

From the Minister

In recent weeks St John's in the City has received media attention that we certainly did not go seeking! The decision made by representative eldership to cancel a booking upon discovery that it was a forum for the controversial euthanasia campaigner Philip Nitchske necessarily implied something that St John's, as a church, tends to try and avoid. The implication was that St John's was making a public stand on a particular controversial issue.

The story of St John's is one of a diverse worshipping congregation; a people gathered from different walks of life. Perhaps it is part of having politicians and government workers in the congregation, often in leadership roles, that we prefer to avoid the potential for division over any 'issue of the day'.

However, as a local church, are there things we should be speaking out about?

Speaking an opinion beyond the walls of the church is easier than ever, thanks to the current era of media information where, thanks to 'the sound bite' and the web site *Twitter*, almost anyone can have an opinion – usually the more scandalous and controversial the better. While most of the time the media is content to ignore the churches, we see now and again the salacious delight in reporting instances of where the church fails to live up to its high calling.

Some think the churches should speak out more.

Mr Graeme Davidson used his regular opinion column 'Religion and Ethics' in the *Dominion Post* on Saturday 15th August (pgB5) to denounce church leaders for not condemning our politicians for their extravagant spending habits: *"The church has left it to the media, especially The Dominion Post – which deserves full credit for acting the modern prophet – to pursue, expose, and shame our MPs over their self-indulgence...Woe to you fainthearted reverends...hang your heads in shame for not crying out against the hypocrisy and greed."*

Is Mr Davidson's indignation justified? Are his expectations about the role of the local church shared by many others? Do people care about what the churches have to say about the allowances of MPs, or any other public issue for that matter? Often churches can be seen as arrogant for assuming they have an audience and a worthy perspective in the wider public realm. I have been aware that when churches have spoken out their public statements are interpreted as moralistic, irrelevant judgmentalism. At the same time, church leaders are seldom experts in the field at issue and comments made publicly can expose their ignorance and inexperience.

If these are interpretations people have of the church speaking out on public issues, what purpose would the churches identify in engaging with people that way? How effective is that in witnessing to the Gospel, and making Jesus Christ known?

Being a 'confessing' church we are defined to a large extent by what we believe, and

continued from cover... we do proclaim specific commitments that shape and support our faith. But the manner in which we proclaim what we believe says just as much as the content of what we say. We are a people who proclaim the Gospel of grace primarily in our shared worship. Through Word and sacrament we remain attentive to the guidance of

the Holy Spirit as we live out our faith corporately, and in the spheres of influence we each have; be it in the home, at work, and as volunteers.

The churches must resist the lure of the media and the distortion that inevitably occurs in trying to share the Gospel by 'speaking out' through this channel that has its own prior commitments and agendas. Despite our own

actions at times, the church is not engaging in a popularity contest. We are called to follow Christ, enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit. Any other commitment is at best a distraction, and at worst "a wide and easy road to destruction." (The words of Jesus, recorded in the gospel according to Matthew 7:13).

Allister Lane

Congratulations to Linda Holloway

Linda Holloway recently accepted the title of Dame. Previously Linda was a distinguished Companion of the Order of New Zealand. This was conferred in 2005. Her title is now re-designated as Dame Companion of the Order. Dunedin based Linda is Emeritus Professor having retired as Head of the University of Otago Health Services Division. Linda together with her late husband John and three sons came to St John's in the late 1980s when Roseneath Presbyterian Church closed. They made an immediate impression. Despite their professional responsibilities Linda and John became fully immersed in the life of St John's. Linda took over the leadership of the Youth



Dame Linda Holloway

Group and in an innovative move Linda and John became the first joint Session Clerks in St John's history and Linda the first woman Session Clerk. It was John who first suggested the we change our name to St

John's *In The City*.

Linda told the Otago Daily times that: "accepting a title was an acknowledgement of all those in her native Scotland and New Zealand who had helped her career... learning her daughter was to be known as Dame was also a delight to her 94 year old mother, she said."

