

When they come to us

by **Bradly S Billings**

Prologue

Luke and Sarah¹ first approached me after a friend had attended a wedding in my church. The first contact came from Sarah. She called my mobile phone one afternoon and asked if she could speak to me about marriage. I answered in the affirmative and a dialogue commenced that would persist, on and off, for several years.

'I'm getting married in a few months time and I'm looking for a celebrant' Sarah began. Then she got to the point. 'What are your requirements?'

'There is one large and important one' I answered.

Sarah would later tell she expected this to be one of either three things –evidence of regular church attendance, commitment to attend a 'discipleship course' such as Alpha, or payment of a large upfront deposit.

'You only have to have to ask, and you've just met that requirement. Let's talk'.

'I'm not getting married in a church' Sarah revealed, 'it's an outside wedding, at a reception centre, in their gardens'.

I was later to learn that this was chiefly because two other Christian churches had already refused to marry Luke and Sarah, for different reasons, and a third had required several weeks attendance at that church before considering a booking. Disillusioned, Luke and Sarah had then contacted the reception centre who had a lovely garden, with a gazebo that served as a chapel, and never turned anyone away.

'Is that a problem for you?'

Sarah was not aggressive, but direct and got to the point quickly. Clearly it was she who was committing most of the time and energy to the wedding preparations, and like most brides, she knew what she wanted and was determined to get it. This was consistent with my experience that at most weddings it is the bride who has the casting vote (so to speak) on most matters!

'Why are you asking me to lead your wedding ceremony?' I asked.

'My friend was at the wedding you took on the weekend and she told me how much she liked the way you led the service and how welcome everyone felt. My fiancée and I both wanted to be married in the Christian tradition. Unfortunately our own church can't marry us.'²

'Let's meet and talk it through' I told them, not wanting to commit on the spot.

'How much is your fee?' Sarah demanded.

'Less than a civil celebrant' I told her, 'probably a lot less'.

'We had a celebrant lined up' Sarah confided, 'but if you can lead a Christian ceremony for us we would be willing to cancel that'.

'Great' I said, with genuine pleasure. Here was a win for the clergy!

'When can we meet?' Sarah wanted to know.

'Why don't you come to a service on Sunday morning and meet me afterwards' I suggested, 'that way you will see me leading a service and you can decide if I am any good at leading things, then you can tell me if you want me to lead your wedding ceremony. There will be plenty of time to talk it through over coffee after the service'.

¹ The names have been changed, however the story is real.

² Luke had been previously married and was divorced, which prevented him from being married in the Christian tradition in which both he and Sarah had been baptized as children.

Luke and Sarah both attended a service the Sunday after that phone conversation. They sat at the back, spoke to no one except the welcomers, and did not come forward to receive Holy Communion with the rest of the congregation. We spoke at length about their wedding plans afterwards and made some arrangements. I did not ask them to attend a church service again and was sure they would not. They had got what they wanted. I had agreed to conduct the service (pending permission from my bishop to do so).³ You will, perhaps, understand my astonishment (pleasant though it was) when I saw them walking into the church the following Sunday. This continued for several weeks, and then became months. Luke and Sarah continued to attend church most Sundays and were soon more regular attendees than many of the lifelong Anglicans in the parish. Clearly they enjoyed the services and were finding their place in our small parish with its eclectic mix of people of all ages, albeit like most Anglican parishes in Melbourne, with a heavy bias on the older generations. After one Sunday morning service, just a few weeks prior to their wedding, Sarah approached me in a pensive mood.

'I've been thinking a lot about the wedding' she said.

'And we both really like this church' Luke chimed in.

'It seems silly to have our wedding ceremony somewhere else' Sarah continued.

This was obviously something that had been lingering in their thoughts for some time. I was, of course, delighted, as they formally asked permission to move their ceremony away from the reception centre gardens and into the church.

Luke and Sarah's story has two postscripts, one joyous and the other sad. The happier of the two postscripts was the birth of their first child, who was subsequently baptized during the course of a Sunday morning service in the church in which they were married, by the same priest who had led their wedding ceremony (me). It truly was a joyous occasion for all present, and a wonderful morale boosting moment for the small but faithful congregation who had thought they might never see another couple of Luke and Sarah's age join the community of faith, get married in the church, announce their first pregnancy to the congregation, and then bring the baby for baptism. Much glory was given to God for all of this as we rejoiced together. However only weeks later we were lamenting together as Sarah's mother was suddenly taken ill and tragically died just hours later at a relatively young age. I was among the first to ring their doorbell after this unhappy news and spent some time weeping and praying with them as we took turns cradling the newborn infant and looking over pictures of Sarah's mum looking healthy and radiant at their wedding.

Luke and Sarah's story is not unique by any means. Every day, all over Australia, Christian clergy are involved in people's lives in this way and offer a ministry of care and presence at important moments such as marriage, the birth and baptism of a child, and at the death of a loved one. The reason I have retold Luke and Sarah's story here is simply this – it all began when they came to me, and if I had not welcomed and affirmed that first contact, they would almost certainly have been married in the reception centre gardens by a civil celebrant, perhaps had their child baptized but not in the context of a faith community in which they were valued and regular worshipping members, and it is highly unlikely any representative of God's people, clergy or otherwise, might have knocked on their door on the night of their devastating loss to offer comfort and consolation. Luke and Sarah are, for my church and perhaps for yours also, typical of those who come to us, seeking the church's involvement at an important time in their lives. This book is about the response they will receive when they ring your phone number, knock on your door, or walk into your church.

³ The Anglican Diocese of Melbourne requires that clergy obtain the permission of their regional bishop prior to solemnizing a marriage in a place not consecrated for Christian worship, and also where one or more of the parties to the marriage are divorced.

One: *Contact*

*Our culture sees an increasing desire and need for rituals and rites of passage to mark significant moments in people's lives – however these may be expressed. Providing these in a secular, humanist or generalized 'spiritual' context is a growth sector... but it's the parish church that remains the first port of call for so many. We are given an unmissable opportunity to be at our best as we mark these rites of passage in ways that are welcoming, inclusive and evangelistic.*⁴

In a frequently cited, but difficult to source, quotation, Archbishop William Temple (1881-1944) famously likened the Christian church to 'the only club that exists for non-members'. Most, if not all, Christian leaders and their parishes would, I expect, accept this as a truism at least in theory. I expect, furthermore, that most priests and parishioners will agree with the statement below from the *Pastoral Handbook for Anglicans*:

*In days gone by, most Australians had some idea of Christian teaching and 'what went on in church', and could join in the Lord's prayer and some hymns at least. With the exception of churchgoers, and some among immigrant groups, that is no longer the case... For many people, the initial or only contact they have with the church is through one of the 'occasional services'... For the sake of Christ, it is essential that those who represent the Church of God do so in such a way as to commend gospel truth.*⁵

In these two statements the crucial nature of ministry offered to those who come to us seeking the provision of one of the pastoral services (typically a baptism, marriage, or funeral),⁶ is clearly evident. Often, those seeking such ministries (together with those who will attend) will not be 'members' of the church (whether this be defined as undergoing a particular experience, rite, process of enrolment, or in terms of attendance at Sunday worship). They will, very frequently, be precisely among those whom Archbishop Temple presumably had in mind when he made his famous quote.⁷ Furthermore, as the quotation from the *Pastoral Handbook for Anglicans* reminds us, this may be one of the very few times such people ('non-members' for want of a better descriptor) have ever approached a Christian church, perhaps even the very first time, and possibly the only time. The National Church Life Survey researchers have noted that:

⁴ Paul Bayes & Tim Sledge, *Mission-Shaped Parish: Traditional church in a changing context* (London: Church House publishing, 2009), p. 50.

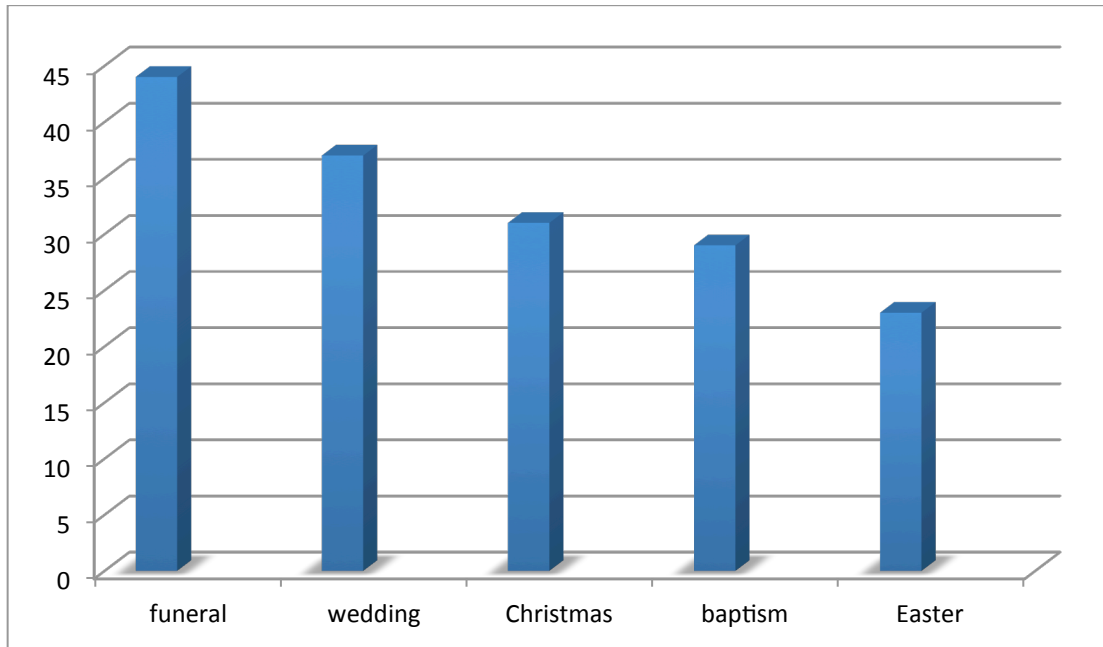
⁵ Charles Sherlock (ed), *A pastoral handbook for Anglicans: Guidelines for pastoral ministry in the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne* (Melbourne: Acorn Press, 2001), p. 1.

⁶ Throughout the term 'pastoral services' and 'pastoral ministries' will refer collectively to the three main such services and ministries – baptism, marriage, and funeral. This is not to deny the place of other rites that fall broadly into the category of 'pastoral services' (e.g. the blessing of a new home, ministrations at the time of death, etc.) or that people may approach a church seeking such rites and services, only to acknowledge that these are less regularly requested of the church and its ordained leaders. Many of the principles and strategies outlined within this book will apply beyond baptism, marriages and funerals, and to the provision of other such services and ministries of the church.

⁷ Brian McLaren affirms this in a postmodern context, noting that 'one of my mentors once said to me, "remember, in a pluralistic world, a religion is value based on the benefits it brings to its nonadherents"'. *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), p. 121.

