

GREVILLEA

November, 2013

Welcome to the twenty second edition of **Grevillea** an e-magazine to stimulate your thinking!

Why "Grevillea"? The Macquarie Dictionary defines "grevillea" as any shrub or tree of the very large, mainly Australian genus Grevillea family. Many are attractive ornamentals and a number are useful trees. It is also worth noting that grevillea can be very toxic.

So Grevillea is an Australian e-magazine which will cover a large range of subjects as time goes on. We trust they will be interesting (not just ornamental), useful and stimulate (not irritate) your thinking. We aim to have articles that will be short, practical and worth your opening them as attachments.

This edition focuses on **Hope and Possibilities when Resources are Limited.** David Baker, the Moderator elect of the Queensland synod, drawing on his experience as Presbytery Minister in Bremer Presbytery, emphasizes the need for utilizing specific, concrete missional objectives. Maz Smith from Newcastle and formerly Western Sydney speaks out of her involvement in congregations. John Barr shares from his UnitingWorld experience about the very different context of the church in Asia. As Presbytery Minister, Stephen Reid reflects on the Ku-ring-gai presbytery. Finally, Christine Bayliss Kelly drew together three Pacific Island young people to share about their experience and the links to the coming NCYC'14 to be held at North Parramatta.

Email me if you have some thoughts to share. My email address is chrisw@nat.uca.org.au.

I hope you are, like me, encouraged by this edition of Grevillea.

Grace and peace
Chris Walker

Ps I recently had the privilege of attending the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in South Korea. Some very significant papers were received which I strongly encourage people to obtain and read. They are as follows:

The Church: Towards a Common Vision
Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes
Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World
An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace

Hope and Possibilities when Resources are Limited.

Dave Baker

Judges 3.31: "After him came Shamgar son of Anath, who killed six hundred of the Philistines with an ox-goad. He too delivered Israel."

Not many sermons have made it to the life-time memory category, but one on this passage has. I heard it delivered by a senior Baptist Preacher, in January 1979, in Sydney.

His main theme was: "You use what you have, and you do what you can".

The sermon came to mind on reflection on the theme presented: "Hope and Possibilities when Resources are Limited."

I guess the more respectable biblical story on this theme is the feeding of the five thousand - or the stories of the early church in Acts, where people transcended selfishness and pooled their resources.

All these stories invite us both to do what we can and look beyond ourselves. Here are some thoughts on the theme.

Developing Specific, Concrete, Missional Objectives. If resources are limited, then making a wise discernment about what will be done with them, and what will not, is critical. Also critical is that what will be done with those resources makes as significant a difference in people's lives as possible. It might be quality worship, it might be running a cancer support group, it might be something in family or children's ministry. Whatever it is, a mission that has clear purpose, and concrete effect, is vital. At the 2006 UCA Assembly in Brisbane, overseas visitors from sister churches were invited to bring a greeting and say a few words. One came from a sister church in Ireland. With a lovely Irish lilt and with friendliness, he said to us, "It's been lovely to be here, to enjoy the fellowship of your church. Having sat in your Assembly, I have to say to you, however, one day your "yes" will have to be "yes" and your "no" will have to be "no". All too often, the UCA tries to be all things to all people, or to keep things going that no longer deliver on the mission. We resist prioritising, objectivity, and assessment of activity against clear criteria with great strength. But we pay the price by never really achieving much, and then validating our poor achievements by saying that's all that could have been. The development of specific, concrete, missional objectives will also call into deep reflection what is of the essence of the faith and what is not. Our behaviours, not our words, speak about what's important to us. We have accreted all sorts of behaviours, attitudes, values and traditions that have passing reference to the priority of the gospel, and the good ordering of the church, but which at times have become stumbling blocks to the proclamation of Kingdom of God in word and deed. At many times, sometimes unknowingly, we have been asked to make choices, and all too often our choices have been to remain with what is familiar and comfortable.

Which raises another unspoken rule in the UCA: "There shall be no specific accountability". If resources are limited, not only should they be allocated to specific, concrete, missional objectives, those who have been entrusted with them need to be accountable for them. In mature relationships, that don't mean a disengaged, judgemental appraisal, it means a culture of transparency and honesty, and feedback, so that support and changes to agreed plans can

be negotiated and agreed to. Clear plans that serve a human need, with clear roles and responsibilities have an added bonus – they release resources.

