



June 2018

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

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

AFFIRM's vision for PCANZ	2
Why do churches decline?	3
What does "evangelical" mean?	4
Jesus' ministry model	4
A disturbing turn for the Anglican Church in New Zealand	5
Crisis in the Uniting Church in Australia	5

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General Assembly 2018

- This will take place in Christchurch, from 7:00 pm on Wednesday 3 October through to about noon on Sunday 7 October.
- Please ensure that your parish offers to Presbytery an elder to go to General Assembly (ministers should also make themselves available).
- Note that Presbyteries have discretion as to whether they send any particular proposal through to Assembly, especially if something very similar has been debated many times in the past.
- Please uphold the Assembly in prayer, that it will be an inspiring and constructive time which honours God and strengthens the church.

Pre-Assembly AFFIRM Conference

**Tuesday 2 October
10:00 am-8:00 pm**

A time when we can gather from all over the country, for a day of fellowship, teaching, inspiration, encouragement, worship, and prayer.

Don't miss it. Please book your travel accordingly.

Venue and registration details available soon.

Presbyterian AFFIRM's vision for the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

A key reason for Presbyterian AFFIRM to exist is that we long for the spiritual and theological renewal of the Presbyterian Church. We have decided it is time again to declare our vision for the church... see the next page ...



VIBRANT
BIBLICAL FAITH
||
HEALTHY,
GROWING,
CHURCHES
||
GROWING
GREAT
LEADERS
||
DYNAMIC
MISSION
MOVEMENT

Presbyterian AFFIRM's vision for the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

Our vision and prayer is that our denomination may become known for...

1. Vibrant biblical faith

- confidence in the Gospel of salvation and new life in Christ
- faithful obedience to the Bible, as the inspired Word of God
- alive with the Holy Spirit
- committed to grace, discipleship, prayer, worship, evangelism and service
- warm fellowship with Christians in other churches

2. Healthy, growing, churches

- strong in faith and discipleship, expressing grace and love
- nourished by Biblical teaching/preaching
- knowing the power of the Holy Spirit
- mobilised for faith-sharing and disciple-making
- engaging youth, families and other cultures
- committed to seeking justice and caring for creation

3. Growing great leaders

- who love God and love people, of Christ-like character, passionate for the Gospel, committed to the Bible, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and able to teach and lead
- who encourage the calling and ministries of all Christ-followers in service and mission
- who encourage the next generation of leaders in vibrant biblical faith and character

Dynamic mission movement

- evangelism – calling people to repentance, faith in Jesus and transformed lives
- new churches reaching new people
- eager to love and serve, promote justice, and care for creation
- regional, national and global vision
- flexible, transparent processes that prioritise and enable mission

Two quotes from Martin Luther

On conscience being subject to the Word of God:

“Unless you prove to me by Scripture and plain reason that I am wrong, I cannot and will not recant. My conscience is captive to the Word of God. To go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand. There is nothing else I can do. God help me. Amen.”

On applying the Word of God to whatever is the most difficult issue of the day:

“If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point that the world and the devil are at the moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages is where the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides is merely flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.”



Why do churches decline?

In recent decades, significant decline has occurred in many New Zealand churches and denominations, and especially in mainline denominations. There are several reasons for that...

The pervasive influence of the wider western culture

Overall, the church in New Zealand is steadily declining, against the backdrop of a western culture which marginalises or denies God, and instead idolises such things as personal choice, experience, image, identity, pleasure, entertainment, sport, celebrity, possessions, and digital connection.

Local church culture

There are any number of reasons why local churches can decline. Reasons may include sleepy services, unfocused preaching, outdated traditions, poor leadership, apathetic congregations, the absence of evangelism, low levels of discipleship, the lack of effective children's and youth work, degeneration into a social club, conflict, lack of energy, stagnation, and discouragement. Such decline can happen to any local church, across the theological spectrum. A minority of New Zealand churches are energetic, contemporary in style, attractive to families and youth, and flourishing. But most are not, and many are struggling.

Like us on facebook!

Have you checked us out on facebook? Look for Presbyterian AFFIRM and like the page. Be in touch with current discussions and the latest news. There are links to encouraging talks, blogs, etc. It's well worth a look.

Fuzzy theology

There is also another factor, which most commonly occurs in mainline Protestant denominations such as ours: the drift into a broad, diffuse sort of liberal/progressive theology which is timid about the Gospel and evangelism, unsure about the truth and authority of Scripture, and doubtful about basic Christian beliefs – such as universal human sinfulness, the divinity of Jesus, his death in our place, his bodily resurrection, his second coming, the need for repentance and faith in Christ, salvation through Christ alone, the new birth, sanctification, judgment, eternal life, and the punishment of those outside of Christ. Because it is often not clear what liberal churches believe, they can fail to inspire, and tend not to attract and disciple people to the same extent as churches with a more confident biblical message.

Unscriptural policies

Liberal/progressive Christianity also prioritises social tolerance over biblical authority, and so often accommodates itself to permissive social ethics. When churches officially allow for lifestyles contrary to the Word of God, decline accelerates. This is demonstrably evident in the major membership decline in the Church of Scotland, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the United Church of Australia.



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What does the term “evangelical” mean?

Understandably, the term “evangelical” puzzles some people. Some wrongly equate the term “evangelical” with “fundamentalist” (which itself has several meanings, most of them negative). Others confuse the word “evangelical” with “evangelistic” (which refers to only one aspect of being “evangelical”). In the United States, the word “evangelical” has been compromised in the last few years by being linked with support for right-wing political movements and recently for President Trump. In the New Zealand context, the term has no political connotation. It is a theological word,

describing some very common Christian beliefs and emphases. The term comes from the New Testament Greek word for “Gospel”/“good news”: εὐαγγέλιον (euangelion). It refers to committed belief in the Gospel, and all that involves (such as faith in Jesus, new birth in Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, discipleship, evangelism, and submission to the Bible as the Word of God). We in AFFIRM are happy to be identified as “evangelical”: as Gospel people, and as Bible people. We are also happy to be called just “Christian”, followers of Christ.