While only a minority of Australians (20%) attend church frequently, many more do have at least some contact with churches during the year. Attendance at services associated with religious festivals such as Christmas and Easter is an important source of contact with churches. Many who do not attend regularly attend religious services connected with baptisms, weddings and funerals. When these are taken into account, it is estimated that 71% of Australians attend at least one such special service each year.⁸

The NCLS research cited above further reported that the percentage of the general population who had attended a Christmas service in the past year was 31%, and Easter 23%, whilst the percentage who had attended a baptism was 29%, a marriage 37%, and a funeral 44%.⁹



This strongly suggest that, at the very least, those attending pastoral services ought to be invested with the same resources and the same welcome afforded to those attending special services at Easter and Christmas. The response those attending pastoral services receive, and the experience they have, will in all likelihood, strongly influence their perception of the Christian faith and the Christian church (and by extension, that of our Lord Jesus Christ). Furthermore, those present at such services will, in all likelihood, be drawn from each of the categories of people represented in the now widely known graph produced for the *Mission-Shaped Church* project:

[insert graph and footnote reference]

That is, present at most weddings, baptisms, and funerals, sitting in the pews alongside each other, will be lifelong churchgoers with a mature and committed Christian faith, the completely “unchurched” who have perhaps never or only rarely ventured inside a church before, the secular humanist who thinks it is

⁸ NCLS Research, *Why people don't go to church* (Adelaide: Openbook, 2002), p. 79.

⁹ Ibid p. 80. Over 80% of the adult population [of the UK] visited a church building for one reason or another in a single year (2003) according to Church of England figures, the majority were attending a wedding, baptism or funeral”. Paul Bayes & Tim Sledge, *Mission-Shaped Parish* (London: Church House publishing, 2009), p. 49.

all a load of tosh, together with the brassed off “used to” churchgoer who has met the church previously in some form is none the richer for the experience (very frequently, it is shabby treatment at or over a wedding, funeral, or baptism that resulted in them becoming “de-churched”). It goes without saying that this congregation is very different to the one that gathers Sunday by Sunday (expect on Easter Day).

The Gospel imperative could not, then, be much clearer! I noted above that most Christian leaders and most parishes would, at least in theory, accept Archbishop Temple’s famous cry ‘the only club that exists for non-members’ as a truism. To a large degree, the response given to those who come to us seeking the pastoral services and ministries of the church will reveal whether this is, for us, a truism in praxis as in theory. Andrew Body goes so far as to say this (referring specifically to marriage, but his comments could also be applied to the other pastoral services):

There is no greater mission opportunity for the Church of today than a wedding. Not only does the couple come wanting something from us, and open to what we can offer, but most of the people who gather for the service will never step inside a church for any other reason. In a country that is largely ‘unchurched’ this is a moment, however brief, when people experience what the church does rather than what it looks like, what it is rather than what it is perceived to be. It is sometimes difficult for church people, for whom services, prayers, hymns and clergy are part of their weekly experience, to remember how alien this is for the majority, who haven’t sung hymns since they were at school, and who may never have spoken to a priest in their lives.¹⁰

1. The parish system

For those who belong to one of the mainline churches, such as the Anglican Church, we will have an important resource, if a much derided and under utilised one, in this respect - the parish system which Australian Anglicans have inherited from our ancestors in the Church of England. Whilst the parish system has never operated in Australia in the same way that it has (and continues to) in England, as the Anglican Church of Australia has never been an established church in the same way that the Church of England has for many centuries, the principles under which the parish system functions are, nonetheless, similar in both countries. Each rural area, town, suburb, or inner city area, across the whole of Australia, is divided into a region of pastoral care, presided over by one or more ordained clerics who (theoretically) offer pastoral care to all within that geographical area (and so are said to have the ‘cure of souls’ for all souls dwelling within that geographical area). Anyone living within that geographical area may, furthermore, approach the cleric having the ‘cure of souls’ for that area, for the provision of the pastoral ministries of the church. As flawed and as irrelevant as this may be in other ways, it does confer one strong positive in terms of our mission, in that the parish system invites every parish church to regard everyone living or working or learning within the immediate geographical area as a parishioner, whether they ever actually attend church or not.

The word ‘parish’ is never used in the New Testament, but it is, interestingly, an ancient Greek word, which literally means ‘those outside the house’: not the insiders, but the outsiders. The Greeks used it to refer to the areas of a city where the non-citizens lived – those with few rights, who were non-Greeks, and therefore excluded. So a parish church, in an ideal world, is not an exclusive place, but an inclusive

¹⁰ *Making the most of weddings: a practical guide for churches* (London: Church House publishing, 2007), p. 1.

*place for the local stranger, for those who don't know the way, the truth and the life; for those who don't know they have a place in the heart of God... It is the inside place for the outsider.*¹¹

In deference to the presence of other Christian traditions and other religious faiths among the populace I would, personally, not so regard those who are already baptized or worshipping members of other Christian churches or adherents to other faiths (these are, in any case, highly unlikely to approach us for the provision of the pastoral services given that they already belong to another church or faith, except in cross-denominational or inter-faith situations). Even so, this still leaves, in almost every parish, an enormous pool of people. Furthermore, just as many parish churches are 'gathered communities' with members living well beyond the geographical region in which the church is located, so also do some churches, especially large and prominent ones, attract requests for pastoral ministry from those living well beyond the geographical area in which they are located. There is a strong case to be made for seeing the parish and understanding the parishioners in both of these ways – as those living within the community in which the church is located *and* as anyone attracted to that church for whatever reason. Whoever they are and whatever their point of connection or reason for choosing to worship in that particular church or to approach it for the provision of a pastoral service, it is from within that large pool of people that the vast majority of those who will approach us for the pastoral services will come. A very good starting point will be, at the very least, to consider them 'parishioners' in this broader meaning of the word, let alone (as in some ways of understanding the model) having a 'right of access' to the pastoral ministries of the church simply by being resident in that parochial area.

*We need traditional churches that are able to sustain the Christian life and witness of their present congregation and that are also able to reach out to those who have a Christian background somewhere in their past and share faith with them. These churches have a large and important mission field. According to every piece of research, these traditional churches are still able to connect with a large proportion of the population. All our traditional churches need to be nurtured, encouraged, enabled to welcome others, to reach out, to develop, to grow.*¹²

The parish system, if nothing else, is a constant reminder of that which Loren Mead has clearly and authoritatively argued almost twenty years ago – that the postmodern church must be orientated towards mission as primarily a local activity, beginning with the understanding that the mission field is quite literally right outside the front door of the church building (hence he writes 'the missionary frontier has changed. It's gone local').¹³ Brian D. McLaren further argues that mission, as it is conducted in the early 21st century, is best perceived and experienced not in terms of individual benefit or 'personal' salvation, but as good news for all.

¹¹ Martyn Percy, 'Many rooms in my Father's house: The changing identity of the English parish church,' in *The future of the parish system: Shaping the Church of England for the twenty-first century* (ed. Steven Croft; London: Church House Publishing, 2006), p. 4.

¹² Steven Croft, 'Serving, sustaining, connecting: patterns of ministry in the mixed economy church,' in *The future of the parish system: Shaping the Church of England for the twenty-first century* (ed. Steven Croft; London: Church House Publishing, 2006), p. 76.

¹³ *The once and future church: reinventing the congregation for a new mission frontier* (New York: The Alban institute, 1991), pp. 58-59.

Missional Christian faith asserts that Jesus did not come to make some people saved and others condemned. Jesus did not come to help some people to be right while leaving everyone else to be wrong. Jesus did not come to create another exclusive religion.¹⁴

2. Come as you are

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me'. Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth'. Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see'. John 1.43-46.

At the beginning of St John's Gospel we find a series of stories reporting the manner in which his first disciples and followers encountered Jesus and began to follow him. In some ways, these are microcosms of what occurs subsequently. Throughout the Gospels there are those like Philip who are, in some sense, 'found' by Jesus. He comes to them and says 'follow me'. There are those who are brought to Jesus, as is Nathanael, by Philip, with the invitation 'come and see'. And there are those whose lives and journey intersects with that of Jesus at a point of time, whether they were 'found' by Jesus or came to him of their own volition, or were brought to him by another. Whatever the circumstances, the recurring pattern is this: our Lord's welcome is without condition, his embrace is all encompassing, and his love without limit. We see this over and over again – from the publicans and tax collectors, the 'sinners' and prostitutes so despised by their fellow Jews (Luke 7.34-39, 15.1-2), to the woman caught in adultery (John 7.53-8.11), the swindler Zaccheus (Luke 19.1-10), and outcasts such as the man suffering from leprosy (Mark 1.40-45) and the woman suffering from hemorrhages (Luke 8.43-48). If we are going to represent the person of Jesus, it is abundantly clear that a Christian church should be a place of welcome, acceptance, and hospitality. In my experience, this is frequently true of the manner in which we welcome those who are brought to us through the evangelistic ministries of the church or who come to us by attending services of worship on Sunday mornings, but somewhat less true of those who come to us seeking the provision of a pastoral service or ministry.

I expect this is partially, and perhaps sub-consciously, the case because most churches, if not all, at the very least welcome, if not actively seek out and 'target', new members. Most of the research into the circumstances around which a person is brought to faith and / or joins a church strongly suggests that personal invitation plays a significant role.¹⁵ Whilst there are, of course, many exceptions, the main

¹⁴ *A Generous Orthodoxy*, p. 120, emphasis his. McLaren explains the shift from modernist to postmodernist mission well in this article for *Leadership* magazine: 'how different is this missional approach to the "rhetoric of exclusion" that worked so well in modernity: "there are blessings to being on the inside. You're on the outside so can't enjoy them. Want to be a blessed insider like us?" In contrast, missional Christianity says, "God is expressing his love to all outsiders through our acts of kindness and service. You're invited to leave your life of accumulation and competition and self-centeredness to join us in this mission of love, blessing, and peace. Want to join in the mission?"' 'Emerging values', *Leadership* Vol. XXIV, No. 3 (Summer 2003), p. 39.

¹⁵ This was clear in the results of a major international survey undertaken throughout 2001 of the situation in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and United States, which found that more than a third of all those who had joined a church did so as a result of being personally invited to attend by an existing church member. Sam Sterland, Phillip Escott & Keith Castle, 'Attracting and Integrating Newcomers – An Analysis across Four Countries'

pathway into the life of a faith community seems to be the personal invitation issued by a friend, relative, or neighbour etc. who then accompanies the new attendee and helps him or her to integrate into the life of the church and to learn and adapt to the prevailing church culture. Hence the main 'doorway' or entry point into a faith community continues to be the 'front door'. That is, attendance at a regular service of worship on a Sunday. There really is no substitute for the personal invitation or for human companionship, in respect to the process by which one is initiated into Christian faith and the process by which one becomes an active member of a faith community (although, of course, we hasten to add that the Holy Spirit has a large and important, if difficult to define, role in this). Personal invitation continues, for this reason, to be a core element in most successful evangelistic initiatives such as Alpha, Back to Church Sunday, and the like. Such initiatives and programs work on the premise that the one brought by another to 'come and see' will be welcomed, whatever their current position in regards to the Christian faith and the person of Jesus Christ. Those who actually do 'come and see', whether through the medium of an invitation offered by a friend or acquaintance, attendance at a course such as Alpha, or simply by wandering in through the front door for a service of worship on a Sunday, are, almost without exception I would expect, very warmly and gratefully welcomed into the life of the worshipping community (at least for that day, or for the duration of that course), and, generally, will be treated as a valued guest.