Linda was invested as Dame Companion of the Order of New Zealand on 14 August, by His Excellency The Governor General at a ceremony at Old St Paul's.

St John's in the City warmly congratulates Emeritus Professor Dame Linda Holloway.

Rob Anderson

Editorial

Recently we had the pleasure of the company of David and Elaine Steedman's children and their families as we gathered for morning worship. David was the ninth minister of St John's. His ministry began in February 1976 and concluded with his retirement in December 1984. In 1983 he was Moderator of The PCANZ. David's retirement was anything but passive. He embarked on a research project that became a doctoral thesis. During the service on 26 July David's plaque on the eastern wall of the church was unveiled. David would have appreciated that Allister Lane invited the children in the church to gather around as the plaque was unveiled by the Steedman family. He would have chuckled too at his son Fergus's gentle humour when he addressed the congregation. The words quoted on the plaque are from the hymn 'Be Thou My Vision.' They are .. **"thou my great Father, I thy true son"** They are wonderfully apt. The words encapsulate David's gentle and humble witness to his

Lord that was fundamental to his ministry. David was also blessed with profound wisdom. His contribution to 'St John's Presbyterian Church, 128th Annual Report in 1981' reveal something of this wisdom and is perhaps something that we appreciate more with the benefit of historical hindsight. 1981 was an exceptionally difficult year for New Zealand. In the winter of that year the Springbok rugby team toured New Zealand. This was during the height of the apartheid era in South Africa. The tour generated division, protest, hurt and violence on an unprecedented scale throughout the country. Church communities were not immune from the divisions as congregations too were split between pro tour and anti tour factions. In 1981 there were few people who sat on the fence when it came to the issue of 'The Tour'. David's words in the 1981 Annual Report were most pertinent :

" A short time ago I was thinking of Paul's claim that he was not disobedient to

the heavenly vision and that meant keeping on through dark and difficult days no matter what happened. I am thankful for faithfulness in St John's that is keeping on week by week with a faithful witness to Christ. And I pray we may all be able to take the spirit of Christ into our community and all our activities. I have always believed that the great characteristic of Christians is the love of Christ and perhaps that is why a card from Atlanta Luther King meant so much to me. I hope that it may say something also to you-

'Hatred and bitterness can never cure the disease of fear: only love can do that. Hatred paralyzes life ; love releases it. Hatred confuses life: love harmonises it. Hatred darkens life: love illuminates it.'

Can we help to illuminate the life of our community with more of the love of Christ?

Rob Anderson

Move it or Lose it!

New Exercise Group at St John's!

Each Thursday during school term,

11:45am,

St Johns Centre

\$5 including lunch



The aim of this new group, which is a Pastoral Care Committee initiative, is to have fun together while exercising to music.

It is designed to cater for all adults, regardless of their level of fitness. The exercises can be done sitting in a chair or standing up. It doesn't matter if you can only manage five or ten minutes – toe tapping is still exercise!

Remember, exercise doesn't have to be hard or vigorous to be good for you – and it's never too late to begin!

Come and try – come and enjoy fellowship, fun and exercise.

Bring a friend.

For more information, please contact: Marg Gilkison 476 3144, 021 144 0494

Calendar of Events

6 September
All Age Worship

13 September
Quarterly Communion

26 September
Youth Group Working Bee

7 October
Session Meeting

17 October
Annual General Meeting

St John's in the City
Presbyterian Church
Corner Willis & Dixon Sts
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Views expressed in
The Messenger do not
necessarily reflect those of
St John's in the City.

No one 'board' at the Black Board Concert

It was a packed house and an evening of fun when the first St John's Blackboard Concert was held in the conference centre the evening of 1 August. The event was the brainchild of Tony Fuell, one of our regular Sunday morning guitarists, who had previously organised and hosted such concerts in the UK and Belgium. A Blackboard Concert is a tradition in many folk-music circles. The goal is to provide a comfortable setting for participation, rather than a focus on perfection. Participants who want to contribute a performance simply sign up; the program evolves right up to the last act.

