

## Synod Mission Advisor Annual Report 2011

As I reflect on this past year I have been heartened by the desire of elders for training. This is a passion of mine as I think that eldership is one of the precious gifts that God has given to us and is firmly based in the Scriptures.

Even more delightful is to see the change that has taken place as elders have come to understand their calling and their function within the church. This is most satisfying.

The past year has again been busy with many visits to parishes, preaching, leading mission appraisals, seminars of various sorts, some small involvement in the new national Parish Development Reviews among some of the things achieved.

The elders' training is expanding and in February this year I was asked to lead a training day for elders in the Gisborne-Hawkes Bay, Manawatu – Wanganui and Wairarapa Presbyteries. This went really well with 80 in attendance and resulted in an invitation to lead the workshop in Wanganui for other western North Island Presbyteries. The northern folk were very appreciative of the Synod's willingness to share its resources this way with the wider church. The local organisers covered all costs and donated the profits and love offering of \$600 to the PCANZ Christchurch earthquake appeal on the Synod's behalf.

In May this year I have been invited by the Presbytery of Kamloops in British Columbia to visit and be the keynote speaker at an interdenominational conference in Alberta entitled 'Eldership Unleashed.' Preceding the conference I will have a two week speaking tour starting in the south of British Columbia working our way through the Cariboo to the north of Alberta for the conference in Grand Prairie. I am both excited and apprehensive at the same time and value the prayers of the Synod family. I go representing the Synod and taking your greetings to the churches I will be visiting.

I have found myself reflecting on the destruction of so many heritage churches in the recent Christchurch earthquake. It seemed to me that this destruction could be seen as a symbol. These heritage buildings, and we have many in the Synod area, were erected by the settlers to proclaim in visual form the faith they had bought with them. They came and, understandably, transported much of what they were familiar with to this land. However this land is not the land that they had come from – it has different characteristics and forces at work so these buildings have been shown to be not suitable for this land. This land lets loose very powerful forces which are the cause of much that we love about the landscape. As one colleague suggested to me recently, perhaps we have to learn to work with this land and not seek to impose upon it.

I wonder if these buildings are a symbol of the church that meets in them. We have imported from another country, another culture, much of our expression of faith. Perhaps that although those expressions have shown some adaptation and have taken on particular characteristics reflective of New Zealand, we have not sought the mind of God for the expression of faith for this land. I think that for many of us this adaptation has been more by kicking and screaming than really asking God what it is He is wanting His church to look like in this place. Perhaps we should more actively work on what the expression of the Gospel should look like in this land. It will have some of the historic character from our heritage but I believe we have far to go yet. In fact we will never finish this journey – in our walk with Jesus we can never say we have arrived as long as we are still in this world.

I also wonder if in seeking to preserve these historic, and in many cases beautiful buildings, we are deep down wanting to remain in some place where we imagine we have been comfortable, or is it some place that was at the time significant in our relationship with God. If those times of significance are in the past then I wonder what that is saying about our ongoing relationship with God at this time. Have we in fact stopped somewhere back where we imagine it was much better? A form of escapism perhaps? In the end we have to ask how much any of our buildings, heritage or otherwise, draw resources and energy from the Gospel call of God's grace and desire for reconciliation. Do our buildings enhance or hamper that call?

God is always the One who calls His people on. The pillar of cloud and fire has risen off the tabernacle and we are being called to continue to move forward. God is with us and wants us to walk with Him on His path, not He with us on the path we may want to walk.

I see many of our congregations stuck in some time warp of a significant past not realising that God has, in fact, moved on and is calling us to come.

May we continue to work together and humbly seek to hear the voice of God through His Word.

I thank Synod for the encouragement you give Beverley and me as I serve among you and I thank you for the amazing support we have received from the Synod family and especially the Executive during my recent time in hospital and my period of recovery. The mission advisor is back open for business!

God bless us all.

Bruce Fraser