There's always more out there than you can see. Time and time again, when people have expressed passion and responsibility for a field of mission, and developed some plan for worship, witness and service in that field of mission, resources have come, attracted like bees to honey. Humans love to see things happen, and we love to be a part of a better future. Those resources are released in different ways. Planning processes that are open and generative provide pathways for collaboration and resourcing. For others, it's "Just tell me what you want" and they're ready to help. Specific, concrete missional objectives provide the means by which people can invest, can move from a desire to help to a way to help. The Fernvale/ Lowood UCA in the West Moreton Region of South East Queensland decided it was time to consolidate their two sites, with buildings ranging from 100 years old to 30 years old, into one new site, with a new worship centre. A building worth \$ 800 000 was built for about \$500 000 because the community came out of the woodwork and donated time and effort to see it happen. They donated because there were a couple of developed pathways for participating, and there was a clear mission objective that they could see happening. Elijah of old, Jesus, people with vision, always at some time feel alone, and need to be reminded that there are others ready to help. The spirit of God reminded Elijah of the 7 000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal; the woman with the ointment came to Jesus to express solidarity with him in his mission – when the disciples seemed pretty useless. The Kingdom is always bigger than the church.

One of the challenges of opening up a vision to participation is that in the collaboration, the original vision may be lost or fatally compromised. It's the line between participation and goals – between relationships and outcomes, which needs to be managed. The accessing of resources in a resource constrained environment means that collaboration and participation are vital; so the capacity to negotiate and set boundaries to acceptable outcomes is critical. If it means walking away and waiting for another opportunity, that is better than spending resources in something that won't achieve the core aims. The mystery of dying and rising is present here. Jesus talked about those who want to save their life will lose it; those who lose their life for his sake will find it. The process of collaboration involves a distilling of what's really wanting to be achieved from what strategies may be employed to achieve it. Sometimes we're wanting to do the strategy so much that we miss the key underlying human need/ issue. There's more than one way to kill a cat than choke it with butter! Are we prepared to die to the way we want something to happen in order that a better way happens? If we're not, then hope and possibility will be profoundly constrained.

Despise Not the Day of Small Things (Zechariah 4:10). Sometimes we look at a huge issue and think that I or we can't do much about it so we won't do anything. Sometimes it's important to start; to do something even if we're not sure it will achieve a lot. Well, who knows where it might end up, but if it never started, we will never know. When the right thing has begun, energy will come to it. If you've got a passion for it, and are ready to take personal responsibility for achieving it, something might just happen. If you don't commit to it, why should anyone follow you?

Hope and Possibility with limited resources will also be generated in the remembering and telling of our Story. There are many heroes of the faith, in the Scriptures and in the Tradition, who model for us faithfulness and a commitment to fruitfulness. They can inspire us to

action. How are we remembering these Stories? How are we passing them on? How are we modelling hope and possibility?

I am arguing that it is in a realignment of energy and vision to specific, concrete missional objectives that we will see a growth of resources. Concurrent to that there will be healthy relationships that are constructed around feedback, mutuality, and accountability, and based on the values of the Kingdom. I don't see any other path to this than the path that finds its way through our own journey to Jerusalem and what lies there.

Reflections from Congregational Ministry

Maz Smith

There are lots of things that come to mind when we speak of ministry or congregational resources. This reflection will consider three basic but essential resources.

People are the most significant constant resource of any congregation. That seems too obvious to state and yet many congregations wouldn't see themselves in that way. In situations of apparently limited resources they are sometimes inclined to look for their resources in the broader institutional structures or their immediate leadership. They don't see themselves as the people God calls together in that time and place, to be the witnesses to God's story in the communities around them. Congregations come in all shapes and sizes, they don't get to pick and choose how they will be filled and they are never perfect. In effect it means that every congregation is a limited resource. Every congregation is a body with a disability.

