrected by taking action that will build the positive aspects of tradition.

In consulting with congregations I have used a group activity recommended by Oswald. I break the congregation into four groups. In their group they identify either the upside or downside of tradition or the upside or downside of innovation. Each group then moves to each of the other tables in turn. Regardless of how each participant feels personally about tradition and innovation, they have the chance to contribute to identifying all the possibilities, including the position they would not normally support. As well as doing this exercise in regard to tradition and innovation in general, it can be applied to a specific proposal for change, by identifying what the change might be, and what not changing might represent.

It is important that we as change leaders also undertake this process, either by ourselves, with any group managing the change, or with the congregation. By participating in such a process we put ourselves in the position of not only examining our personal preferences but also forcing us to see beyond them. We bring our inner motives into the open, along with those of the congregation.

There is another sense in which change in the church is about us. If we are genuinely participating in the life of a congregation, the change we seek to lead it through will also change us. We cannot remain the same. It may be that the process will teach us things about ourselves of which we were previously unaware. Our relationship with the congregation may change in the process of implementing innovation. If the change process has involved confrontations or hard decisions that have been unpopular, even with a minority of the congregation, our relationship with that congregation may change considerably. Successful change could possibly result in our no longer being able to pastor that congregation. We may also end up carrying wounds that shape our future ministry and willingness to lead future change. Again, the reflective leader will pay attention to these possibilities. They are a part of counting the cost before setting out on a project.

It is for this reason that Intentional Interim Ministry is always seen as a limited activity, rather than part of a long term pastorate - and a good context for congregational change. The I.I.M., being a relatively short term process of 12-18 months, can confront serious issues in the life of a congregation, including the 'family secrets' which are never spoken out loud. The I.I.M. then leaves, making room for a new, long term pastor who is free of carrying the burden of being the change agent.

At the time of writing the Uniting Church in N.S.W. faces substantial proposals for change that could impact a broad range of the church's life throughout the Synod. The proposals grow out of a financial crisis which is presenting the church with issues and decisions it might otherwise have avoided. Some of these have been difficult issues we have previously set aside rather than face, among them the shape of Presbyteries and theological education, the impact of declining church membership, future strategies for growth, the missional use of property and budgetary policy. There is much on the table. Jobs are on the line along with theology, how we see ourselves as a church and what we consider our important, core identity.

As we consider these issues, it could be very easy for personal issues to cloud our judgement. I definitely include myself in that statement! Many of us who participate in the decision making will have vested interests to one degree or another. That is not to say we shouldn't be participating, that we aren't competent to do so or that our personal investment

in the outcomes will prevent us from making wise and faithful decisions for the sake of Christ's mission. But we do need to reflect on the degree to which we will be affected by the change, and how we weigh that personal impact against the well-being of the church and its mission. How will we intend to discern the leading of God, especially if that direction may be at personal cost to ourselves? Ancient words remind us that 'the unexamined life is not worth living'. Unexamined motivations can be counterproductive and even harmful.

Over the years I have found a simple, helpful tool for discernment and personal reflection in the Examen of Conscience from the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. There have been a variety of adaptations of this exercise, and what I recommend is not necessarily pure Ignatian spiritual practise. The Spiritual Director who taught me this reflective practice suggested there was value in undertaking it twice a day: around midday, to reflect on the events of one's morning, and in the evening, to reflect on the rest of the day's events. Developing a regular, personal rhythm for the Examen prepares us for those times when we need to use it in specific situations. The basic Examen questions we reflect on are: what has moved me closer to God (classically, these are referred to as the 'consolations') and what has moved me away from God (the 'desolations')? Another way to consider this might be to ask the questions: what has God been moving me towards; and what has God been moving me away from?

If we apply this reflective process to change leadership - or participation in decision making regarding major change - we might ask ourselves questions such as: what in this change, or proposal for change, is leading me, or us as a congregation (or Synod!) closer to God and God's purposes; and what is leading us away from God's purpose? An alternate approach - which considers our personal motivations more closely - might be: what within me is moving me closer to God's purpose for the church in this change or proposal; and what within me is moving me away from God's purpose?

To take Jeffrey Jones' observation once more: (change) leadership is *never* about us, but it is also *always* about us. We bring our personal issues, both the ones of which we are conscious, and those of which we are unaware, to our leadership. We are not untouched by the change process. We ourselves will be changed to some degree, for better or perhaps in ways we would not choose. If we are reflective ministry practitioners we will acknowledge this, and perhaps free ourselves to more honestly discern God's vision for our congregation and church.

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