The programme on 1 August was diverse and very entertaining. Tony was our MC. Ted Cizadlo bravely

started the show with several songs, followed by the first of two fantastic dance groups coached by Ani Prasad. Other musical acts included: Grace Boston on trumpet, Timothy Galt on trumpet and piano, solos by Sam Bennett, Mary Gow, and Tony Fuell, and duets by Linda Van Milligan/Beth Cizadlo, Clair Davis/Eve Davis, and Thomas Seear-Budd/Talia Carlyle. There were poetry presentations by Brigitte Hicks-Willer, Thomas Seear-Budd, and Blair Rodgers. The evening was capped off with a humorous monologue by Allister Lane.

The Blackboard Concert provided a great opportunity for intergenerational appreciation. Our youngest performer, dancer Elihu Prasad, had recently turned 3, and the oldest was probably

Blair, whose age is up to him to divulge! Many of the youth were involved. One teen, discussing the event afterward, shared how surprised and impressed he was to hear the contributions from some of the older members of the congregation. Events like this are great "levellers;" everyone, young and old, is able to have the same experience of performing and appreciating other performers.

Many thanks go to the social committee who provided lovely decor to create a cafe-like atmosphere in the hall, and an excellent supper with mulled wine in addition to our usual coffee and tea.

The organizers of the event are planning for another Blackboard Concert, date to be announced.

Beth Cizadlo

Reflections on Peace Sunday

On Sunday 2 August Allister Lane spoke to the children about Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the horrors inflicted by the atom bomb and where Jesus fits into all of this. He developed this subject in the course of his sermon. In the same service Melissa Jeffries in her Prayers for Others prayed for the spirit of forgiveness and in particular forgiveness for such atrocities as Hiroshima and Auschwitz. Forgiveness, as she quoted from a poem, can be seen as:

"A testament to our human spirit"

This moved me to search out

the following words which I copied some years ago from a display in the small Holocaust Chapel in Ely Cathedral,



Ely Cathedral

England. Surely 'A testament to our human spirit'. The prayer was found written on

a piece of wrapping paper in Ravensbruck, the largest of the concentration camps for women in Nazi Germany

"Lord, remember not only the men and women of good will, but also those of ill will

But do not remember all the suffering they have inflicted upon us; remember the fruits

We have brought thanks to this suffering; our comradeship, our humility, the courage, the generosity, the greatness of heart that has grown out of this; and when they come to judgement let all the fruits that have been borne be their forgiveness."

Wendy Bengel

Session Update

This is the first of a series of quarterly Session updates for The Messenger.

The last three months have been particularly busy, with Session discussing a wide range of topics.

In June, Martin Baker, the Assembly Executive Secretary, gave a thought-provoking presentation on developments in the wider Presbyterian church. While it is very easy to focus on the aging and declining nature of the established church in New Zealand, Martin highlighted a number of exciting developments throughout the country. These are focused on growing the church, and on reaching out and building new faith communities. The common features of these churches were that they had strong leadership, as well as congregations that were prepared to take risks and were open to exploring new ways of engaging with the community. Martin concluded by highlighting that we are called to be "people of faith" and that the challenge is now.

Ryhan Prasad led a report on the progress of the evening service which is part of a new ministry within St John's targeting the 18-30 age group. Currently, there is an average

of 32 people attending each week with a core group of volunteers. There are also other opportunities to grow and develop this ministry through small groups and other activities.

Session also approved the Rev Leanne Munro conducting services on a monthly basis through until the end of the year. We are very grateful for Leanne's ministry, and she has already made a valuable contribution to our worship at St John's.

In July, the Church Organ Refurbishment Committee gave an update on their work and on-going investigations. The timeframe for undertaking any work on the organ is quite long (several years) given the limited number of firms available to do this work and their current workload. The congregation will be consulted when it comes to making a final decision.