But they are their own best resource. And they are the resource that God has faith in. In each congregation, despite what I have understood to be difficulties like age range, length of church experience or overbearing personalities, there has been alongside that, and sometimes harder to discover, great gifts of endurance, faithfulness and perspective. So it seems that one of the first questions to ask might be "Given that this congregation is this group of people, is the way they are currently bearing witness to God's story all that is possible?" Are they being the Church? That isn't a question of working harder but is sometimes imagining the next step.

Two congregations I have joined were tired. They had been managing for an extended period of time without a placement. In one that was small and meeting in a Community Centre, we used the image of going on a picnic. It was time to sit down, get some sustenance, connect up with the family members again, have a rest on the picnic blanket. In their own time that congregation decided they had rested long enough. It was time to get up, shake out the blankets and get on with the next thing. They did that with impatience and energy. Because they felt refreshed, they also felt more hopeful.

Another congregation had a history of fragile relationships. They were just about the only resource they had and it wasn't going all that well. There was some embarrassment and defensiveness clearly evident. Telling them to get their act together wasn't going to work. They needed to know that they were loved, and hopefully, despite their reputation even lovable. Through ordinary, regular things like preaching, visiting and using consistent consensus procedures in meetings, people began to feel valued and heard. The relationships certainly were not healed instantly but there began to be some joy and hope that they would survive the present and have a future.

By far the most disconcerting revelation of the people of the congregation being the most important resource was in fact, not having a congregation. For almost 12 months there was no congregation at Rosemeadow in Western Sydney. When it did emerge, the shape of the congregation was determined by the gifts shared by the people God had called together. They were unusual gifts: The gift of no experience in the church, the gift of not knowing that there might be expected forms of behaviour, like not smoking, in a worship service, the gift of not knowing what was in a Bible, the gift of straight talk and thick skin. These were accompanied by some of the more usual congregational gifts like hospitality and generosity.

The people of the congregation are not the only ones who are an important resource in the church. The people of the broader community are just as valuable and just as necessary. In the congregation just mentioned it was quite impossible to tell where the church community ended and the neighbourhood began because they kept interacting. The church community did not withdraw from its neighbourhood activities and relationships. They were proud of their church involvement and spoke of it with confidence. They knew and respected that many of the 'Christian' qualities of compassion and care were exercised by their neighbours. They found hope in not being thought of as weird because they were part of a congregation.

Engagement with local community centres, being part of the Board of Management of the Neighbourhood Centre, connection with local Public Schools through literacy programs for the children of refugees and international students, enabling disabled Olympic Athletes to run a games day in a local high school and a local youth service to run a "Skate Park Day" in the church car park, have in various ways enabled the people of congregations to learn more about many of the people in the communities around them that they notice but never speak with. Such engagement created the possibility of being supportive, of caring for, of engaging with groups and individuals. They knew themselves to be valuable members not just of the church community but also the urban communities around them. This was reinforced when they were successful in secular grant applications for community projects.

A couple of individual members in a congregation offered themselves as support people for newly arrived refugees. Consequently the refugee families being supported invited their friends among the refugee community to connect with that congregation until there were 8 new families, some with 4 or more children. 28 new people with limited English language sideswiped the mission plan, the seating arrangements, the morning tea (the kids ate *lots* of biscuits) and the powerpoint presentation amongst other things. The concerns and the future of the congregation changed from that event onward. They were energised, some with hope and some with fear, but they could all see that something new was happening, something bigger than themselves. Very limited experience of congregations suggests that where many of the members are engaged in intentional healthy caring relationships with neighbours, there is less disruptive internal strife and a waiting list of possibilities for serving Christ's ministry of abundant life in the community.

To the people of the congregation and the people of the community, I would add the leadership of the congregation as the essential resources for any community of Christian faith. They are the ones that are sufficient to imagine and sustain hope for faithful worship and service. In no particular order are mentioned some of the things (resources) that have enabled and encouraged congregational ministry for a person who has never been inducted in a church building (2 front yards of houses, a church hall and a school hall). I've been involved in starting 2 new congregations, (neither of which continues but which have produced a lay preacher and a person commencing a period of discernment), involved in 3 building projects and been dependent on funding in three placements. I am simultaneously humiliated and delighted when I have yet again underestimated the people of

God: humiliated because by now I should know better, and delighted because they are never limited to my assessments.

Some things I regard as very important are as follows.

