



September
2011

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Presbyterian
AFFIRM is a
network of
evangelical
Presbyterians
with a passion
for the
transforming
gospel,
biblical faith
and vibrant
churches.

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Editorial

In 2011, the Presbyterian Church in this country is in some respects a safer place for evangelical people than it was ten or twenty years ago. Radical agendas in theology and ethics now have steadily decreasing support. The proposed new doctrinal standard the *Kupu Whakapono* is biblically orthodox, and the last Assembly emphatically voted to retain the historic Westminster Confession. While the denomination remains a mixed scene, theologically, at all levels of the church (including the new Presbyteries) there are many Gospel-minded people fulfilling significant roles – including the Moderator, whose passionate advocacy for evangelism and disciple-making is reminding the church of what it should be about.

However, at grassroots level many Presbyterian churches – including some evangelical and charismatic congregations – are not doing very well. Common problems include

insufficient Gospel clarity and confidence, a lack of biblical teaching and preaching, stuffy church services, lacklustre leadership, controlling personalities, insufficient prayerfulness, an ageing and tired membership, and the widespread failure of the church to propagate and nurture new believers. If churches are to make headway in our societal context of relentless secularism, consumerism, and spiritual confusion, we cannot muddle on like before. We need prayerful, biblically-minded leaders (including elders) with a clear Gospel focus and a heart for people, and congregations who will accept the challenge and the cost of genuine mission.

Presbyterian AFFIRM’s calling is to be a voice for the biblical and spiritual renewal of the denomination we are part of. The most critical part of that is the renewal of the local church in its worship, community life and mission.

Two church renewal ideas...

A West Auckland church finds one of its most effective outreach ministries is free English Conversation Classes, followed by morning tea and an optional Bible Study (for which most people stay). A similar programme runs in the evening. It is not unusual to have people from many different countries and several different religions studying the Bible together, generally with great interest and respect. Some members of the class

also start attending church.

The same church has recommenced this year an effective weekly evening service, called Night Church. It is aimed primarily at young adults and youth, but others also come. The formula is a café preceding, up-beat music, testimonies, inter-active Bible teaching, a variety of speakers and topics, and good suppers. Night Church is reaching new people.

An invitation and request: please send us brief accounts of encouraging renewal and mission strategies from your churches, for subsequent AFFIRM newsletters.



“The Gospel and building missional churches”: one-day Presbyterian AFFIRM Conferences

<i>Whangarei 17 Sept</i>	<i>Auckland 24 Sept</i>	<i>Tauranga 5 Nov</i>
<i>St Andrews Uniting</i>	<i>Greenlane Presbyterian</i>	<i>St Enoch's</i>
9.30am	Registration	
9.45am	Welcome, introduction & worship	
10.00am	“The Gospel today” - Bible Reflection (Ben Dykman/Steve Jourdain)	
10.30am	“1814 – 2014: 200 years of the Gospel in Aotearoa New Zealand” (Stuart Lange)	
11.30am	Break	
11.45am	“What’s happening in NZ Churches” (Murray Robertson)	
12.45pm	LUNCH	
1.30pm	“Reaching unchurched Kiwis with the Gospel” (Murray Robertson)	
2.30pm	Break	
3.00pm	Whangarei & Greenlane: “Church Planting and the New Senior Wave” (Jim Wallace)	
	Tauranga: “Church growth - What really works?” (Paul Williamson)	
4.00pm	Finish	

Cost: \$35 includes a boxed lunch (pay on the day but please register as below)

To register (or if you have questions) contact:

Ben Dykman at Greenlane Presbyterian
09-5201491 or at ben@gpc.org.nz

Speakers:

Murray Robertson: Following a forty year pastorate at Spreydon, Murray was approached to head up the development of a leadership network with a vision “to encourage pastors and other church leaders in the development of effective missional churches through New Zealand”. Although the initiative for this came from the Baptists, the ministry of the network exists to serve churches of different denominations.