Ailsa Salt also gave a report on behalf of the Outreach Committee. At its most recent meeting, the committee made grants to Mt Cook School, the Women's Health Collective and Catholic Social Services. Additional funding has also been given to Presbyterian Social Services and the

Downtown Community Ministry. The committee is also supporting a number of international initiatives in conjunction with the Global Mission Office, and is looking to actively involve the congregation in these projects.

In August, Session discussed out partnership with the BGI. With the BGI celebrating its 125th anniversary this year, it is important to look at how we can continue to develop and strengthen this relationship, and how we will work together into the future. This will ultimately be reflected in a suitable partnership agreement between the BGI and St John's.

Session also unanimously approved a one-year internship for Ryhan Prasad as part of the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership internship programme. We look forward to supporting Ryhan in this way, as he completes his training to become a Minister in the Presbyterian church.

Please feel free to speak to me or your Elder if you have any comments or questions about these or any other matters.

Paul Ramsay

Church Does Not Endorse Visit

Media Release from 20 July 2009

St John's in the City Presbyterian church does not endorse the planned visit of euthanasia activist, Dr Philip Nitschke, to New Zealand, and has withdrawn the use of its facilities for the meeting scheduled to take place in Wellington this Friday.

Speaking on behalf of St John's, Session Clerk Paul Ramsay said that "while we support balanced and informed discussion around such issues, we find the approach taken by Dr Nitschke to be inconsistent with Christ's teaching and example."

"Once the nature of Dr

Nitschke's visit became clear", Mr Ramsay said, "St John's felt it necessary to cancel the booking."

"The meeting was never going to be held in the church itself, but in the St John's Centre, which is a facility we make available to a wide range of community organisations."

Paul Ramsay



Starlight Story Time

A Magical Night of Stories, Scarecrows, Supper and Spooky Trails

Each year St J's Kids and their friends are treated to special night of fun. We gathered on the 14th August for an evening of stories and dance.

It was such a fantastic night, the people that came just loved it. The chapel was packed to the edges with families snuggled together, friends sharing popcorn and grandparents watching with delight the faces of their grandchildren.

After stories we crept into the night to follow the night trail through Spinks cottage. Through tunnels of boxes, up creaky stairs, we checked out ultra violet illusions, we had a cuddle with a big bear and heard birdsong in a forest. All the way we counted pukeko.

We followed glowsticks, were treated with a Confidence performance then learnt a dance! We finished with a delicious supper and a balloon to take home to remind us of the fun we had.



These evenings only happen due to the generosity and enthusiasm of many people. We are so grateful for the many who helped. There was fantastic performing,

delicious baking, popcorn bagging, greeting, cleaning, dancing, balloon blowing, supper genies and those creating amazing trails. Huge thanks to you all for what was an incredible team effort and a magical night.

Most important of all is our aim of inviting people into our church family and making them feel happy and welcomed. Each year we see faces of many who don't normally come to our church but for at least one night they can enjoy the fun, laughter and joy we share in the St John's church family.

Arohanui

Beth and Nicki

C o n n e c t 2 0 0 9

Where to begin? Connect '09 was great. Between trips to Wendy's, weird spoken word poetry rap, the most intense games of ping pong you've ever seen, constant trips to the kitchen for mochacos, sing-alongs on the balcony, roast dinners, pranks involving ninety-nine red balloons, going to bed at four in the morning, mingling with new people, trampolines, coffee, dance battles, awesome cover bands, naps, basketball games, free food, strange interpretive art, and

wrestling matches there was still time to get through four awesome seminars, featuring such Presbyterian celebs as Graham Redding, Carlton Johnston, and Howard Johnston, worship, small group discussion, communion and other faith related activities. But long lists aside Connect was awesome and not just because it was heaps of fun. As a first timer to Connect I was blown away by the event. The level of commitment shown by the organisers was amazing and the diversity of the people

attending was not only surprising but inspiring. There were seminars for everyone, those new to youth ministry like me and those who have been kicking around the circuit for a while and they covered a huge range of topics. However, the best thing about Connect was not all the seminars and activities on offer (although they were great), but just seeing that Youth Ministry is alive within New Zealand.

Ryhan Prasad