- Theological education and formation. This taught me to think critically and creatively about my own faith and the faith of others. It taught me the value of questions. It taught me the value of the text of scripture and the context. A few weeks of ministry taught me the reality that what I knew then would never be enough but I had the basics for learning as I went and thinking about people, ideas and events theologically. What I learnt last month taught me that I still don't know enough.
- Good, solid, challenging, encouraging supervision. Without this, self-awareness would be short sighted, spiritual practise would be whimsical and personal hope is at times seriously stretched.
- Prayer. Time spent in silence, trying not to ask, trying to be quiet so that there is some chance of noticing what God is doing rather than the list of things that I believe have to be done.
- Love of the people of God. This is not an emotion; it is a vocation. It has required confession, apology, respect for people of different opinions, careful confrontation and listening. Reminding people of the faithful things they have done, their valued achievements. Helping the people of God love each other is a constant task. When they are standing close together it is inevitable they will step on each other's toes.
- Encouraging the appropriate utilisation of each person's gifts. It has been important and rewarding to seek out lost or hidden gifts and just as important to redirect the use of gifts that are out of control.
- Courage and imagination. Hope is sustained by being able to imagine a different way, another response. Holding that vision for a congregation until they can imagine it for themselves or adjust it for themselves is exciting and rewarding.

The Spirit of God works through people with just a little faith. In each congregation experience tells me *more happened, than we did*. It gives me hope that could happen again.

Issues for the Church in Asia

John Barr

Around one and a half million members, 2,104 congregations and 1,072 Ministers of the Word. These statistics relate to the Evangelical Christian Church in Timor, a church that serves communities in West (Indonesian) Timor and the adjacent islands.

This profile fits many Indonesian churches. Indeed it's a profile that is typical for churches across Asia as Christian communities experience significant growth.

West Timor is an interesting case as the church serves one of the poorest regions of Indonesia. Neighbouring East Timor is even more critical as this newly independent nation recovers from the ravages of violence and war while continuing to struggle with the issue of endemic poverty and ongoing trauma.

Ministry in Timor, therefore, has its challenges! Lay pastors and evangelists form the basis of local leadership while ordained clergy mostly exercise oversight of regions involving as many as ten to fifteen congregations and memberships of 15,000 or more.

Clergy and lay leaders generally receive very small stipends and it is not uncommon in some rural areas for ministers, pastors and evangelists to be paid “in kind” with a proportion of the corn or rice harvest being set aside. This is because many villagers are subsistence farmers and their participation in the cash economy is minimal.

This was certainly my experience after serving in West Timor during the 1980’s and then maintaining a long engagement with the church in both West and East Timor over the past 20 years through UnitingWorld. These churches are rich in numbers but very poor in an ability to provide services and fund ministries.

My time in Indonesia focussed on training young people for ministry and we often worked with very few resources. Class sizes were huge, access to published materials was minimal (often limited by the availability of material in non-English languages) and students were mostly drilled with a rote-learning methodology that saw them as “empty vessels” needing to be filled with the wisdom and knowledge of their teachers.

But the demand for well-trained leaders clearly resonated as the major issue across many churches. Congregations often struggled, not because they lacked numbers. Indeed, it was often standing room only on Sunday mornings. The need to increase numbers of church members hardly rated attention. The major issue concerned how these many people could be effectively pastored, educated and administered. Lay pastors were mostly required to have a junior high school education while their sole aids were simply a Bible, a hymn book and a book of church regulations.

Ordained clergy generally received an extensive “academic” style education in the seminary. However those who were newly ordained inevitably were appointed to rural congregations where isolation, poverty and critical lack of infrastructure severely limited their capacity to minister effectively. Indeed, I was aware of many young clergy who, along with their families, were appointed to rural locations in West Timor where there was a lack of medical care and families barely survived on stipends equivalent to an income of around a dollar a day.

The scenario within the life and witness of the church in West Timor, in East Timor and in many parts of Asia clearly reflects a situation where the Christian community is vibrant and healthy in terms of numbers. But the church is struggling, is even facing a crisis, in terms of accessing resources to sustain, nurture and develop ministry.