This book is, however, about those whom come to us seeking the provision of a particular service or ministry of the church – be it the baptism of a child, the celebration of a marriage, or to arrange the funeral of a loved one. Usually those approaching us for these purposes will come of their own volition. No one will have invited them to attend a service. No one will have sat with them throughout the service or explained how things happen in a church and what is going on etc. There will be no meal or teaching material around which to gather, ask questions in a friendly and conducive environment, and often no or only limited opportunity present to form relationship with people who profess Christian faith. It would seem to me highly unfortunate for many reasons if those coming to us for this purpose were not regarded in the same light as those welcomed or invited into our churches and, worse, be seen in a negative light as wanting from the church something they have no right to request or be treated as a distraction from the 'real' task of ministry, as 'work', or a hindrance to the priest, the parish, or both. It would be inconceivable that the first time attendee at a service of worship on a Sunday, or the person attending an initiation course such as Alpha, or the one invited in for Back to Church Sunday, would, upon being met by the parish priest or another church leader or member, be so regarded. Nor is it likely that a first time attendee on a Sunday, or guests at an Alpha course etc., be interrogated about their faith, asked what their commitment to Christ is, or be required to explain their non-attendance at church in the past. This is however, frequently the reported experience of those who come to us seeking the ministry of our church at a crucial and often difficult moment in their life. Sometimes it is worse – we have probably all heard horror stories of those whose phone calls were not returned, or who were simply ignored, refused, or turned away.¹⁶

(NCLS Research, June 2004), p. 8. The study found also that 'a number of other areas were significantly more influential for newcomers in Australia: including contact with the minister or church through a rite of passage, p. 8.

¹⁶ A further, crucial point, often misunderstood or unappreciated by clergy, might be summarized as 'response time'. For many clerics this will seem like 'going the extra mile', however when dealing with Gen X and Gen Y in particular, especially in the context of marriage ministry, a quick reply is normal and almost always expected. This is the generation for whom an answer machine is tedious and 'old school'. They will expect all but instant responses to text and email messages, and although they will not get it from busy clergy, a week is a very long time in the world of Facebook, Twitter, email and iphones. It doesn't take long to reply to an email (overwhelmingly the preferred method of communication in this age group) even if it is just a note to say 'got your message and will reply as soon as I can'.

The institutional churches have concentrated on participant membership to the exclusion of nearly everything else. They have abandoned, and have appeared to alienate, not only those who still feel that they belong but also those who may want to rejoin a community where transcendent spiritual values and experience are central... We have tended to behave more and more like a cult, at first neglecting, then blaming, the growing number of people who belong by association. Yet these 'association' members are key to a proper understanding of our mission.¹⁷

This book is a plea that those who come to us for the purposes of baptism, marriage, or a funeral, be welcomed in exactly the same way as those who are brought to us or come to us through the Sunday worship door, or to an Alpha (or other evangelistic or nurture) course, or on Back to Church Sunday, or as the guest of a regular member of the congregation, etc. Like the first time attendee at Sunday worship, or the participant at Alpha, the one who comes to us for a pastoral service is just like a Nathanael in the passage from John 1 above. They have come asking for the baptism of a child, to be married in our church, to arrange the funeral of a loved one, but, often without even knowing it themselves, they are coming, like Nathanael, to see Jesus. And even more than this, they have very often not been brought (as Nathanael was) by another, but have come of their own volition and frequently by themselves. We know our Lord would have welcomed and loved them unconditionally. But what about his earthly representatives? When they come to us, is it the unconditional love and the all embracing welcome of Jesus they will see and experience? Or are there spoken or unspoken conditions that must be met, hoops to jump through, and explanations demanded? Do we ask them to come as they are, or do we implicitly or explicitly, ask them to come as someone else? We would do well to take as our starting point the words of the hymn by Deirdre Brown.¹⁸

'Come as you are: that's how I want you.
Come as you are; feel quite at home,
close to my heart, loved and forgiven.
Come as you are: why stand alone?

'No need to fear, love sets no limits;
no need to fear, love never ends;
don't run away shamed and disheartened,
rest in my love, trust me again.

'I came to call sinners, not just the righteous;
I came to bring peace, not to condemn.
Each time you fail to live by my promise,
why do you think I'd love you the less?

'Come as you are; that's how I love you;
come as you are, trust me again.
Nothing can change the love that I bear you;

¹⁷ Richard Thomas, *Counting people in: changing the way we think about membership and the church* (London: SPCK, 2003), p. 13.

¹⁸ Words and music by Spectrum Publications, Melbourne. *Together in Song Australian Hymn Book II*. © The Australian Hymn Book Pty Ltd 2006. Registered Office 14 Martin Place (Level 17) Sydney 2000.

all will be well, just come as you are.’

3. Perceptions and Misconceptions

No one inside the Christian church is unaware that the social context in which Christian ministry is being conducted in the early twenty-first century is enormously different, across the western world, to that which existed just a matter of decades ago in the past.

*There is nothing straightforward about the religious situation in which we find ourselves. Quite plainly a whole way of life associated with Church and Christian faith is passing away.*¹⁹

*What is taking place is not merely the continued decline of organized Christianity, but the death of the culture that conferred Christian identity.*²⁰

It is easy for those who, like me, spend much of their lives in churches and in church circles, to fail to understand and appreciate how a Christian church and its clergy might appear from the perspective of those who have rarely, if ever, graced the inside of a church or sat through a service of worship. To us, the physical space of the church is comfortable and familiar. The rituals and ceremonies of the church are a meaningful and normal part of our lives. Our structures and processes, though sometimes a source of consternation, are things we daily navigate. The often archaic and titular language we use is part of our vocabulary, and even has an endearing quality to many of us. We sometimes fail to see and to understand how strange and foreign it all might seem from the perspective of the outsider, unused to our ritual, estranged from our language, and, most crucially, unsure of the reception they will receive upon approaching us.

Every Australian who lived through it will never forget the 1983 ‘Ash Wednesday fires’ that devastated south eastern Australia that year (so called because they occurred on the day of that religious observance). Large areas were burned out, many perished, and many more lost their homes and livelihoods. The event lingered long in the consciousness of the community, so much so that, more than twenty years later, when I told a local couple that I could not conduct a rehearsal for their wedding on the evening requested because I was taking an Ash Wednesday service that night, they immediately assumed this was a service instituted by the church to commemorate the bushfire victims. They had, of course, never heard of the religious observance that had a pre-history of many centuries. But they certainly knew of the fires.

A far more serious impediment to the lack of understanding regarding Christian observances, rituals, and language, is however the perception (often borne out of ignorance) that those coming to us will have of us. Every parish community and every group of Christians I have ever been involved with, do have a genuine and sometimes even overwhelming desire to share the good news with others, especially those others who are not presently members of a faith community, and to welcome newcomers into the life of their faith community. As I have noted above, when visitors attend church services on a Sunday we (usually) go out of our way to treat them as our guests and to make them

¹⁹ Scott Cowdell, *God’s next big thing: Discovering the future church* (Melbourne: John Garratt Publishing, 2004), p. 40.

²⁰ *Mission-Shaped Church: church planting and fresh expressions of church in a changing context* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004), p. 11.

welcome. But what response do we give to those who are our guests at weddings, baptisms, and funerals, and the like? Many of those coming for these pastoral services (especially marriage and baptism), and those seeking to arrange for them, will be in the younger age groups that we all but universally say we are seeking to make connections with, and many will be approaching us for the very first time. They will often have very little understanding of what transpires inside a church. They may not know what language to use (a question I am often asked 'what do we call you?'). Their preconceptions (and misconceptions) will most probably not be arising out of the warm and wonderful welcome they received upon first attending a service of worship, for they never have. It is far more probable that their perception of the Christian church and its clergy will have been formed by their prior experience (if any) at school, but especially by that of their parents or grandparents, the experience of friends who had previously been married in a church or organized the funeral of a loved one in a church, and, perhaps most powerfully, by the image of the church and its clerics projected by the popular culture (media, television, film, etc).



Revd Lovejoy of the long-running television program *The Simpsons*, an 'instantly recognizable and ludicrous character'.²¹

It may seem strange, even silly, to us, but often those who come to us as will be anxious, even afraid. For many of them the church will never have been a part of their lives. It exists as an institution on the periphery of their social world. The building might be large and imposing. The sign out the front gives the cleric an important sounding title. They have never previously had any dealings with this church or another. They have never attended a Sunday service. The thought running through their minds may well be something like this - Who am I to ask for a marriage, baptism or funeral? One bride told me well after her wedding day that she had agonized over the email correspondence that had been her first contact with my parish: 'I must have written and re-written it twenty times'. A couple wanting to have their child baptized began the conversation by saying, very apologetically, 'We moved to the area a few years ago but we've never been to the church', and left the comment hanging, waiting for the expected rejection to come. A family organizing the funeral of a loved one told me they had initially thought their only option was to be approach a celebrant as 'dad was not especially religious' but were persuaded by a family friend who had arranged for the funeral of a relative at our church in the not so distant past that 'it is okay to ask the church for help'.

²¹ Mark I. Pinsky, *The Gospel according to the Simpsons* (Louisville: Westminster, 2001), p.71.

Most of this is not the fault, and not the doing, of the Christian church. It is not our fault, and not our doing, that so few of those in the community, especially those in the younger age groups, have never, or only very rarely, had any meaningful contact with the Christian church. Even so, this is the undeniable reality of the social world in which we exist and in which we conduct our mission, and it serves to amplify the crucial nature of the all important first contact.

4. First Contact

Everyone in ministry, or who answers the phone in a parish office, has heard the cringe-worthy request:

'I'd look to hire your church for...

'I'd like to get (insert name of child) done...

'I'm not religious, but...

Some couples requesting marriage in my present church (St John's Toorak in the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne) are refreshingly honest. Among the responses when asked why they want to be married in St John's I have heard:

'It's a beautiful church (many times)

'I always dreamed of walking down a long aisle with stained glass at the end

'It's near the reception centre

'I went to a Church of England school so I guess Anglican must be like that

'A lot of our friends will come by public transport and there's a tram stop right out the front

'Grandma would be really upset if we didn't

'We wanted a traditional ceremony

'I came to the wedding of (name of friend) and just fell in love with the church

'My fiancé is divorced so we can't get married in our own church

'We're having a lot of guests so we needed a building that can hold 300+

'The cathedral was unavailable that day and we already had the reception centre booked

Among the responses that are almost never heard are:

'Our faith is really important to us

'It's important for us to be married in the sight of God and in a place consecrated to worship of him

'The liturgy of the Anglican church really resonates with us

'I have attended this church all my life

Whatever the reason behind it, the phone rings and the approach is made. Sociologists and people who study these things are all but unanimous in maintaining that first impressions are very powerful and almost impossible to change. As tempting as it may be, on occasions, to respond with a corrective, or even a negative, the missional situation of the Christian church is such that, in my view, we are in no position to do so, and certainly not in any position to turn people away. As we have seen above, Jesus did not, and nor should we. Everything now turns on the response to that first enquiry and this is why the person answering the phone, or opening the door, or replying to the email, is so crucially important; whether that person be the parish priest, his or her PA, spouse, a volunteer, or church member who just happened to be in the church or office. It is imperative the response be friendly, sympathetic if required, warm, and, above all, positive.

