

## **Mission Advisor Report to the 2012 Synod Annual General Meeting.**

As indicated in my report last year I had been invited to British Columbia by the Presbytery of Kamloops. That visit took place last May. The trip was very successful and although the Canadians thought that the Kiwis were a blessing to them, the Canadians were certainly a blessing to the Kiwis as they welcomed us warmly into their midst. They are a wonderfully hospitable and friendly people. Beverley and I were hosted by the Church and we were accompanied by Christine and Ross Hansen of Cromwell.

I spoke in a number of places during the tour which ended in Grande Prairie, Alberta for the 'Eldership Unleashed' Conference. About 80 people attended mainly from the Canadian Presbyterian Church but also Lutherans, Christian Reformed and United Churches. It was a very moving experience to see the way the Holy Spirit moved among these people and the change that was taking place in their lives as a consequence. Christine also had a part to play leading a workshop on spiritual gifts.

Following the conference I was asked to write one of the cover stories for the Canadian Presbyterian Church's national paper 'Presbyterian Record' in January. That edition was devoted to the Conference. I was particularly touched by the other cover stories of people's response to the conference. God has indeed been gracious to us.

Thanks to the Synod for letting me go and share with the Canadians. It was a most enriching time and I certainly learnt a lot as a result. I have written a report of the tour as well as copies of the Record cover stories along with DVD's of the conference sessions and Christine's workshop. Any of these are available on request.

One of the things I spoke and wrote about in Canada was the need for us to come to grips with our understanding of the priesthood of all believers. This is something we pay lip service to but which, as an institution, largely deny by our practice. In doing this we effectively say that most of our people have no real role to play in ministry within the church. However our General Assembly in 2002 said that the core of ministry in the PCANZ is the whole people of God and the prime function of our well trained professionals is to equip, resource and train the whole people of God in their ministry. Most of our people still think that ministry is the preserve of the professional alone. We have to continue to work on this.

As I meet with congregations it is apparent that we are addicted to 'church'. An addiction is an habitual thing with such a hold on us that even though we may want to break with it, we find that near impossible to achieve because of the feelings of insecurity engendered. In so many cases we simply cannot conceive that church could be any other way than the way we know it and what's more, we don't really want to change the way we are. An addict cannot be helped until they realise they need help. Many of us are still in denial.

I once asked a young man the question 'Am I in love with Jesus, or the idea of Jesus? Am I in relationship with Jesus or the idea of that relationship?' That question has come back to me and I find myself asking it often. I also think that, as a church, the question really goes back a step from there. 'Am I in love with the 'church' or the idea of church?' The church is not the point – Jesus is. Jesus must be central in our lives. The growth of the church is not the purpose – the worship of God along with the resulting proclamation and demonstration of the Kingdom is the purpose. The church does not exist for itself. It's growth and life is the outcome of God's mission not the purpose of the mission.

I meet many wonderful people who are tired and weary and my heart goes out to them. Is this tiredness and weariness because we are not working where the Lord would have us? Are we trying to move forward in our own strength, to do our own thing? Is the Lord Jesus the centre and focus of what we do or is it the church? I would like to explore this with congregations and leaders. I don't think closing congregations is a good thing but if we are addicted to 'church' then the last thing we want to do is have that addiction broken, so in the end it kills us.

Jesus said, 'I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives. Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for eternity. (*John 12:24-25*).

The secret to new life is the death of the old. My hope is that we can let go, trusting God will lead us into that new life.

Many thanks for the privilege of serving among you. Your kindness and hospitality as I travel throughout the Synod is greatly appreciated. I look forward to the continuing journey together.

Bruce Fraser  
12 March 2012.