



Dunedin Methodist Parish

Finding Good in everyone Finding God in everyone

www.dunedinmethodist.org.nz

Presbyters:	Rev. Siosifa Pole	455 2923
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Parish Stewards:	Mrs Hilda Hughson	487 6226
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Parish Office:	Siosifa: parish@dmm.org.nz	466 4600
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Mornington:		

PARISH BULLETIN

7th August 2016

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY 14th August

9.30 am	Mornington	Helen Watson White
9.30 am	Mosgiel	S Pole
11.00 am	Glenaven	Helen Watson White
11.00 am	Wesley	S Pole
1.00 pm	St Kilda	TBA

MOSGIEL LEADERS MEETING - On the 9th of August, 7.30pm in the hall. All members are expected to be there.

SHARPEN YOUR WITS and join the fun for a Workplace Support fundraiser. Proceeds from the quiz night at Nellie's Bar, Mosgiel, to be held on Thursday, August 11 at 7 pm, are going to Workplace Support. It costs \$5 to be part of a team. Workplace Support board members and staff will be there and it would be a great chance to have a catch-up with them and learn more about the work they are doing.

OPEN EDUCATION - On Wednesday, 24 August, at 7.30 at Mornington Methodist Church, Colin Gibson explores the religious music written by the modern Welsh composer Karl Jenkins. Jenkins first made a world-wide hit with his stunning multi-media Armed Man Mass, an eloquent cry against war. Among much else, he has since written powerful and beautiful large-scale settings of the Gloria and Te Deum, a Requiem, a Stabat Mater and sets of delightful Christmas carols. Terry Waite described his music as 'a gift to humanity' for its interfaith character and its focus on world peace. Come and hear for yourself—and bring a friend (koha \$5). The usual 6pm pre-session meal (\$15) will be offered by Judy Russell (sign in or ring 455 3727 for your booking). Proceeds go to the Syrian refugee families now settling in Dunedin.

PUBLIC ISSUES FOR PARISH BULLETINS 2 AUGUST 2016

Climate for Churches - 20 August, 10am – 4pm, Lotofale'ia, Auckland

Kia ora, Talofa lava, Malo e lelei, Bula vinaka, Greetings

What will church leadership on climate change look like?

We look forward to you joining this Methodist and Anglican Climate Action hosted workshop. We welcome all church people to this ecumenical event with leading speakers.

Registration is important for catering purposes:

www.climateworkshop2016.eventbrite.co.nz

We can offer travel subsidies for people south of Bombay and North of Orewa. Please contact Betsan or Alex for information:

betsan@publicquestions.org.nz / alexanderjohnston96@gmail.com

PARISH COUNCIL meets Wednesday August 10th at Wesley Hall 7.30pm. Another **Parish Future discussion** afternoon is scheduled for Saturday August 6th 2-4pm with a break for delicious afternoon tea! Wesley Hall. We will look at more specific strategies for mission. Let Hilda know if this still suits people. (ph 4876226)

PRAYER REQUEST - Please continue to pray for the peace of the world as we celebrate Peace Sunday this weekend. Remember the victims of war and violence and their families.

SYMPATHY AND CONDOLENCES - The Tongan community are mourning the death of five Tongan people in a tragedy that happened on Tuesday evening 2nd of August at Katikati, North Island. Please pray for the families of the deceased and their loved ones during this difficult time. The Tongan community in Auckland will host a memorial service for these people at Mangere Tongan Methodist Church at 6pm tonight. The St Kilda Church will dedicate a prayer for the families of these victims and their loved ones during their service at 1pm.

HOPEWALK - Walking together towards suicide prevention and awareness. Saturday 13th August 10.45am departing from the Otago University School of Dentistry, 310 Great King Street, to the Octagon. **WEAR YELLOW** (if possible). Live entertainment in the Octagon till 12 noon. Organised by the Life Matters Suicide Prevention Trust. ALL WELCOME. <https://www.facebook.com/events/1795184507368422/>



HAPPY BIRTHDAY to Annabelle Wilson, who turns 6 on 12th August!