Jim Wallace is married to Laurelle and between them they have blended a family of 5 teenagers. Jim has a passion for church renewal and church planting. He recently moved from planting a new church in Bethlehem (Bay of Plenty) to the challenge of helping St Enoch's Presbyterian Church, Tauranga (an aging, declining congregation) reconnect with its community and grow again.

Paul Williamson co-Vicars Holy Trinity Tauranga along with his wife Dale. Paul has been in all sizes of church from rural conglomerates to medium size and 400+ congregations. He believes in a healthy, mission oriented and community connected local church but knows how hard that is to make happen. From the perspective of a large church, Paul will share what he now knows he should have been doing for the last 30 years.

Stuart Lange is a Senior Lecturer at Laidlaw College, where he teaches the history of Christianity. His talk will be based on the address he gave at the opening night of this year's New Zealand Christian Leaders' Congress. He is also the minister of Massey Presbyterian in West Auckland. He and his wife Christine have four sons.

Please note:

We have not forgotten the South Island! It is hoped to run some similar one-day conferences in the South Island in the earlier part of 2012. If you would like to host such a conference in your church please let us know (we have already had one or two offers).

An encouraging example of church renewal: Helensville

Before (2005):

St. Andrew's Presbyterian.
A traditional weekly worship service.
A faithful, declining congregation of about twelve Pakeha members, with an average age of over 65. No children's or youth work. A small, plain heritage church building, built by pioneers a century earlier. Kitchen, toilets and a meeting room in the old manse next door. Off-street parking for four vehicles.

After (2011):

Helensville Community Church.
Meets in much larger and attractive new facilities, after the church sold its heritage site and purchased some commercial premises on the main road into town. Half of the new site was completely re-fitted, to suit an all-age church, and half is providing a rental income. Off-street parking for sixty vehicles. A contemporary weekly worship service. A growing multi-ethnic congregation of about fifty-five people, with an average age under 40. Many are from lower socio-economic families. Over half the attendees have made new or fresh commitments to follow Jesus. A functioning children's work. In addition, up to 30 teenagers attend weekly Youth Church. Over thirty-five mentally and physically disabled people attend a weekly "Wiggles & Giggles" session (with a monthly church service for them being planned).

How did it go from that to this?

Obviously God has ordained it, and has brought about the fresh shoots. Also...

- Elders in 2005 recognised the need to "do something radical" or face closure
- A part-time minister very eager to see the situation improve
- Regular prayer meetings (weekly corporate prayer meetings continue today)
- Deliberate outreach to Pre-School and Primary School children, who in turn now form the core of the current Youth Group
- Introduction of contemporary worship style
- Introduction of weekly Home/Cell Groups
- Outward evangelistic focus
- Lively, life-application biblical preaching
- Continues to be a work in progress

Has it been an easy road? No, it hasn't. There have been many challenges along the way, and some serious challenges remain. But Helensville's story is a good illustration of how God can renew the church, especially where there is a vision born of faith, prayerfulness, and a determination to re-gear and reach the community with the Gospel.

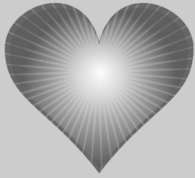
Appreciation

We note with thanks to God the wonderful contribution to global Christianity of the Rev Dr John Stott, who passed away recently. John Stott was an outstanding evangelical leader, profoundly dedicated to the Gospel and to the careful exposition of Scripture. Despite many scholarly opportunities, Stott remained a preacher and pastor. His many books modelled biblical faithfulness, insight, balance and clarity. He was committed to working from within for the renewal of the mainline church.

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GOSPEL



REV DR JOHN R
W STOTT
27 APRIL 1921 -
27 JULY 2011



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Is There A Second Chance After Death?

by Rev Dr Mark Keown

'Universalism' holds that ultimately, everyone will be saved. It has been around from the early days of the church, but was ruled a heresy by 6th century councils. Universalist views, however, have continued to be held by some. 'Absolute universalists' for instance insist that, no matter what, everyone will be saved. 'Hopeful universalists' hope that 'in some way' everyone may ultimately be saved. Barthian universalists see Christ as the elect God-man in whom all humanity is now saved. Roman Catholic universalists (relying on Macc. 12:43-47 in the Apocrypha) have believed people can be released from purgatory through the merits and prayers of Catholics to God, Jesus, Mary and the Saints.