Why not something like...

'You're considering being married, how wonderful, congratulations, we would love to discuss your wedding plans with you

'I'm so sorry to hear of your loss, of course we will be able to assist with the funeral arrangements

'We always welcome those bringing children for Baptism, I'll get the details and our Minister will be in touch with you very soon

A positive response seeks to calm apprehensions and fears, and offers reassurance that the church will respond in a welcoming and timely manner to whatever is being asked of it. It is not necessary at this point to go into detail about the baptism policy of the church, or whether the fact one party to the marriage is divorced will be an issue, or that the family member who has died was 'not religious'. The clergy and other leaders of the parish will clarify such things in the conduct of the pastoral response to the particular situation, in accordance with their own conscience, and with regard to the policies and guidelines established by the parish church and / or the Diocese as applicable. The crucial matter is that the request is welcomed. The person making the request is then affirmed and the mission of the church enhanced. The message received by the enquirer is that this is a safe place, it is going to be okay, I will not be turned away.

Offering friendship and Christian love each time the door bell goes is an act which of itself builds the kingdom of God most effectively. And as a consequence it is the hardest work we have to do. It requires us to set aside the times we have felt used or had our hopes dashed and to forget the inconvenience of the call in order to treat the latest enquiry with a warm smile and a new hope in Christ.²²

²² Nick & Hazel Whitehead, *Baptism matters* (London: Church House publishing, 1998), p. 37.

Two: *How open are our doors?*

The image of the open door is a powerful one. It says to those passing by – we are open for business, please feel free to come in, you are welcome. Some churches not only have a prominent open door leading out onto the street but an accompanying sign. One of my neighboring church's says – 'church open for rest and reflection'. Whether it is possible to leave a physical door open or not, the Christian church should be a place that is easy to enter, that is open to all, and that welcomes all. As the master himself said: 'So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you' (Luke 11.9).



1. How will they find you (literally)?

It is no use having an open door if no one knows it is there. Whilst visibility may not be a problem at all for some churches, for others it will be, especially those tucked away in quiet residential streets or away from the main thoroughfares and places where people gather. It may be necessary to be creative in ensuring people know the church exists and welcomes visitors, on Sundays and other occasions, as appropriate. There are any number of ways and means of achieving this – from letter box drops, sending out press releases to local papers about an upcoming event or activity, perhaps finding a donor willing to sponsor a form of paid advertising, posting notices in friendly shopkeeper's windows, asking the council to erect street signage on the nearest main road indicating the location of the church, to simply getting out into the streets, shops, and restaurants of the community to meet and greet people. These, and many more, are the pragmatic ways of raising visibility and ensuring the presence of the church in the community is known, however there is one all important strategic step that every parish with any interest in the provision of the pastoral services should be taking, and that is to fund an attractive and informative web site. Many will have taken this step and taken it some time ago, but surprisingly, there

are still many who have not done so, or whose existing site says very little about the possibility of approaching the church for a baptism, marriage, or funeral, let alone inviting such approaches. There is, however, no question that the single most important interface between a parish church and those seeking to be married in a church in particular (and to a lesser degree those seeking to arrange for a baptism or funeral), is the internet. Almost every couple presenting for marriage at St John's Toorak who did not have an existing connection to the church though being resident in the local community, their family of origin, or school, when asked how they found the church respond with 'on line'.

*For many people today the Internet is their primary research and study tool. Information about almost anything is only a few key words in a Google search box away. As a result, not having a church website today is like not putting your church in the phone book or not having a sign in front of your building. And that website needs to be an accurate reflection of your church because it will probably determine the new visitor's first impression.*²³

This fits with the widespread assumption, among those engaged in the wedding industry, expressed primarily through marketing campaigns and budgets, that the first place those being married look for the services they want or need is online. For these reasons it is absolutely imperative that a parish involved in marriage ministry in particular, or wanting to be, invest in an attractive web site that is regularly updated and improved, and that the information displayed on the web site regarding pastoral services be current and accurate. It may also be worthwhile investing in online marketing tools such as Google Adwords,²⁴ at least for a period of time. And it is further important that the email inbox be regularly checked and enquiries responded to promptly.

2. How will they find you (ascetically)?

Assuming the church is visible, the door is open, the web site completed and uploaded and generating hits, and visitors, passers-by, and those seeking the ministry of the church are welcomed, how will they find you ascetically? In that, how will the church appear, physically, to the first time visitor? What is the first thing that strikes you about the church as you approach it? Try this. Walking along the street, starting from as far back as necessary, what meets the eye first and foremost as the church and its surrounds come into view? Is it a pretty picture? This is what the first time visitor sees, and the sort of things going through their minds will be things like - what will our friends think, is there enough parking, what will it look like in the wedding photos? The matters here are largely pragmatic and practical, and will seem obvious to many, however it is always worth taking a fresh look at the mundane and in some cases quite necessary to begin with the obvious.²⁵

(i) *The building and its surrounds*

²³ Mark Stephenson, 'Your website: more than a yellow pages ad', *Net Results* Vol. XXIX, No. 2 (March/April 2008), p. 7.

²⁴ <https://adwords.google.com.au>. This is a way of directing web traffic to your site, for a fee charged on a per click basis that can be capped so as not to exceed a pre-determined budget.

²⁵ A very helpful article by Susan Eaton Mendenhall identifies seven aspects of the church building that are of acute importance to the visitor but sometimes not 'seen' by the regular attendees – outside appearance, entryways, rest rooms, cast-aways, decór, fellowship time, clutter. 'Seeing your facility with new eyes', *Net Results* Vol. XXVI, No. 2 (March/April 2005), pp. 16-17.

Good stewards of property ask themselves what the building and the grounds might say to the first time visitor. Is it help! someone mow the lawns; we can't afford the paint; or something more positive? It doesn't take much, in normal conditions, to ensure the church grounds are in a neat condition. It can be as simple as keeping the lawns mown, the gardens weeded, and removing any build of rubbish and debris that might occur overnight or during the course of the week.

(ii) *The noticeboard*

The church noticeboard continues to be an important interface between the parish and the surrounding community, especially for those planning pastoral services. The fundamental questions should be answered - What is the name of the person I should contact to arrange the baptism, marriage or funeral? What is the phone number? Make sure there is an after hours number on the message if this is an office number. Is there a web site I can visit to look for more information? What are the Sunday service times? Sometimes those arranging for a pastoral service will attend on a Sunday to see the church and its leaders in action and possibly to introduce themselves and make their request known in person. An old, faded, or inaccurate noticeboard really is inexcusable, as are the interior pin boards featuring posters advertising events that took place a month ago and the brochure racks stacked with reports of Annual Meetings past. A small thing that can be done is to place on the interior noticeboard, typically in the church narthex or entrance foyer, a photo featuring of a recent marriage or baptism or both, with an explanatory caption (e.g. the baptism / marriage of N, this parish welcomes all seeking baptism / marriage). This sort of thing can be easily produced now on various computer programs with attractive and professional appearing results. It affirms and reinforces in a pictorial way that requests and approaches for pastoral ministry are welcomed.

(iii) *Inside the church*

Finally, what are things like inside the church. Some churches can do nothing much, without extraordinary expenditure, about their architecture, however all churches should be places of warmth, beauty, and peace, in their own way. Obvious things, such as carpet left dirty, old pew slips on pews, dying flowers, and dirty window panes are of course to be avoided.

We may not be able to do much with the external architecture of a church building that we have inherited... what we can do, though, is to aim to make the inside of our main parish building somewhere that is comfortable, the kind of place where those who are not used to church might be ready to stay for a while... To spend money on the comfort and aesthetics of our church building is in itself a mission activity.²⁶

3. Coming in through the front door

²⁶ Mike Marshall, 'Travelling towards faith: evangelism in the parish', in *The parish. People, place and ministry: a theological and practical exploration* (ed. Malcolm Torry: Norwich: Canterbury press, 2004), p. 151. Thankfully, this need not be a large and elaborate project or expense. As Carol Howard Merritt advises 'most small churches don't need to invest in a major construction program; they just need a couple of brushes, a bucket of paint, and a box of extra-large trash bags', 'If walls could talk', *Net Results* Vol. XXIX, No. 2 (March/April 2008), p. 15. The article is worth reading in its entirety, pp. 14-17.

All churches aspire to be places of welcome. All churches hope to grow and flourish. Many are actively engaged in 'outreach' projects and ministries to their surrounding communities, and instruct their members in methods of personal evangelism and in the practicalities of sharing their faith with others. All want to impact their local community for the Gospel of Jesus Christ, however that is perceived. For all our outward focus, however, it really is astonishing at how often we miss those who come to us, not as a result of our own evangelistic and missional efforts, but simply by walking in through the front door, calling by phone, or contacting us by email, to request the provision of a pastoral service. Bob Jackson notes in his wonderful book *Hope for the Church*, that 'a parish church should be open and welcoming to everyone in the community,' however many churches that think they are welcoming in fact 'only successfully welcome people like us'.²⁷ When 'they' come to us, seeking the provision of a pastoral service, we will very often be welcoming those who are unlike us and unlike our usual Sunday congregations. They may very well have little or no church heritage or background, and only a paucity of Christian formation, knowledge of the Gospel, or understanding of the traditions and practices of the church. It is precisely at times such as this that the true nature of our welcome will be tested. Is the door of your church really open, is it open part of the way, only ajar, or completely closed? Is it open only to some, or only conditionally? Or is it, in fact, closed.

²⁷ *Hope for the Church: contemporary strategies for growth* (London: Church House Publishing, 2002), p. 86.

Three: *Reaching out through rites of passage*

Pastoral services are often, and rightly, referred to as 'rites of passage'. They occur at important moments in people's lives – around the birth of a new child, marriage, and the death of a loved one. All sorts of emotions will come into play at these times. Because it is of such importance to them, the couple or family concerned will be investing a high degree of resources into the service – in regards to their time, emotionally, and sometimes (especially in the case of weddings) financially. Whereas, in times past, the Christian church could reasonably expect to impose its conditions and requirements on those approaching it, and just as reasonably assume acceptance with little or no compromise on the part of the church at all, this is manifestly no longer the case today and has not been for several decades. Whole industries have now developed around occasions like marriage. The rise of secularism has been accompanied by the advent of the civil celebrant offering a viable and rapidly expanding alternate service. The rampant consumer culture in which we live and conduct our mission reinforces the message that the recipients of what we call ministry will nonetheless usually view what is being offered through the all pervasive prism of market economics – they are paying (in the form of fees or donations), they are the consumer, they are the customer, and in return they will expect and demand quality, professionalism, and service. I am not here arguing the merits or otherwise of this, but simply stating the fact. This is the often subconscious position from which we are being approached by those who come to us.

