

## Mission Advisor's Report For 2010 Synod AGM

As always, it remains a joy to serve you throughout the Synod family. Thank you again to those who have extended hospitality to me as I have travelled the area. Thank you also for the invitations to walk some of the way along side you, learning from your experience as we share together. Thank you also for the encouragement you have given me in this past year.

I have both enjoyed and been concerned in training sessions with elders. I have enjoyed watching both teaching and overseeing elders coming to a greater understanding of their calling but concerned at the number of times I hear, 'I wish I had known this before I became an elder.' In 2002 the General Assembly affirmed the centrality of eldership and called on Presbytery's to train elders. I am pleased to be part of that training but concerned at the huge misunderstanding and ignorance of eldership and it's place in Presbyterianism. One session pointed out to me that they did not know that they could make decisions – they thought they were there to do what the minister said. One of the things that marks us as Presbyterian is the way our structures are set up so that collectively we seek the mind of God, collectively we discern His way ahead. The spiritual leadership of a congregation is the responsibility of the elders, not the teaching elder alone. The teaching elder is one elder among others each with their separate function within the body of Christ for the building up of the saints to works of service and growing maturity in the faith. Many of our elders are unaware of that – I suspect from what I hear and observe many of our congregations are also unaware.

Elders are but part of the body of Christ. We need to discover what it means to be the body of Christ in the context where God has placed us. If all believers are priests before God what does that mean, what might that look like? I suspect somewhat different from what we experience in our church. What would ministry look like in the light of careful study of New Testament teaching and practice, devoid of the overlay of convention and tradition? I suspect somewhat different from what we see in our church. The Mission Appraisal process I use with parishes, asks some of these questions and explores the implications. I am encouraged by those who have found it helpful and challenging. I am constantly surprised how God is able to use this to achieve things amongst His people that I would not have thought about.

This past year Synod sponsored a conference for Rural Parishes where the key speaker was David Webber from the Presbyterian Church of the Cariboo, Canada, who I had visited in 2005. David also spoke at various gatherings around the Synod, and indeed other parts of New Zealand, before the conference. I know from the comments that have come back that his visit has had a great impact in many places. His addresses to the Conference (on the web site) were very stimulating and both named some of the frustrations that many rural parishes feel as they seek to be involved in mission in their area, and also offer great hope that there are other ways to be church in a rural setting. Following this a number of rural parishes met together for a day to deepen the network that the conference fostered. I am excited about this.

There are many wonderful stories from within the Synod region of exciting new moves by congregations to engage in mission. Some of them are on the Synod web site under 'News'. I would like to hear of others, with pictures, so they can be added to the growing story. One story on the site has had ramifications in England where a number of parishes were directed to it, to show just what can be done by a parish that would seem, in the eyes of some to have had little future. The web site is at **[www.synod.org.nz](http://www.synod.org.nz)**. If you haven't checked it out yet then do so. There is an increasing collection of news and resources there. I would like to keep adding to them so please let me know.

The web site also provides the opportunity for parishes to develop their own web presence that can be self-managed. There are a variety of options and costs so if you are interested get in touch with me.

I look forward to a further year of service among you. Thank you for the privilege.

Bruce Fraser  
Mission Advisor