FAITH THINKING

The next Faith Thinking event is:

Science, the Bible and Theology: Historical Perspectives

Associate Professor John Stenhouse, University of Otago

7:00 – 9:00 pm Friday August 19, and 9:00 am – 12:30 pm Saturday August 20

Burns 5, (Albany Street), University of Otago

In September, this course will be held:

Going deeper into the Gospel of Mark

Professor Paul Trebilco, University of Otago

7:00 – 9:00 pm Thursday September 15, 22 and 29

Burns 7 (Albany Street), University of Otago

Each course costs \$20. Please register online at

<http://www.otago.ac.nz/continuingeducation/index.html>

For further information please go to:

<http://www.otago.ac.nz/theology/news/otago055227.html>

ATTENDANCES at the Explorers Group have been encouraging, an example being fourteen last Sunday afternoon when the group had what David Kitchingman described as a "ramble" following Bishop Randerson's lecture on "God in the 21st Century." It was particularly encouraging to welcome two newcomers to the group, Heather and Felicity, and indeed we are indebted to Heather for the photo. Do you like the thought of being part of the Church that challenges the status quo, that asks difficult questions, that demands a more coherent, rational expression of the faith? Then maybe you should seriously consider coming to Explorers at Mornington on the 4th Sunday of the month at 4.30pm.



STORY FROM THE MISSION

Skills for Dads Invercargill: We met with Kate at Invercargill Prison – she was very complimentary about the programme and was delighted that one of the facilitators of the programme was male. She mooted that this type of programme is needed in prisons. She is very keen for the programme to be repeated. The review and evaluation of the programme with Nga Kete Matauranga Pounamu (who delivered the programme for the Mission) was very positive. They reiterated how valuable the programme was for the participants and the amazing stories of change (and want of change) that came through the programme.

If you would like to support the Mission's work with a donation, please visit www.givealittle.co.nz and search for The Methodist Mission.





It was not a headline calculated to afford old preachers, like me, "comfort and joy... comfort and joy" I refer to Ian Harris' fortnightly stir in the *ODT*, July 8, *No future in keeping fossils warm. In a time of transition, is the timidity of the clergy killing the church?*

It's not the first time I've reflected uneasily when the charge of clergy timidity has been laid, the failure to identify with new insights, to explore and explain bold new theologies, or to speak up on controversial issues that challenge popular religious assumptions. In fact, the allegation of wide and systemic moral cowardice on the part of the clergy across several generations, is disturbingly commonplace these days.

By sheer co-incidence, or was it, my friend David Kitchingman in his summary for the Explorers Group of Bishop Randerson's June open ed. lecture, included a quote directly addressing this very issue. David instanced the distinction between the literal and symbolic interpretation of much of the Bible, and of biblical faith. Randerson in his book *"Slipping the Moorings"* leaves no doubt of his view that the Church has failed in its duty to make clear the difference. He writes *I believe many are leaving the Church, and others not even considering joining it, because the Church is not making clear the symbolic nature of much of its teaching there are clergy who interpret their faith literally, and so teach their congregations. There are others who, espousing full well the symbolic truth, do not query the literal dimensions of a story in case it upsets people. In so doing they may well create a sanctuary of doctrinal certainty for the gathered few, but at the huge cost of alienating many others. The Church does little to provide an intelligent and robust expression of its theology in the public arena, abandoning the field to atheists, humanists and others to peddle their own anti-religious messages to an undiscerning community.'*

"A sanctuary of doctrinal certainty" has a frightening ring to it. It describes a church so comfortable with the familiar, its role, its message, its *raison d'etre*, that it has no need to explore the unfamiliar,

no need to mine for hidden truth, and no need to grapple with what appears alien and unpalatable to the traditional expression of the gospel.

And so to the unavoidable question - is this my own indictment of the Church I have served for a lifetime? The answer, with some provisos, is a "no". And neither will I plead guilty to the timidity charge, though doubtless there were occasions when instead of the proverbial lion I offered only a lamb. Quite early in my teenage years I was mentored by one of our finest preachers, who never lost an opportunity to remind us that the authentic gospel has a crown of very sharp thorns and by its very nature causes offence. He did so, on a fairly regular basis, but people came to hear him because his preaching was relevant, stimulating, well researched, and rooted and grounded in the soil of everyday life. There is respect for integrity.

By contrast, another impressionist memory from the same early period.

