



Dunedin Methodist Parish

Finding Good in everyone Finding God in everyone

www.dunedinmethodist.org.nz

Presbyters:	Rev. Siosifa Pole	455 2923
	Rev. Dr. Rod Mitchell	477 3700
Parish Stewards:	Mrs Hilda Hughson	487 6226
	Mrs Earlene Owens	489 8146
Tongan Steward:	Mr Kaufusi Pole	455 0096
Parish Office:	Siosifa: parish@dmm.org.nz	466 4600
	Katrina: admin@dmm.org.nz	
Parish Prayer Convenor	Elaine Merrett	489 7663
Pastoral Convenor	Beryl Neutze	476 7447
Mornington:		

PARISH BULLETIN

31st July 2016

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY 7th August

9.30 am	Mornington	S Pole
9.30 am	Mosgiel	G Abernethy
11.00 am	Glenaven	S Pole
11.00 am	Wesley	G Abernethy
1.00 pm	St Kilda	TBA

MOSGIEL METHODIST WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP Tuesday 2 August @ 1:30pm in the hall lounge. Our speakers will be David & Debbie Murphy speaking to us about their ministry at the Milton Prison. As this will be a very interesting meeting we invite ALL interested people to attend ALL VERY WELCOME.

PRAYER REQUEST - Please continue to pray for families who are still grieving for the death of their loved one. Continue also to pray for those who are seriously sick, frail, and lonely.



PF&R COMMITTEE - The PF&R Committee will meet at the Mission building at 7.30 pm on Wednesday 3 August.

COUNTRY GOSPEL SERVICE – Sunday 7th August @ 7 pm - St Luke's Anglican Church, 67 Gordon Road, Mosgiel. Featuring Taieri Gospel Band and guest artists Graeme & Melissa Partridge.

Parish Links

Some members of St Kilda youth and Sunday Schools and parents went to the *Vahefonua* meeting that was held in Mangere, Auckland from 8th – 10th July. There were about 32 of them who went and each one of them enjoyed the whole gathering. Both the youth and the Sunday School members were heavily involved in this gathering from Friday until Sunday. Each day they were asked to participate in leading Worship, to sing, and to do action song. On Saturday they were asked to do some cultural dancing, which was inspiring to these young people. At the combined Service on Sunday of about 800 people, the youth were asked to assist on the Children's talk. The theme of the Children's Talk was "Let the Children Live". The parents who went to supervise these children were delighted to see the growth of confidence among our young people.

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.



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)



RADIO CHURCH **8.30am Sunday**
 a weekly service presented by Dunedin Inner City Ministers' Assoc
 Otago Access Radio 105.4FM & 1575AM and online www.oar.org.nz

SELLING OF THE WESLEY SITE - Just to update the Parish with the selling of Wesley site, especially those who are curious about the process. The Mission and the Parish agreed that Edinburgh Realty will continue to market our property. There is some interest but there has been no decision made yet. The PF&R Committee continues to consult with the Mission Board on the selling process.



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.

Ken Russell