In our age a fresh approach to universalism is taking root, what some are calling 'evangelical universalism', which – rather surprisingly – claims to be still evangelical and orthodox. Where it differs from mainstream evangelicalism is that it sees the opportunity for salvation extending to hell itself through the unlimited grace of God – one can be saved out of hell itself by submitting to him there. This is not so much argued directly from Scripture, but through the trajectories of Scripture which speak of God as a God of unlimited grace, who never gives up seeking to restore relationship, and whose love will ultimately win over all resistance. This notion has caused a storm of controversy among evangelicals in the USA.

In response, just four brief comments...

Firstly, the Scriptures give no hint of a second chance after death. Scripture teaches that 'a person is destined to die once and then face judgment' (Heb 10:25, 27). 'Evangelical universalism' plays around with the meaning of the Greek word for 'eternal' (*aiōnios*), arguing that it does not mean 'forever'. That, however, makes a mockery of

'eternal life' (the gift of eternal God).

Secondly, while there are New Testament texts which speak of a restoration and reconciliation of all things (e.g. Col 1:20), Jesus and the scriptures speak of eternal destruction for those outside God's salvation (e.g. Dan 12:2; Matt 18:8, 25:41-46; 2 Thess 1:6-10; Jude 7; Rev 20:11-15). When a doctrine contradicts the direct teaching of Jesus and the Scriptures, it can hardly be considered evangelical or orthodox.

Thirdly, the idea of a second chance after death violates the logic of the Gospel, evangelism, repentance and faith. The gospel speaks of a free gift of salvation offered to humanity and received by faith. There is no New Testament notion of saving faith beyond death and judgment, when we face God in glory and either receive eternal life or are sentenced to eternal separation, and when we will receive the outcome of our decisions here.

Fourthly, so-called 'evangelical universalism' misunderstands the doctrine of hell. From one perspective (especially from our contemporary worldview in which we feel entitled to think and act however we like), hell may seem harsh and unfair. However, at a deeper level God's punishment witnesses to God's goodness and justice. It speaks of how a just and good God will not let evil carry on for ever, but will one day act decisively to remove it from this his world, graciously releasing his people and creation from suffering, pain and death. Hell is not vindictive, but part of God's 'yes' to what he has promised, and what we long for, a new heaven and earth in which sin has no place. While we may debate the nature of hell (whether it means eternal punishment, eternal separation, or just annihilation), it remains etched into God's big picture of salvation through faith in Christ.

Some candour

It was a bit strange, really. The official PCANZ minister's magazine *Candour* – which is generally very worthwhile – recently included a “Guest Editorial” by Rev Dr Sir Lloyd Geering, someone who made a name for himself over the last forty years not by confessing the Christian faith but by denying its basic tenets, such as the existence of God and the divinity and resurrection of Jesus. In his article, Sir Lloyd attempts to dismiss both the historic Westminster Confession (which was unequivocally retained by the last Assembly) and the new Kupu Whakapono (which the same Assembly enthusiastically endorsed). As a free citizen in a free society, Sir Lloyd is fully at liberty to hold and articulate his

views. But it is hard to fathom why they should be given a pre-eminent space in an official organ of the Presbyterian Church. Someone who could write a book entitled (and advocating) Christianity Without God would not seem to us to be an obvious person to help the Christian church confess its faith in the living God. We remain confident that the next Assembly will warmly adopt the Kupu Whakapono. As it happens, the creeds and confessions of the Christian faith and church will be remembered long after their many detractors are forgotten. As for the “word of the Lord”, we can be sure it “will remain for ever” (1 Peter 1:25).



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(NAPEC)

P O Box 84 133,
Westgate, Waitakere City,
Auckland 0657

Phone: (09) 833 8153

E-mails:
admin@presaffirm.org.nz
napec@presaffirm.org.nz

www.presaffirm.org.nz
(includes NAPEC info)

National Council of AFFIRM-NAPEC: Steve Jourdain
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