1. 'Do no harm'

A good place to start in considering the conduct of pastoral ministry from the perspective of the practitioner (priest or other minister) and the parish, is the maxim *primum non nocere*. That is, 'do no harm'. This is the aged cornerstone of medical ethics, here provided with theological clothing. Do no harm. At the very least, the provision of pastoral ministry ought to be beneficial, not harmful or hurtful to either those requesting ministry and those providing it. There are few things more harmful and hurtful than a rejection – 'they refused to bury my father', 'they would not accept my baby as a Christian', 'my daughter had her heart set on being married at Saint...'. Think about the tone of voice, the body language, the reactions of those hearing the story, and imagine the harm being done. Not just to your parish or your church, but to the whole church of the living Lord Jesus Christ. Fewer and fewer people distinguish between denominations in the way that was once normal. The vast majority, and especially the younger age groups, will tend to view and experience 'the church' as a single entity – and when they come to you seeking a pastoral service, you will be very often representing by default the whole of the church, seen and unseen, across denominations. A large and important responsibility to be sure. There may well be occasions when requests cannot be met and a compromise cannot be reached – although I hasten to add that, in the many hundreds of pastoral services I have conducted, I have never had occasion to refuse anyone and never not been able to come to a satisfactory agreement with anyone. Whatever is done and said, and however it is done and said, the old adage is a good place to start, for the sake of the whole church and our combined mission here on earth. *Primum non nocere!*

The Miller family²⁸ approached me through a family friend. The situation was desperately tragic and somewhat inexplicable. A young woman in her twenties (we will call her Amanda) had taken her own life. She was on the verge of graduating from University in a professional occupation and seemingly had a blossoming career in front of her. Her family were just like any number of other families. Parents, hard working and dedicated to their children. Two older brothers, both of whom adored their sister. The Millers lived in an upper middle class area and had been able to send their children, including Amanda, to Anglican schools, seeking the very best in education for them each. The school Amanda attended had an historic connection to my parish and when this unthinkable event occurred, without any warning or logic, the family turned to St John's. The first contact was, as I have stated, through a friend of the bereaved family who were, understandably, not in a state of mind whereby they could make rational decisions. In their hour of need the only place they could think of to turn to for the provision of ministry at this time of loss and grief (and it was a ministry of the church they were requesting without actually knowing it) was St John's Toorak. The family friend was not sure the church could help, but I assured her we could. The family would want to have an audio-visual display of Amanda's life, one of her brother's was already working on it. Would that be okay? Of course, I answered. Although St John's had no data projector and was not set up for this, the details could be settled later. It transpired I personally arranged for the hire of the necessary equipment and two technicians to operate it. The other brother had some firm ideas about music (secular). Would that be an issue? No I replied. Amanda's family were not religious and had not attended the church for many years... At this point I stopped the family friend. There are no conditions on the love and compassion of God and that is in the 'business' we are in as a church I assured him, the church was there for this family and would assist in any way possible. For some this will be quite normal and the expected response, it is what any of us would do and say in the circumstances, whilst for others it may seem to be going too far and giving too many blanket approvals. But it would not be, I would strongly argue, for one Galilean prophet named Jesus who was quite prepared to go the extra mile. As we walked out of the church after the service celebrating Amanda's life (and it was a celebration, albeit one coloured by an extraordinary depth of sadness), I embraced her family on the doors of the church for the duration of the few moments we had before the following congregation were upon us. It was one of the most spirit-filled moments of my life. God was with us in a truly powerful way. My role had been small. I simply met them in their hour of need and provided the time, the place, and the instrument in the form of the liturgy of the church, to enable them to entrust the daughter they loved to God's keeping. Their gratitude was well beyond anything I had earned. How easy it would have been to make things hard, to give the impression we couldn't help, to umm and aghh about whether it could be allowed, if a visual display could be arranged, if 'that hymn' could be sung, to ask awkward or embarrassing questions about why that music etc. It would have been so easy to miss a moment and an experience in which God was so powerfully present. Months later I still encounter people who were at that service, witnessed that moment, or even know someone who was there and have heard of it. Many seeds were sown. Again, I stress, my role was very small. I simply said 'yes' to the requests as they came, because I was sure that was what the Gospel compelled me to do, and I led the service according to their wishes and within the liturgical integrity of the church. God took care of the rest.

2. Going the extra mile

In planning pastoral services today we almost always, at least to some extent, will be seeking to first bridge the all but complete disjunction that now exists between the Christian faith and church, and the

²⁸ Names have been changed.

social world in which we live. Whilst there are happy exceptions, the reality is, most of those of marriageable age and most new parents presenting a child for baptism are not coming to us for the same reasons as those who walk through the door each Sunday morning to attend services of worship in our churches. For most Sunday worshippers, their faith is personal and real and very important to them. The worship of almighty God is a large and important part of their life, as is the community of faith who worship alongside them, and the church building in which they meet for that purpose. The style of worship, whether the Anglican Prayer Book or another, will often be of further significance and importance to at least some of those who gather Sunday by Sunday. But this is not always, if often at all, the case for those coming to us for marriage, baptism, or to arrange the funeral of a loved one. For them, the church will become important, very important, for that one day, the day of the ceremony, and for a period of time in the lead up to it. After this, when the happy couple have left the church to the joyous greetings of friends and family, or the child baptized and carried out now a member of the body of Christ, or the casket bearing the mortal remains of a loved one has made its last journey out of the church and into the back of the hearse - the regimes of everyday life will resume and the importance of the Christian church (and probably that of the Christian faith) will recede into the background of their busy lives. For this reason, those seeking pastoral services will often approach us in a highly emotional state, out of complete or partial ignorance of the church, but with a disproportionately highly developed notion of what they want from us. Most parishes and parish priests will develop clear guidelines and policies around how requests for pastoral services are received and conducted. The place where most tension will be present is almost always that place where the requirements of the parish and / or the conscience of the priest and parish leaders coalesce with the wishes of the couple or family concerned. If there is going to be a battle, it is usually here that the battleground will be.

Among the common points of contention are these (all heard in recent years at St John's):

'Can we have godparents who are not baptized?

'I would like to involve some elements of my (insert non-Christian religious tradition) culture in the ceremony...

'My head bridesmaid is a man, does that matter?

'We would like the Collingwood (or other team) theme song played as dad is carried out of the church'²⁹

'We would like to write our own vows and say them to each other on the day

'I don't want much God language, can we edit out 'in the presence of God'?

'We would like to have (name) and his / her (same sex) partner as our godparents

'My best friend at school is now a (insert denomination) Pastor, no offence, but we want him / her to do the whole service

'Can we play a song by (insert name of secular rock band) as we leave the church, this is our song, it was playing on the radio when we met

Clearly there are some requests that simply cannot be countenanced. For instance, the increasingly heard request that a civil celebrant preside at a funeral inside the church is not something any Anglican priest is at liberty to grant. But even here there are ways to refuse without actually turning the family requesting this away. When I receive this request I will ask for a meeting whilst still being honest about the position of the church – 'I'm not able to agree to a civil celebrant leading the service, but let's meet and talk that through'. Almost always, once the family concerned have had their fears allayed and come to appreciate that their wishes can, in the main, be accommodated, they will reach a place of compromise that preserves both the integrity of the church and their particular wishes about how the

²⁹ This matter became a source of some controversy and media attention when effectively banned by the Roman Catholic church in Melbourne (as reported in the *Herald-Sun* newspaper, 10th September 2010).

service will proceed and who will speak etc. An example of this was the large and important funeral of a prominent person in my local community. A family friend, who was a licensed civil celebrant, had wanted to conduct the service inside St John's church. Rather than simply deny the request and turn them away, I arranged to meet both the family members planning the service and the civil celebrant. We talked it through, they explaining their wishes for the friend who was a celebrant to be involved, which turned out to be the express wishes of the deceased, and me explaining the position of the Anglican Church in relation to this together with my own position as a person under the authority of my Archbishop. They were refreshingly honest in admitting that the reason they approached St John's was that 'it's the only building in the area than can accommodate the five hundred or so expected to attend'. I explained that, under no circumstances could I allow a civil celebrant to lead the service. However I also offered to incorporate their wishes as much as I possibly could. From fearing I was going to be presented with a purely secular order of service consisting of eulogies and classical music, it soon transpired that they were more than happy to include the 23rd Psalm, the Lord's Prayer, and the Christian committal. We now had the basis of a Christian liturgy. They, furthermore, specifically wanted two hymns, one in particular that was a favourite of the deceased. It was looking more and more like a Christian funeral the longer we spoke. The civil celebrant's role was directed into the eulogies. He would give the main eulogy and would also have a role at the refreshments afterwards, in another venue, introducing a PowerPoint display of the life of the deceased. Of course I didn't care what he did afterwards, but I did inside the church. After some frank discussion he agreed to speak as a family friend at the point of the eulogy, and not to be identified as a celebrant. We had overcome the main hurdle. There was no formal space in the order of service I was eventually presented with for a bible reading, homily, or congregational prayers, however it was easy to work these into my opening and closing comments. After all, once I stood up to speak, who was going to close me down in my own church? The funeral turned out to be a grand affair that was a fitting celebration of the life of the deceased, and afterwards, both the family and even the originally combative civil celebrant, were pleased with the ministry offered and grateful for the role played by the church in their hour of need. It was, in the end, not that difficult! Some seeds of faith were sown and who knows (other than God himself) where they might take root and germinate.

There is no one right or wrong way to respond, however the guiding principle should be that modeled by Jesus himself in the Sermon on the Mount: 'if anyone forces you to go one mile, then go the second mile also' (Matt 5.41). For those willing to go the second mile a place of compromise can usually be reached in almost every situation. The bottom line is very simple – if, as in the example cited above, I had simply refused the request and turned the family away, several hundred people who might otherwise have never had a reason to enter St John's church would not have done so, would not have heard the proclamation of Christian hope given that day, and would not have had what (I hope) was a positive experience of the Christian church and Christian faith.

3. What are we trying to achieve?

Beginning with the premise of 'do not harm' and expressing a willingness to 'go the extra mile' gets us somewhere, but the key question in the provision of the pastoral ministries of the church is this - What are we seeking to achieve? When we set out to plan a pastoral service, or to develop a pastoral services policy, or when we hear and receive such requests, even if we respond on an *ad hoc* or case by case basis, the question at the forefront of thinking ought to be - What is it we are hoping and trying to achieve through the provision of this ministry? There will be, of course, be certain practical, administrative, legal, and theological imperatives present at a baptism, marriage, or funeral that must

be achieved. In the case of a baptism the Trinitarian formula must be used; in a marriage there are legal requirements to observe; at a funeral one purpose will be the reverent disposal of the mortal remains of the deceased. Usually these practicalities, together with the theological imperatives, will be carefully determined by the liturgy, denominational or other requirements, and the traditions, ceremonies, and rituals of the church. As well thought out, beautifully written, theologically sound, or as much practiced over many centuries as these may be, the ceremony itself is only one part (often a very small part) in the broader context of the ministry as a whole. In regards to funerals, although the principle applies to other rites also, Trevor Lloyd writes:

*We would want to see the funeral playing its part, not as the only way the church offers comfort to the bereaved, but as a focus or tool in a much longer process of helping the bereaved, not just to cope or overcome but to grow as people and to grow in faith. A short liturgical rite cannot do much in the way of caring, but it can open doors, lay foundations and avoid creating problems for the future.*³⁰

The message here is that the whole is greater than the individual parts, for it is the whole of the ministry offered that is significant and which is likely to be remembered and reflected on, either positively, negatively, or indifferently. Widely experienced and much read and sought after church consultant Tom Bandy is adamant that ‘environment is more important than liturgy, and experience is more important than information’.³¹ A year, or several years, after the event, the key participants (the couple being married for instance), let alone the congregation who were present, are highly unlikely to recall (without recourse to the video) what the readings were, the content of the sermon, or the nature of the prayers. Often they will not even be able to recall the name of the priest who presided just a year or so later (I say this out of personal experience!). This is especially true of the highly charged emotional atmosphere in which funeral ministry is offered and conducted. What will be recalled is the whole of the experience. Was the welcome warm and accepting, or grudging? Was the service put together in a capable manner, and led by a well practiced and qualified person? And most of all, did it meet the needs of those to whom the ministry was offered?