Indeed for many who choose to answer God’s call to ministry, they find themselves living in a constant cycle of poverty. They become isolated and even marginalised in communities where access to a library, connecting to the internet, regular communication with colleagues and even access to transport is simply a pipe dream!

Hence, for many growing churches in the Asia region the availability of resources and the effective training of leaders is the priority.

When I was in China some years ago I engaged with some ‘house churches’ and here I encountered a genuine passion and excitement about the Gospel. However, levels of Biblical awareness and theological understanding were minimal. This was because well-trained leaders were simply lacking. Such house groups, therefore, ran the risk of going out on

tangents to become pseudo-Christian organizations. Here there is little comprehension of the orthodox Christian tradition.

I have seen this happen in parts of the Western Pacific and here I also identify tendencies in West Papua (Indonesia). In these locations minimal Biblical understanding and lack of clear theological leadership can lead to the misappropriation or the misinterpretation of Christian teachings. Consequences lead to the development of religious movements that are grounded in indigenous belief systems and are driven by utopian aspirations. Known as “millenarian movements” or what some may prefer to label as “cargo cults”, such developments take on the characteristic of a cult or a sect.

These movements can also take on political dimensions centred round a yearning for independence or the idea of becoming a new “Israel” – a new “chosen people” standing in opposition and against others. Indeed this is a formula for disaster when church members take on such an identity and then come into conflict with their Muslim neighbours (as has taken part in parts of Indonesia with deadly consequences).

With these comments in mind, and as a former researcher and teacher with the church in Indonesia, I make the following observations:

- (1) There is no real need to play a “numbers” game in Asia. Churches are growing - churches are full! The real need is to ensure Christian communities receive good leadership. This is an imperative as churches in Asia must be adequately resourced. It’s not so much a question about evangelism these days. Rather it’s the priority of Christian education and leadership that matters!
- (2) Churches need to refocus on the realities they are dealing with. Most Christian communities across Asia are poor. They represent marginalised people who lack the most basic resources. These people are often isolated from centres of power and they inevitably experience persecution. Here I refer to, among many others, the people of West Papua, the Chin and Karen ethnic groups in Burma, the Naga people of northeast India, the people of Nias and Mentawai in Western Indonesia or the Dalits across most of India.

Education and leadership development needs to move from an alien “academic”, “centralist”, even “elitist”, approach to one that resonates with the realities people live with. Here I advocate an approach that embraces an “underside” view of history where Christian education and church leadership operate in the context of the poor and the marginalised. Here education and leadership development needs to take place “in-situ”. And this needs to take into account a “holistic” approach that relates to every aspect of the struggle people face in their daily lives.

- (3) The focus of many churches these days is in the community develop area. Much of this is due to the fact that Western governments and agencies are tending to fund overseas aid projects through local churches. I witnessed this for myself after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami where churches, including the Church of South India, the Church of Christ in Thailand and some Indonesian churches were “swamped’ by overseas funds.

I also saw this in East Timor where, after the independence crisis in 1999, the tiny Protestant Church in East Timor was somewhat overwhelmed by funds and goods sent enthusiastically

by overseas partners. These gifts included items such as, “teddy bears for Timor”, “thongs for Timor” and “tools for Timor” through to more sophisticated food security and poverty reduction programs.

The focus here was on aid, emergency relief and community development while the church itself struggled with virtually no resources to carry out ministry in the form of worship, teaching and pastoral care to a deeply traumatised community. The truth of the matter is that Western nations and churches are determining the future directions and priorities of churches in Asia through the sheer weight of their ability to raise funds and give financial support specifically to aid and development. Meanwhile, Christian education, leadership development in the church and the ability of the church to witness and care in the wider community is overlooked. These things consequently suffer.

Indeed, these days it is common to visit a local church in Asia and see an impressive, well-resourced, overseas funded community development program taking place. Meanwhile in that same place ministry in the area of Christian education, church leadership, administration and pastoral care languishes. Partner churches in the West need to reassess priorities here.

My experience of living and working with the church in Asia leaves me in great awe of my colleagues. But these churches must be resourced more effectively if their growth is going to mean anything. The alternative is to see only a shadow of what Christ calls into being as his body throughout the world. This is not what God intends.