I recall being made aware of an elderly minister, on the point of retirement, the object of amused contempt by his colleagues for openly bragging about his "sermon barrel," from which he had preached in every circuit, obviating his need to ever prepare a new sermon. It was said his sermon notes were yellow with age. And was it surprising he moved to a new appointment every three years.

The truth of the matter, and this is not to brag, is that I have been singularly fortunate as a presbyter to be appointed to parishes where a prophetic preaching ministry was welcomed, if not expected. Thank God for the Glenavens of this world! Consequently, I never doubted my role to criticise the old, and break in the new. And neither have I felt constrained by parish leaders worried about dangerous heresies from the pulpit impacting adversely on the freewill offerings of the parish - though there were occasions during times of national upset over the Vietnam war and the Springbok tour when I was made aware of sentiment among some in the parish that "Ken is rocking the boat a bit much, isn't he?" As for doctrine, how I have appreciated switched-

on lay folk who have enjoyed Sunday morning engagement with the likes of JAT Robinson, John Spong and Lloyd Geering with comments, not of warning but encouragement. Lucky me!

Some of my colleagues were not as fortunate. They spoke out and paid a high price. Others doubtless had their fingers burned early and took the course of least resistance, a lonely and intensely dissatisfying course for any minister who knows there is deeper truth bursting for release, but for whatever reason, opts to keep the lid on it.

And so is Ian Harris exaggerating the case for clergy timidity, painting an unnecessarily bleak picture of the church's failure to speak the truth without fear or favour? No, he is not. Indeed, consistent indignation at his *Faith and Reason* column have made him something akin to a satan in the eyes of critics, evidence enough, for them, that exploration and innovation are as unwelcome as ever among those for whom faith and truth are a locked repository of unchanging dogma.

I am thinking these days of Canadian woman, Gretta Vosper - soon to come to New Zealand for the Sea of Faith Conference in October. Gretta is a parish minister with the United Church of Canada who has made no secret of her changing, evolving faith since her ordination in 1993 to the point where with perfect honesty she now embraces for herself the word 'atheist'. Shock, horror! Surely, a death wish for any minister! Yet a careful reading of her testimony makes it clear that her use of the a-word has more positive than negative connotation. She has taken very seriously the rejection of the notion of the theistic God so common in the traditional expressions of Christian faith, (the person God) and has embraced a more community-centred view of God-ness, in and through the fabric of humanity.

Asked by a reporter last year" how do you respond to those who say you've lost your faith? Vosper responded *I haven't lost anything. I've just learned to describe what I believe in terms that are grounded in everyday language and not cloaked, and so potentially misinterpreted, in archaic, exclusive language. My theological training exposed the*

Bible to me as a construction of human beliefs. My faith development, growing up and in theological college, instructed me to live in accordance with an ethic grounded in love and compassion. I still live that out. I simply no longer think of it as the exclusive purview of a Christian ideology. It never was, and it shouldn't be."

Notwithstanding that the United Church of Canada is by reputation a broad church, known for its liberality of view and generosity of spirit, Vosper's very public embrace of a-theism has been a bridge too far - at least for some - and the Church has yielded to a motion that she be examined by the General Council of the Church with a view to determining her "fitness as a minister" and whether her ordination vows (inc a belief in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit) remain a valid foundation for her continuance in ministry. Indeed, it may be the first time a clergy person has been required X years following ordination to reaffirm vows as an act of discipline.

Not surprising, the eyes of the world Church will be on the hearing. Vosper is steadfast she wants to remain as a minister of the Church, but the big question, clearly, for hundreds, perhaps thousands of her colleagues in ministry is, if she is dismissed, how many others should stand alongside her in solidarity? Shame on the United Church!

To return to Ian Harris and to be fair to him, he is at pains in his article to defend the many good people who remain loyal to the church for the feel-good benefits that regular association with a community bestow - but he rates "loyalty" pretty low in terms of preparing the church to survive and prosper as an effective agent for change in the next decade or two. *For me, the future of the Christian faith does not depend on loyally keeping fossils warm, whether fossils of creed, doctrine, church order or anything else.*

It's a sobering word for us all, but thankfully not a deterrant.

(Repeated from July 31 because of poor circulation on that date)

Ken Russell