

**The Reforming of Our Thinking
Regional Mission Adviser
2006 Annual Report to the Synod of Otago/Southland**

The Adviser's role is to work with parishes as they seek to clarify/discover their mission focus in this time. In reading the reports of my predecessors there is a recurring theme – change in society is normal, change in the church is vital and in most parishes overdue.

As a church we have spent much time and energy looking at programmes, processes and structures in an endeavour to meet the challenges we recognise around us:

- ◆ How do we relate to our communities?
- ◆ How do we present the changeless Gospel of grace in a rapidly changing environment that leaves many bewildered?

It is not primarily the programmes, processes and structures that should be our focus. There is a far more fundamental change that has to take place – that is, in our perception of the church, the world, and our interaction with it. We are so caught up with being 'church - the institution', that we are in need of a complete re-formation in our thinking of who we are and why we are here. This needs to challenge the core of our thinking about being Presbyterian, what we believe and why we believe it. It also calls for a dramatic re-evaluation of what we mean by :

- ◆ ministry,
- ◆ eldership,
- ◆ the priesthood of all believers and the body of Christ.

It means that all who are concerned with the church's life need to be engaged with this rethink. It will involve:

- ◆ clergy rethinking their role/ministry models; and along with
- ◆ elders discovering and taking up their God called work as the collective leadership of the parishes and
- ◆ the faithful people of the church rethinking their expectations of ministry and mission in 21st century New Zealand.

Survey's show that New Zealanders are a very spiritually aware people. The problem is with the perception of the institutional forms of Christianity.

My task is to help parishes start to grapple with these issues and allow the ever calling Spirit of God to lead us into the place He has for us. There will not be 'one plan fits all' any more. Each congregation will be different in it's expression of the faith, and within each congregation there will be different groups of believers who will express and work out their faith differently, all under the Lordship of Christ. Therefore what I am seeking to do is facilitate this change of perception within the communities of faith to which I am invited. There is no preset agenda but a desire to help each group discover their part in the vivid tapestry that is the fellowship of the creative God.

There are four parishes in Southland with whom I have an ongoing relationship and some eight others throughout the Synod with whom I have had an initial contact.

I am aware that I am building on the very able work done by Allan Paulin and John Daniel before me. However, my task is different from theirs in many ways. Theirs were national appointments with national responsibilities, mine is a Synod appointment with responsibilities primarily to parishes. The position, as it has been set up and funded, is the Synod's gift to the parishes. I come at no charge to the host parish. Now that has to be good news!

Bruce Fraser.
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