What a joy it is to hear words such as these:

‘We felt so welcomed and affirmed from the moment we walked into the church

‘Everything was perfect, from the time we picked up the phone and asked if we could book the wedding

‘So many people commented on the service, how wonderful it was

‘It was just the most beautiful baptism I have ever been to, it was so helpful to have the ceremony explained bit by bit so we all knew what was happening and, more importantly, why

‘When we really needed the church, when mum died, they were there for us

Such experiences will reflect well on, not only the host church and its leaders, but the whole of the church. A guiding principle might be then, in response to the question ‘what are we seeking to achieve?’, a positive experience on the part of all concerned, both on the part of those seeking the pastoral ministry and the congregation on the day.

4. The basic law of congregational life

³⁰ Trevor Lloyd, *Dying and death step by step: A funerals flowchart* (Cambridge: Grove publications, 2000), p. 22.

³¹ Tom Bandy, ‘Christmas visitors: how to ‘train to retain’ when the church goes public,’ *Australian Leadership* (Vol. 1, Issue 4, 2008), p. 8.

Up until now I have been discussing matters that are largely in the purview of the ordained clergy who will commonly deal directly with request for pastoral ministry or at least have a large and prominent role in determining how they are handled and met. However the congregation as a whole have a large and important role in this as well. Someone older and wiser than me once told me, in a moment of honest reflection on many years of ministry, that all clergy would do well to begin with the assumption that parishes are essentially selfish places because human beings are essentially selfish people. Many parishioners resent, or even oppose, the provision of pastoral services where the objects and recipients of the ministry are 'outsiders' or 'non members'. This is especially so where the demands are high. Those requesting pastoral services might be seen as unnecessary distractions, as hindrances to the mission of the church, or an unwelcome drain on the time and people resources of the parish. Even if it is stated or couched otherwise, the underlying issue at the core of this objection will often be that the parish priest spends most of his or her time meeting the demands for pastoral ministry from 'outsiders', and very little time tending to the pastoral and other needs of the faithful and committed parishioners who attend Sunday by Sunday and who finance the operation of the parish. The objection is, undoubtedly, a valid and understandable one. However it is also a denial of the imperative to mission declared by our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt 28.16-20) and shared by all Christians, priest and parish alike. American church consultant Bill Easum rightly understands the imperative to mission as the 'basic law of congregational life'.

*Churches grow when they intentionally reach out to people instead of concentrating on their institutional needs. Churches die when they concentrate on their own needs. This is the basic law of congregational life.*³²

Those who come to us seeking the pastoral ministries and services of the church are making the outreach part of this very easy for us. They came to us, we did not go to them. This is for us a 'free hit'. If we were wondering where to start in terms of our outreach, our mission, and evangelism, we could no worse than to begin with those who actually come to us. This is outreach without the effort. This is the great commission without the going. They are coming to us, asking to attend our church, and wanting our ministry. Wouldn't we be crazy to turn them away or to make it as difficult as we possibly could? As indicated by Bill Easum's 'law of congregational life', the manner in which we respond is also an indication of our overall health as a Christian community.

*Churches are healthiest when they reach out. Members are best nurtured when they nurture others... We have a need to help others. God made us that way. We find emotional and spiritual health by moving beyond concern for self.*³³

It will not be easy to change many years (nay centuries!) of church culture that essentially understood the role of the parish priest in terms of a chaplaincy – that the priest is there to care for the church members and to respond to their needs. After all, isn't that why we pay him / her? It will not be easy to help congregations and parishes understand that this is only one aspect of a multi-faceted ministry that is the ordained ministry. And it will be even harder perhaps to help congregations see and respond to those who come to us seeking the pastoral ministries of the church as a gift. Even so, this is precisely the task, or at least one of the tasks, facing the mainline Christian church in the early twenty-first century. One of the most practiced and experienced of all working in the area of church growth and renewal, Canon Robert Warren, puts this imperative plainly and helpfully in the passage below.

³² Bill Easum, *The complete ministry audit* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2nd edn, 2006), p. 93.

³³ *Ibid*, p. 93.

One of the striking characteristics of churches whose stories have been listened to in the healthy churches project has been the extent to which they have looked out beyond themselves and engaged with the whole of life and with the wider community. They are not ghetto churches, hiding from life. Rather, church is not the be-all and end-all of their existence. It is God's love for all creation and for all that is that motivates them – in the whole of their living. These are churches that embody the truth that we must stop starting with the church. The starting point for these churches is the world around them and the whole of life. They demonstrate in their life the truth that no group is happy or healthy unless it has a task to fulfil beyond itself.³⁴

³⁴ Robert Warren, *The healthy churches' handbook* (London: Church House publishing, 2004), p. 22.

Four: *The Service*

All corporate religious services, whether conducted in a church or elsewhere, constitute acts of Christian worship offered to almighty God in response to what he has already done for us in sending his Jesus into the world.³⁵

*Because it is God who always takes the initiative, Christian worship is best discussed in terms of response.*³⁶

*The main point... is that in genuine worship God is the subject – and we are not.*³⁷

*Gathering for worship is a God-centred activity which takes us beyond ourselves and into the realm of God's presence and sovereignty. This... is a deeply counter-cultural activity.*³⁸

Although the parameters of the term 'worship' are very wide, all acts of corporate Christian worship are, then, to be viewed in terms of a response to God - specifically, the response we human beings make to a holy and almighty God. This is true of the pastoral services of the Christian church, as it is true of other corporate services (such as those on a Sunday morning). Corporate gatherings of worship will, furthermore, always involve a liturgy, since undoubtedly specific words or actions will be performed at certain points of the service, to facilitate the nature of the human response to God (which is, in essence, the act or action of the worship), but also to achieve the particular purpose or goals of the service (for instance, the exchange of vows or the reverent disposal of the mortal remains of the deceased, etc.). The two –worship and liturgy - will always go together, and this is as true of the pastoral services as it is of Sunday services.

1. The 'L word'

Liturgy, to be sure, is a term treated in some parts of the church as a guilty family secret – something we once shamefully did in the past, but which is now disowned, or which are doing our very best to disown. I have even known colleagues who have claimed to have somehow abolished liturgy in their parishes, and who wear this claim as a badge of honour. We should be clear, from the outset, in recognizing that whatever is actually done or said in a pastoral service will constitute a liturgy. We should be further clear that liturgy does not equate to slavishly recited prayers, mind-numbingly long and tedious litanies, nor precocious ritual and ceremony presided over by an over dressed and pompous cleric. Liturgy (from the Greek *leitourgia*) in the New Testament describes both the performance of a service or ministry (Phil 3.20), and the corporate act of worship offered to God (Acts 13.2).³⁹ The English derivative 'liturgy' has

³⁵ For instance, a marriage conducted by a Christian priest on a beach is still an act of corporate Christian worship, as is a funeral conducted by a Christian priest in a funeral chapel.

³⁶ J. D. Crichton, 'A Theology of Worship', in *The study of liturgy* (ed. Cheslyn Jones et al; London: SPCK, 1978), p. 7.

³⁷ Marva J. Dawn, *Reaching out without dumbing down: a theology of worship for this urgent time* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 76.

³⁸ Richard Giles, *Creating uncommon worship: Transforming the liturgy of the Eucharist* (Norwich: Canterbury press, 2004), p. 20.

³⁹ Frederick W. Danker (ed), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 3rd edn, 1979), p. 471.

come to describe specifically the conduct of a religious service and especially, although not exclusively, the Eucharist.⁴⁰ In its purest and simplest form, the liturgy equates to the sequence or 'order' of the corporate act of worship or 'service' (hence an 'order of service'). It will determine what will be said, sung, and done, by whom (certain individuals or all present?), and at which point. The liturgy may be very simple, as simple as a few lines on a scrap of paper. It may be written hastily onto a post-it note or on the back of someone's hand. It may even exist entirely in the mind of the service leader. It may be printed into a booklet of any length and complexity, or it may be projected onto a screen. It may be determined by a Prayer Book. However it exists, there will be a liturgy, and this is true of the pastoral services – for at some point the child (or other person) will be baptized and certain words will accompany the ritual act; the couple being married will be required to say certain words in the form of the vows; at a funeral the deceased will be committed to God's keeping (and so on). The word that describes the content, the conduct, and the sequence of these events, is liturgy.⁴¹

2. Another 'L word' (leadership)

Many in the church and many of its leaders (often the same ones who seek to disown the term 'liturgy'), fear that the presence of a liturgy, especially a highly developed one such as that proscribed by a Prayer Book, will alienate people unused to 'religious' language and customs and that this is, therefore, to be regarded as an unnecessary barrier to engagement, evangelism, and mission in general. This is, no doubt, true, in many instances. We have probably all been to the Sunday morning service presided over by the priest who knows all of the corporate responses and where they are to be found in the Prayer Book, but who fails to share this information with the congregation. It's fine, of course, for the 99% present who know exactly where the service begins (p. 119 of course, as it does every week), but alarming for the two visitors present who are frantically looking for the opening prayer in the hymn book. Liturgy done badly can be dispassionate and alienating, or just downright boring.⁴² The presence of a highly developed liturgy, such as that found in a Prayer Book, can indeed be a barrier to inclusive, affirming, and engaging worship. But it does not have to be. To a large degree this will depend on the liturgical leader.

To be sure, what we might describe as 'church culture' is unknown at best, and downright weird at worse, to the vast majority of our fellow Australians. Attending a service in a church does, therefore, usually involve for many present the crossing of a 'cultural gap'. That is, the gap between the culture of the outside world, and that which exists inside the church. Whilst I would strongly argue that any culture, and any liturgy, and any ritual or ceremonial, can be learned quickly and effectively and is by no means a fatal hindrance to church growth, mission, or evangelism - the fact remains that 'the gap' exists and must be crossed. This is especially heightened at 'one off' pastoral services such as baptisms, marriages, and funerals, for those attending such services simply do not have time to acclimatize to the new culture, nor to learn and adapt to it. They have only just crossed the gap and will need to adapt to the new culture, and be initiated into it, instantaneously. In contrast, the first time attendee at a Sunday morning Eucharist might find the first few services a little strange and difficult, but will gradually become used to the language, the custom, and the ceremonial, over time, even if it takes several weeks, months,

⁴⁰ J. G. Davies (ed), *A new dictionary of liturgy & worship* (London: SCM, 1986), p. 314.

⁴¹ A useful and readable contribution, specifically on the value of written texts, is that of Michael Samson, *Why liturgical worship anyway?* (Bramcote: Grove publications, 1984).