Hopes and Possibilities When Resources are Limited
Ku-ring-gai Presbytery reflections
Stephen Reid

My first ministry was in the multi-congregation Parish of Maitland. My colleague in this ministry was an able and experienced pastor who understood the traditional church extremely well. One of the sagest pieces of advice that he gave me was this: “*Steve, we are not going to save the world. We are not even going to save Maitland*”. He might have added something like: “*All we can do is the best we are able with the best of who we are – by the grace of God*”.

Most Uniting Church congregations are small congregations. They are likely to have an average Sunday worship attendance of less than 100, probably less than 60. With few exceptions, their age profile is heavily skewed towards the older end of the scale, compared with their neighbourhood. Most are struggling with diminishing human and financial resources. Moreover, many are paralysed by two inhibiting attitudes. The first attitude is the memory of how church used to be. The second is the desire to survive.

For the last six and a half years, I have been Presbytery Minister in an area which includes part of the northern Sydney metropolitan area, conjoined with NSW’s Central Coast - a satellite region with a large population of retirees and a significant number of people who commute to Sydney for their employment. There are 35 congregations in the Ku-ring-gai Presbytery, served by around 28 Ministers of the Word or Deacons, and 15 additional Pastors or employed pastoral agents. The Presbytery also has ministry agents involved in aged-care and school chaplaincy.

The congregations of Ku-ring-gai Presbytery struggle with the two inhibiting attitudes of which I spoke. They remember what church used to be like when they were young. They remember Sunday School anniversaries, large vibrant youth groups and congregations with full choirs that sang four part harmonies. It is hard to escape a mind-set so strongly forged in a formative stage of life.

These congregations also struggle with the instinct to survive. Their church is the one where their father was Sunday School superintendent for twenty years. It is where they were married and their children baptised. It is where they worshipped for decades, where they know each other and feel a sense of belonging and spiritual nurture. For this church not to survive would be for a part of them to die. But the people of the church are the people of Christ. And in the midst of their personal and organisational struggles, the gospel is preached, nurtured and honoured. And where gospel values are nurtured, hope and possibility eventually rise to the surface.

One thing that is important, though not essential, to this is ministerial leadership. Many of the congregations that show signs of new life are led by men and women who are pastors and preachers first. They facilitate change in congregations by first recognising people's struggle with the nature of faith in a rapidly evolving community. New ways of seeing the future are given birth through conscientious caring, and through preaching that has integrity, and is not manipulative. Their leadership is consultative. It listens, as well as speaks, and gives rise to a shared vision for future dreams, which is integrated into ministry that values relationship above outcomes.

Many congregations have experienced glimmers of optimism through the thoughtful introduction of "Messy Church". They do not expect this will save the world, or even their church. But it shows that the message of life in Christ can have relevance to people under 50, even in the midst of working long hours, struggling to pay off the mortgage while forever transporting kids from one activity to the next. It also helps the old-timers to see that things can be different and still have value. It doesn't have to be Sunday, it doesn't have to be every week, it doesn't have to be crowded and it doesn't have to have an offering.

Given the near impossibility of starting youth ministry from scratch, some congregations are getting beyond the old equation where a healthy church must have a healthy youth group. Some are establishing experimental forms of children's ministry incorporating "Messy Church", but also developing links to playgroups, pre-schools and to the grandchildren of their regular members. Sometimes the links are seasonal rather than regular, such as special Advent programmes linked to the congregation's involvement in Scripture classes. In other places, Church Councils have decided that a healthy congregation doesn't need to have lots of members under 60. They can do excellent things in ministry with seniors. It will not be a ticket to survival, but no such tickets are available. In the meantime, they can forge a meaningful ministry that is a faithful response to the call of the gospel to them, in their demographic environment.

In the northern Sydney region of the Presbytery, some congregations are also learning how to forge partnerships with Korean-speaking congregations. In at least three places, instead of simply entering into rental arrangements, Korean and English congregations are working together at what it means to properly understand each other's cultural backgrounds, and what it means to be in a neighbourhood that faces precisely the same issues. In another place, a

congregation incorporating Korean Christians who choose to worship in an English-speaking service are working at developing a form of partnership with a large Korean-speaking Uniting Church congregation worshipping nearby.