Jesus’ ministry model: Attract, Challenge, and Train

by Peter Cheyne

Most people who know anything about Jesus know that He attracted huge crowds, as He healed the sick, delivered the demon-possessed, raised the dead, and gave fascinating stories and superb teaching. But Jesus also focused considerable time and energy on just twelve men.

Were these two disconnected strategies? What was Jesus trying to achieve with the crowds and what was He trying to achieve with the few? Was there any connection between the two? And what does that teach us about how churches should do ministry?

Through his ministry to crowds, Jesus made connections with a vast number of people and met real needs. It was clearly successful. People flocked to hear Him and to see the miracles. But that was not Jesus’ primary goal; it was only phase one of a three-phase strategy. Periodically, Jesus challenged those crowds. John 6 is the classic example of that (but there are also examples in Luke 9, 14, and 18). In John 6, Jesus makes a clear distinction between the crowds who had come only to see the miracles, and those who believed, who had been given to Him by

His Father. There were evidently very few in the second category because the whole crowd left Jesus. Only the Twelve remained (and Jesus wasn’t sure even they would stay). To individuals, the invitation “follow Me” was a considerable challenge that acted as a filter. Some would, some wouldn’t.

The crowds gave Jesus access to many, many people. But above all Jesus wanted the few who would believe, repent and obey. The crowds were important, because the few were somewhere within them. Phase Two was to filter the crowds with a challenge. The challenge revealed those who were willing to pay the cost of discipleship. Phase three was to train those few. Jesus’ model might help us evaluate our own church’s mission strategy. Attract, Challenge, and Train. Does our strategy include all three phases? And do we implement each in the same way that Jesus did?

For many churches, Christian living centres on attending worship. Our worship services are crowd activities, and we put considerable effort into trying to make them appealing. This model of church is “attractional”. We may gauge



ATTRACT



CHALLENGE



TRAIN

Jesus' ministry model *continued*

our success by the number of people attending. But do we also challenge those people to the point that some walk away, just as they did from Jesus? And do we have a comprehensive training programme for those who respond to the challenge? If not, is it possible that all we have is the crowd which is present for

largely selfish reasons i.e. exactly what Jesus did not want? Similar questions can be asked about our youth programmes and our community ministries. Think about them in terms of Jesus' "A.C.T." strategy: Attract, Challenge, and Train. To explore further, see the longer article on our website: www.presaffirm.org.nz.

A disturbing turn for the Anglican Church in New Zealand

In May, the General Synod of the Anglican Church of New Zealand voted to allow its Bishops to authorise a church service of "blessing" for same-sex couples who are in a civil union or legal marriage. This will also open the door to those so "blessed" being eligible for ordination, where the Bishop supports that. While some liberals felt the decision did not go far enough, and others claimed it was a pastoral compromise, this development is certainly causing great heartache among many Anglicans who believe same-sex relationships cannot be reconciled with the Word of God. They are asking, how can the church bless any behaviour which the Word of God calls sinful? How can the Anglican Church claim its doctrine of marriage remains unchanged if the church will now bless same-sex relationships? How can God bless a denomination which sets itself above Scripture? As a matter of conscience, should they stay or leave? The key underlying issue is the authority and interpretation of scripture. The Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans New Zealand has declared that "the General Synod has acted in a way which leaves behind biblical authority, the apostolic tradition, and the doctrine and practice our church has always held", and notes that "many faithful, Bible-believing Anglicans feel deeply grieved and betrayed by their church". For many evangelical clergy and lay readers, a

crunch point will come when they are required to sign again their submission and assent to the church's constitution and code of canons, which will include this recent change.

The loss from the Anglican denomination of many committed leaders and members could become quite serious. A considerable number of clergy and laity, and several strong parishes, may leave the Anglican Church of New Zealand: some may join other churches and denominations, some may align themselves with the international Global Anglican Future Conference movement, and others may establish new independent churches. Many other evangelical Anglicans may decide to stay within the denomination, at least for now, and in fellowship with other evangelicals through groups like (Anglican) AFFIRM and in new "communities" which General Synod has set up to provide support and a place to stand for those opposed to the new development.

Please pray for our Anglican evangelical brothers and sisters in this agonising time, as they work through their issues of conscience and weigh their various options.

Should some evangelical Anglicans turn up at our Presbyterian churches searching for a possible new spiritual home, be sure to give them a supportive and understanding welcome.

Crisis in the Uniting Church in Australia. Please pray!

The triennial Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia meets from 8 to 14 July in Melbourne. Its Standing Committee is bringing a proposal to change the doctrine and understanding of marriage within the UCA from a man and a woman to any "two people". Our friends in the Assembly of Confessing Congregations (an Australia-wide

movement within the UCA) are deeply concerned about such a radical and divisive departure from marriage as instituted by God, and have called for a "Sacred Season of Prayer and Fasting", in the 40 days leading up to and during the Assembly (5 June – 14 July). We invite our readers to stand with them in prayer.

PLEASE PRAY
FOR OUR
ANGLICAN
EVANGELICAL
BROTHERS AND
SISTERS



**PRESBYTERIAN
AFFIRM**

A network for **Action, Faith, Fellowship, Intercession,
Renewal and Mission** within the Presbyterian Church of
Aotearoa New Zealand
and the
National Association of Presbyterian Evangelical Churches
(NAPEC)

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Millward, Rev Erin Pendreigh, Rev Ian Pittendreigh

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