⁴² Not surprisingly, the single most significant reason given for non attendance at religious services is, consistently, 'boredom'.

or even years, to effectively learn the new church culture and to completely cross the cultural gap between world and church until the time comes when the gap is for them non-existent. Those attending a pastoral service, many of whom will have little, or possibly no, prior experience of attending church services, simply do not have this luxury. For this reason, the sequence of the service and the conduct of the corporate act of worship is usually 'spelled out' for all present in considerable detail by the presence of an order of service, either printed and issued to all who attend as they arrive, or projected onto a screen. The order of this document will give direction as to who will speak and when, and what the sequence of events will be, together with clear instructions about the roles and participation asked of the congregation. Even when this is not present, the gap can still be crossed and the culture learned 'on the run' as it were, through the medium of calm, clearly enunciated, and frequently repeated directions. It is frequently the case that, at a wedding, the bride and groom will have only two words to say entirely from memory ('I will' or 'I do'), everything else being said 'after me' (the minister). Mindful of the enormity of the occasion for both bride and groom and that it is highly possible they have forgotten this or become uncertain about the response even though the rehearsal was only a matter of days in the past, I will often issue a reminder as part of the question of consent, prefacing those words with 'I will now be asking N. and N. to give their consent to their marriage here today each by saying I will'. This sets their minds at ease and enables full participation in an unobtrusive way. Similar such directions can be issued to congregations – it never hurts to note that 'Your response is to say together the words printed in bold' (many will, in all likelihood, not know this); or 'please do stand to sing the hymn' (many are the occasion when the hymn has been sung seated by congregations unsure or ignorant of the prevailing custom in Anglican churches at least); and again, 'I will now use the traditional words of greeting printed in the order of service, the Lord be with you' (without this announcement, or one like it, I have found, the greeting will usually be responded to at pastoral services, not with the customary 'and also with you', but with silence). This will all come down to leadership. A good liturgical leader will take as a starting point the assumption that at least some, even if a tiny number, present, will have no prior experience or knowledge of Christian worship and will, therefore, be utterly clueless when it comes to knowing what to say and when, what to do and when, and how to conduct themselves in church generally. Concise, but clear, directions will be required at each point of the service. These need to be delivered audibly and unambiguously. And it will not hurt at all to be repetitious (without insulting the intelligence of those present). The directions should, furthermore, relate not just to the words of the liturgy ('we say' or 'we sing' etc), but the conduct of the liturgy (i.e. the ceremonial). Don't assume anyone is reading the rubrics, if they are present, and never assume anyone present will know what they mean. Helpful and concise 'stage directions' should be given to enable the congregation to know when to stand (i.e. at the committal, 'we stand now as a sign of respect'), to alert the congregation to something that will be said together ('the prayers will conclude with the Lord's prayer which is printed in the order of service and which we shall say together'), and to introduce silences ('a few moments of silence now to remember N. before we commend him/her to God's keeping') lest it seem like the leader has lost his or her place in the book or forgotten what to do next. It is always helpful to tell the congregation what is happening – e.g. at a wedding, 'the bridal party will now be proceeding to the vestry to sign the marriage certificates'; at a funeral, 'upon leaving the church please proceed to the church hall where refreshments will be served'; at a baptism, 'the baptismal candle will now be lit as a sign that N. is to shine, like Christ himself, as a light in the world'.

3. Resources, readings & prayers

The content of the liturgy, and the liturgical resources used, will almost always be determined by the requirements of the denomination concerned. In the case of weddings, the requirements of Australian

law will also come into play, in that registered ministers of religion are permitted to conduct marriages according to the rites of the denomination in which they are ordained only (for this reason an Anglican priest, for example, enters 'according to the rites of Anglican Church of Australia' on the documentation).⁴³ Even so, within the marriage service and certainly in the funeral service, and to a lesser extent also at a baptism, there will usually be sufficient flexibility and ample room for personalisation, so that an order of service that meets the needs and wishes of both the couple and / or family concerned and the priest / minister and church, can be met. This is a missional imperative.

*The mainline church has largely forgotten that we are called to be missionary church in a missionary situation. Jesus calls us to relate to secular people who are not actively involved in the life of the Kingdom through a local community of faith by learning their language, sharing their lives, experiencing life as they experience it by living among them. As we plan for worship, we are constantly asking ourselves whether the language, music, images, stories, and visuals we are using will be intelligible to people who have not been inside the church before.*⁴⁴

Many are the liturgical battles fought over matters, both trivial and weighty, when planning for pastoral services; and thick on the floor is the liturgical blood spilled over demanded concessions to the text of the liturgy, the content of the prayers, and omissions and / or additions to the form of the service etc. This is undoubtedly because it is here, at weddings, funerals, and baptisms, that the interface between the church and its culture, and 'the world' and its culture, is at its broadest and most critical. No doubt it will need to be conceded at this point that there will always be some matters that are denominationally 'non negotiable' (such as adult or infant baptism), and some matters over which individual clergy will 'go the wall' (e.g. 'under no circumstances will I allow that hymn be sung in this church'). What should be determinative is, however, not individual tastes, likes, and dislikes, but the mission of the church, and this should take priority in line with the principles articulated earlier ('Going the extra mile', above). It is understandable perhaps that some will want to react to the rapidly diminishing role and importance of the Christian church and faith in the secular environment, or to the equally rapidly diminishment of their own congregations, by imposing themselves upon those who come 'from the outside' seeking a pastoral service. However there is no doubt that the spectacle of some clergy, determined to fight theological and liturgical battles with the profoundly non-theological and un-liturgical, is a sorry one that is damaging to the mission and reputation of the church, especially when this occurs, as it often does, at a time of great personal grief and vulnerability (funeral) or what should be a time of great joy (wedding) for those coming to us. It's time for some of us to grow up, adapt to the changed circumstances of the church, and accept that the provision of the pastoral service is not just an activity of the church and an act of Christian worship, but in some very real sense and purpose, it is 'their' service also.⁴⁵ Although reflecting on the ability (or non ability) of Anglican Christians to hold together a variety of traditions and theologies within the one church, the thoughts of Brian McLaren below are equally applicable to the dialectical tension often experienced between a church and its leaders with those from within local and extended community who might come to it requesting a pastoral service.

⁴³ See the Commonwealth of Australia, Marriages Act 1961, sec 45 (1).

⁴⁴ James A Harnish, *You only have to die* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), p. 160.

⁴⁵ In relation to marriage Henry Everett notes that, 'it is uncomfortable for many Christians to accept, but what is commonly referred to as "Christian marriage" is a relatively modern concept. For much of the first millennium of the Christian era marriage in itself was not regarded as a special part of the Church's domain'. *A companion to Common Worship* (ed. Paul Bradshaw: London: SPCK, 2006), Vol. 2, p. 180.

*Compromise (like tolerance) is a dirty word for many Christians. It suggests a lowering of standards. But it is a beautiful word (like tolerance) if you are trying to live in community with others.*⁴⁶

Compromise within the context of a respectful dialogue will often be required in regards to weddings and funerals in particular where the couple being married and the family planning the funeral will almost always expect to have at least some part, if not a fairly high degree of involvement, in the planning and conduct of the service. Here, again, we reach back to the all important question of what we are trying to achieve. Is it a fight to the death over purism in liturgy, theological integrity, or is it an expression of the unconditional love and welcome of our Lord that takes priority?

*A wedding that is truly memorable to the bride and groom, their families, and the gathered assembly, is both tailored to the couple's needs and offers a high degree of personalization. The music, words, and actions of all involved certainly aid in creating an environment of welcome and comfort, in essence, wedding services may, to a certain extent, be regarded as a means of outreach, aimed at touching people's emotions, souls and lives.*⁴⁷

(i) 'Watering down' the text

Even where priests and pastors proceed from a missional perspective and a willingness to welcome and accept all who come to them, and are quite willing to let go of personal likes and dislikes and put aside trivial or inconsequential objections; there may still be some places where the liturgical resources used may need to be explained and possibly re-worded, in order to accommodate some of those who come to us. The issues here are more complex and difficult than wrangling over particular hymns, music, or readings, or whether or not a fishing rod representing the deceased's passion for angling can be placed on the coffin etc. Many are they who have, at a wedding and funeral in particular, expressed a desire to 'water down' the language, change the wedding vows, or even remove altogether any references at all to God. Clearly this makes a nonsense of the pastoral ministry as an act of Christian worship and cannot be countenanced. Rather than an immediate and outraged refusal, however, there should always be room for a dialogue that seeks to gently explain the position of the church and the clergy and help those requesting a change to come to an understanding of, and appreciation for, the presence of the offending terminology and of why it must remain. In some instances there may be room for compromise at the discretion of the cleric. I have sometimes encountered, for instance, those uncomfortable with 'renouncing Satan' at a baptism service. Here alternative words, that still preserve the requirement to reject evil and its embodiment in the scriptural figure of 'the Satan' can usually be found that are more palatable to the parents and godparents and the congregation.⁴⁸ At a wedding, where the couple concerned had their hearts set on writing vows of their own, it can often be easy to accommodate them by insisting they say the vows set out in our own liturgical resources which to a large extent constitute the rites of our particular tradition, but then have the liberty to say some words meaningful to them, to each other.⁴⁹ The guiding principle here is this – there are very few circumstances, and in my experience almost none at all, in which a place of compromise cannot be found where the willingness to dialogue,

⁴⁶ *A generous orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), p. 235.

⁴⁷ J. Wayne Pratt, *Wedding services* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), p. viii.

⁴⁸ *Common Worship 2000* (The Church of England) includes an alternative for of 'the Decision' that omits the requirement to renounce Satan or 'the devil', with the caveat that there must 'strong pastoral reasons' for its use.

⁴⁹ This is, arguably, within the spirit of the second order marriage service from *A Prayer Book for Australia 1995* (p. 662) which suggests a form of words that may be said by the couple after the vows with the rubric *the couple may say*.

understand, and 'go the extra mile' is present, even where the initial request is an attempt to 'water down' or 'de-Christianise' the service.

(ii) *Music*

Music is often the area where the false distinction between 'sacred' and 'secular' is most keenly asserted. Even so, most of those who lead services in churches know full well that, just because a piece of music was composed in the Baroque style, or a hymn written in Victorian times, this does not make it any more 'sacred' than other compositions. The prevailing ethos will almost certainly be determined by the stance of the parish priest and what might be described as 'local culture.' In my present ministry situation, for instance, an oratorio from an opera, usually performed by a soprano or other qualified performer, is frequently a feature of funeral services inside the church. In another parish, in a working class suburb of outer Melbourne, the wedding march was a recorded version of a song by rock band Aerosmith. Strangely enough, it worked well in this setting and seemed appropriate to the couple concerned and their friends and family. Conversely, an opera oratorio would not have been appropriate here, any more than Aerosmith would have been in St John's Toorak. Once again, it is really matter of context and contextualization, that should almost always be able to be worked out in dialogue with those requesting the ministry. As I write, I have just returned from leading a service celebrating the life of one member of what had been a jazz quintet performing regularly around Melbourne. The family, quite naturally, asked that the surviving members of the group be invited to lead the music and singing in the church service, and our parish organist was gracious enough to allow this. I received this note from one of the family.

Thank you also for being so accepting and flexible in allowing the jazz band to play the hymns. I know it was probably fairly unusual for that to happen, but once again it meant a lot to dad and also to the family to be able to do that.