Other congregations are beginning to see that being the church is not about being “mainline” any more. It doesn’t have to be about bringing people into church property on our terms. One of the inheritances of union, and of an evolving society has been an over-abundance of structures and properties. Some congregations are seeing that properties can be community assets. Many neighbourhoods have a paucity of gathering points for programmes that serve people. Playgroups, yoga classes, AA meetings and U3A classes are amongst the wide range of communities that gather on church premises because some of them have nowhere else to go. Disused manses can provide reasonable residential rates to University students. It doesn’t have to bring people into worship to be worthwhile, and it doesn’t have to be realised as a capital asset in order to be a positive possibility in the ministry of Christ.

Sometimes, however, properties have been sold. Alternatively, the nature of their use changes significantly. Three congregations are amongst the strongest in the Presbytery because, in the wake of Union, rationalising properties, and coming together on one site created resources that allowed them to develop strong and vibrant organisational cultures. Since then, further rationalisations have taken place. Four churches have been able to strengthen their people and property resources through the merging of congregations and the sale of properties that were linked within Parish structures. More recently, two neighbouring congregations have resolved to merge into a single English-speaking congregation on one site to release full use of the other site to a growing Korean Uniting Church.

A philosopher, Thomas Kuhn, wrote back in the seventies about the role of paradigms in stifling the possibilities for clear thinking. Paradigms are a set of assumptions, memories and images that shape the way we think and help us decide how we need to do things. After a while, those paradigms can become prisons that put bars in the way of fresh or innovative possibilities. Eventually all hope and possibility is dried up because there is no new life in these prisons. Some sections of the church are learning to escape the paradigm of the suburban church. The assumption of this paradigm is that the church must be a microcosm of the local community, the memories that feed it are of thriving Sunday Schools and thriving youth groups, and the image that it has is of an organisation that is built to thrive and survive. It is a paradigm that may still serve some places well, but it holds back many others.

As yet, however, I don’t think the church has any one new paradigm. We are in the period of what Kuhn called “revolutionary” thinking, where everything is up for grabs, and probably should be. However, in the midst of this revolutionary time of paradigm shift, there are signs of hope and of possibility. The future will not be like the past, but whatever the future holds it is in God’s hands. In the meantime, perhaps our calling is as simple as this: To do the best we are able, with the best of who we are, by the grace of God.

Hope and possibilities when resources are short
A Pacific Island Youth perspective

LisiaFitikefu, Tau’lofa Anga’aelangi, Henry Onzem

There are many things which can be identified as differences between the generations and there are many things which can be identified as particular to a specific culture. For many

young people in the Uniting Church there are so many issues which can be identified as belonging to either one or to the other- often without understanding the shared experience of other young people from all cultures.

In the Parramatta Nepean Presbytery there are 19 mono-language groups apart from English and many more multicultural congregations. Many of the young people come from Pacific Islander backgrounds and can feel somewhat isolated from other groups or almost afraid to connect with groups that come from other cultures because of the strong influence of the older generation. The pride and acknowledgement of the first generation in their own 'heart' language and culture with their sense of belonging with others of like background is very strong. Yet the 'second' generation, or those growing up in Australia from childhood ('1.5'ers'), have a unique opportunity to bridge between two cultures, two languages and two generations. However this is not always easy.

In the original thinking about the upcoming *Yuróra* NCYC'14 there was a desire to find ways to connect younger people together, to share a range of experiences, ideas, hopes and dreams with others in the hope of building a strong network. We had hoped to break down some of the barriers and suspicions between cultures in ways which could help us work well together into the future across cultures, languages and generations.

So *PI Ignite* was born. *PI Ignite* began as a way of gathering and listening to 'youth' from Pacific Island (PI) backgrounds. At a gathering at Parramatta Mission young people came from many churches and different PI backgrounds. We had spent some time training some table leaders about how to listen and to draw out people in sharing with each other around certain questions. Each table had a range of people- some who knew each other and others who had not met each other until that night. It was a real time of getting to know each other. What was interesting was the surprise on so many people's faces and the excitement when the young people began to realise the main issues affecting them in their own context was something experienced by other young people in different contexts. The realisation that each group was not alone was wonderful to see.

From that first night issues were identified that could be acted upon through further listening, discovery through some research, relationship building and always trying to connect people with each other and break down some of the superficial barriers. Training days, a weekend listening to Martin Levine, principal of the Alan Walker College, talking about discipleship and many other gatherings have helped people come together in worship, sharing, getting to know other people and always trying to build bridges between people.

So what resources?

- People - some key people with key ideas and a willingness to listen and work with leaders.
- Identifying key leaders of the community
- Time - to gather and share about particular matters which are important such as the use of 'heart' language (which generation's 'heart' language?) or education for the future.
- Patience - to know it is not easy for people who are used to being told what to do take time to feel heard, valued and confident they can contribute.
- A heart for God - this is something that is a process not just an event.
- Building mutual connections - every Pacific Islander is somehow connected or related to another person. Churches can identify these networks within their members which can be used as a bridging agent for Pacific Island congregations.

- Major Events - e.g. 1) The Tongan National Conference has been identified as a network crossing for the Tongan Churches Nationwide. 2) The Tonga Parish is made up of 11 individual congregations. Every three months they run youth rallies for the young people of the church. The youth rally is a part of a youth project that is funded by the NSW/ACT Synod. Young people from other denominations as well as the Uniting Church attend the event and there is a positive feedback. This is another bridging agent for the Church and the Tongan community. These two events acted as a promotional vehicle for the *Yuróra* NCYC team.

In this time of limited resources the church plays a major role in ensuring that all resources are being utilised in the most appropriate way. Every year, for example, a large number of churches and schools come over from Tonga to fundraise for their new church buildings and for equipment. Opportunity arises for the head of the churches and schools to reconsider how many church groups come over to Australia. We need to develop a system for Tongan congregations to follow when proposals are received from outside. This is a way to ensure that our resources are going to the right place at the right time.

While it is always good to experience and connect with those from Tonga, it is a challenge for many of our young people wondering about the relationship with Tonga which can actually disadvantage our young people. What is unfair for some of the young people is when they ask their own local church to approve a budget for certain church projects and get rejected. And when other churches send a letter asking for money, the church immediately accepts the proposal. This raises the question if the problem is the amount of fundraisings or the decision making process of our churches. It also raises the very real challenge of how younger people from PI backgrounds are valued within their own context.

Of interest is the use of the term 'youth'. In an Australian context this is usually focused on high school aged young people, extending to early university. However, in the PI context 'youth' usually refers to young people up to and including early thirties.

This is all a major challenge but *PI Ignite* is one way of empowering young people to engage with each other and an attempt to value those from PI background from varied ages across generations.

Sometimes people don't understand the link between *Yuróra* NCYC'14 and what's been happening at *PI Ignite*, but that's okay. Perhaps the easiest way to summarise the connection is this. Young people of various cultural, ethnic backgrounds do value the place of churches in their lives. Both *Yuróra* NCYC'14 and *PI Ignite* certainly point to this value. Here is a group of young, passionate people who are looking at the church as an integral part of social change, as well as a medium through which young, responsible, confident men and women can faithfully articulate discipleship in contemporary Australian society.

PI Ignite is a building a network of Pacific Islanders, one that is looking to plug into the Polynesian, Melanesian, Micronesian worlds and communities of the Pacific Ocean. Similarly, NCYC'14 is embarking on a bold new format to plug into the cross-cultural realities, which reflect the young people it hopes will attend. Both communities, however different, do share one commonality. They seek to add value to their communities of faith, by spending time together, be open to the stories each community tell and be prepared to in some way, create a new story themselves.

The past ten months of meeting with key PI leaders, conversing about what we (young PI people) need to do for ourselves, the patience of elders to hear the concerns we raised, and the solutions we proposed, certainly won support. But *PI Ignite* is under no illusions of achieving everything. They know that that much lies ahead, yet there is a quiet optimism that

young PI people are beginning to find a context and mission that can meaningfully add value to their communities of faith.

A special celebration, as part of the community celebration at NCYC'14, will help all of the PI youth and those from other backgrounds to begin to glimpse the possibilities when we join together being bridges to each other and with each other.

Hope for the future, new possibilities. An exciting time indeed!

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