(iii) *Readings*

The distinction made above (sacred and secular) in regards to music applies often also to the readings. Whilst at a wedding and a funeral there will always be at least one reading from the Christian Scriptures, there is no reason why there can not then be further readings from places other than the Christian Scriptures, especially when this is requested by those planning the service. At St John's, we provide families planning weddings and funerals extensive resources in regards to both readings from the Bible and from non-biblical or other courses.

(iv) *Prayers*

The single most common complaint heard after a pastoral service, in my experience, goes like this – What have they done to the Lord's Prayer? Similarly, one of the most frequently asked of all specific requests at funerals and marriages I conduct is something like this – 'can we please have the proper Lord's Prayer.' By this is meant the 'old version'. The source of the complaint is, of course, the presence in all of the most recent Prayer Books and other liturgical resources of a 'modernised' version of the Lord's prayer which is often unknown to those who have not attended church regularly in the past and especially to those in the older age groups who, if they remember any prayer, remember the Lord's prayer in the 'old language'. Although it is of course increasingly the case that those coming to us do not know any version of the Lord's Prayer, old or new, on many occasions it will be appropriate that the majestic language of the 'old version' be used in place of the modern one, and this is especially the case

at funerals; although I hasten to add that I frequently hear requests for the 'old version' from couples being married also. It's simply a matter of being sensitive to the needs and expectations of the recipients of the ministry, and being aware of the presence of the 'old version' of the Lord's Prayer in the introductory matter to *A Prayer Book for Australia 1995* (p. xi) with the accompanying rubric 'where the Lord's Prayer is ordered to be said in this book, the following traditional form may be used'. Finally, and most importantly, it is absolutely crucial that the prayers be offered and led in a manner that does no harm. If doubtful that you have recalled all of the names of the family members concerned then don't do it, pray for 'the family' generically. If you don't know anything about the couple being married be very cautious in praying for the 'love and devotion of their parents' (they may be deceased or estranged) or 'for the gift of children' (how do you know the bride can in fact have children or wants to?) etc. Conversely, prayers for all who mourn are always appropriate, as are prayers for the future success and flourishing of the marriage.

(v) *The homily*

One point that normally lies entirely at the discretion of the clergy is, of course, the sermon, homily, or 'wedding address'. I expect many reading this will be surprised, perhaps offended, even angered, by what I am now going to say about the sermon / homily in the context of a pastoral service – it is not the most important element of the service. In fact, I would go so far as to say it is among the least important elements of the service and ought to be approached with considerable flexibility. Furthermore, I would maintain that there is high potential to cause more harm than good by viewing the sermon or homily as an opportunity to 'convert' those present, and this is especially the case at funerals. Of course, I expect there are those who were converted to a life changing faith in Christ whilst attending a wedding, baptism, or funeral, and I further expect readers will not hesitate to furnish me with the details of instances known to them or recorded in the annals of church history. However I am willing to assert that these are wonderful exceptions. Honest preachers will admit that, despite delivering homilies perhaps on hundreds of occasions at such services, not a single known convert has ever been won for the faith through the preaching of a convicting sermon at a wedding, baptism, or funeral. I would be willing to further assert that, should a poll have been taken of a sample of those attending pastoral services over the years, the single most common response to the homily or preaching would almost certainly not be a positive (not 'my life was changed', or 'I found my faith'), but overwhelmingly a negative – too long, boring, offended by (insert reasons here) etc. Richard Giles notes that there are times when a homily may be intrusive:

*The liturgy properly celebrated can be said to need no embellishment by way of additional words or commentary; as proclamation goes it is powerful enough in its own right. It can be a conversion experience... Let the liturgy speak for itself.*⁵⁰

Where a homily is desired or necessary, he further argues that it be located carefully within the overall structure and flow of the occasion, and not be an 'additional' or 'stand alone' feature.

*The homily is a work of preaching that knows its place as a component of the liturgy; it makes way for the greater good of the whole experience of a composite and many-faceted act of worship.*⁵¹

⁵⁰ Richard Giles, *Times and seasons: Creating transforming worship throughout the year* (Norwich: Canterbury press, 2008), p. 12.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 13.

I am not here arguing categorically against including a homily. I am, however, arguing for a degree of flexibility, creativity, and most of all sensitivity, in approaching the homily and crafting something that will sow and plant seeds for future nurturing and growth, rather than aiming to produce fully grown and mature faith where no seed has even been sown previously. Let's be honest and cut the essence of the matter. The reality is, those attending the wedding, baptism, or funeral are not there to hear a beautifully crafted three point sermon – they are there to witness this important moment in the life of a family member or friend. Conversely, and somewhat inexplicably, then, many preachers and leaders invest the majority of their time and effort into this one portion of the service that is of little or no relevance or importance to the congregation present. This is where the principle I articulated above becomes so important – what are we trying to achieve? If the answer is to perhaps, just maybe, find one convert by boring, putting off, or offending the majority of those present - then a ten minute homily on the basis of the Christian faith and the need for personal conversion will be the right call. If, however, we will be seeking to cast the net as widely as possible, to influence as many as possible present, and to scatter the seeds of faith as broadly as possible - it is the whole event that will be of utmost importance. In the context of the whole, the homily is just one component. Andrew Body, in his excellent *Making the most of weddings*, written specifically for priests and parishes, points out that, using the presence of a largely 'unchurched' congregation gathered for the occasion as a 'recruitment drive' for new members is tantamount to the same charge often leveled against those seeking pastoral services by the clergy and some vestries – that they are using us!⁵² The end result, and the overwhelming purpose, should be to ensure that all present, and especially the couple or family immediately concerned, experience the ministry offered in a positive light. If so, then a seed has been sown. My own practice has been to leave in an order of service such as a wedding or funeral a place for 'the ministry of the Word' at which point the reading/s from the Bible are included (as they must be), leaving flexibility also for a homily at this point following the reading as is anticipated by the Prayer Book without actually proscribing a set place to the 'the homily'. There may be good reasons for varying the usual pattern of a homily or address immediately following the reading/s. At one wedding the resilience of the bride and groom, having passed through great personal difficulties to reach the altar, was of prime importance – the homily at this wedding was incorporated into the prayers of thanksgiving to reflect this situation. At several funerals, especially in the case of sudden and tragic death, the homily has needed to come first, after the opening sentences and prayer, to claim the occasion and set it within a faith context, such was the grief, shock, and sometimes anger, of the congregation. On many occasions I have abandoned the carefully planned homily in my notes and done something entirely different, to complement the occasion (frequently, for instance, after hearing the eulogy at a funeral). A homily may take the form of some opening remarks, it may constitute the gathering, it may be incorporated into a eulogy, it may precede the readings and set them in context, or follow the readings so as to explain and apply them. It may preface the prayers or even take the form of the prayers. It may be a closing exhortation. It may be that the homily is embedded within the whole of the liturgy and has no recognizable 'slot' of its own.

⁵² *Making the most of weddings*, p. 5. Rather, he rightly encourages his readers, 'we need to see more clearly that our role is about allowing space for people to encounter the love of God in the way that is possible for them'.

Five: *Sowing seeds*

The exercising of ministry at a significant time in the life of one who comes to us is a Gospel imperative in which we hope to sow a seed of faith that might take root in the lives of those who are recipients of the ministry, at a time when the 'soil' of their life might become fertile in accordance with the unseen work of the Holy Spirit.

Again Jesus began to teach beside the lake. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the lake and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the lake on the land. He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.' And he said, 'Let anyone with ears to hear listen!' (Mark 4.1-9).

It is never wrong, however, to assist this process, and to build on any goodwill generated by the provision of the service, in an intentional way. Below some simple and straightforward measures are offered as a template or basis for a fuller parish discussion and consultation. The time to begin is before they come to us!

(i) Develop a pastoral services policy

A clearly defined policy, agreed to and ratified by the parish council or vestry and its pastoral leader, is a good place to begin. This need not be an elaborate document, but should set out the agreed position taken in regards to some of the questions that typically arise in relation to the pastoral ministries – e.g. what about requests for other clergy to officiate, who gets the surplice fee, what about parishioners and their families, do we allow the Masonic or RSL rites? etc. For an example policy see Appendix A. The development of such a policy often leads to further questions about the preparation for, conduct of, and pastoral 'follow up' offered to those presenting for pastoral services. As the vestry is 'responsible for the promotion in the parish of the whole mission of the Church – pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical' (*The Churchwardens and Treasurers Manual*, p.16) it is healthy for such matters to be broadly discussed and that as many minds as possible be brought to bear on how these ministries can be opportunities to not only offer practical care and compassion in a Christian context, but also as a bridge into the life of the Christian community and into the Christian faith.

(ii) Worship is evangelism

Priests and parishes, and surprisingly often those in possession of century old bluestone buildings set in beautiful surroundings, frequently under-estimate the evangelistic potential of the church building. In the same way what takes place in the building, whatever its condition or appeal, is often similarly underestimated. The reality is, however, that attendance at a service of Sunday worship is still one of the most common ways 'outsiders' and newcomers enter a Christian community and it still the case that the

majority of first time visitors to a church enter through the ‘Sunday worship door’.⁵³ The Sunday morning service is, furthermore, the parish at its most authentic. This is who we are. It is what we do. A good starting point for those seeking one of the pastoral services (especially marriage and baptism) is to offer to meet for the first time immediately after they have attended a Sunday morning service. The advantages in this are mutual. It gives the couple concerned an opportunity to see the church ‘in action’ and the space being used for divine worship which is quite different to how it is empty of people. It also provides them a chance to see the priest model how he or she leads a public service and conducts themselves. This will (hopefully) engender confidence in the ability and professionalism of the cleric who is to marry the engaged couple or perform the baptism. The parish staff (especially administrators) have an easy answer to all requests from those wishing to meet the parish priest in advance of a pastoral service – come along any Sunday (although this will not be appropriate for funerals which usually need to be planned in a much shorter time frame, and common sense and flexibility should still be part of the response, not everyone’s work, family, or other commitments will allow them to attend on a Sunday morning). The real value, and the missional imperative, in such a policy is, however, that it brings people who are already at least interested enough in ‘the church’ to want to be married in it or to have a child baptized there, through the door and into the worshipping life of the community. It does so in a gentle and mutually beneficial manner – it is not as if they are being asked to attend a twelve week Alpha course or the like, it’s just a single Sunday. My usual practice in regards to weddings is to sign the couple’s Notice of Intention to Marry form after they have attended a service on a Sunday morning, usually over coffee after the service, rather than in a separate appointment at another time. I make this the first face to face contact, unless there are good reasons for acting otherwise. A small parish in Leicestershire (UK) found that

*The effect of the church services on couples is remarkable. According to one of the incumbents, most of the couples are ‘unchurched’ – in other words, people who have had no connection with any church in the past. He finds that because they have fewer ideas to undo, they are much more receptive to the Christian message than those who once went to Sunday schools.*⁵⁴

Again, we should not under-estimate the potential for our worship to be a vehicle of mission. One small taste of worship done well is one seed sown into one life (or more). Hopefully, they will want to come back, perhaps not until Christmas or Easter, or when there is next a need for pastoral ministry. If they do, another seed is sown. And if, in a quiet moment of reflection, or perhaps after a crisis or difficulty, or upon encountering Christianity in another way or context, they decide to ‘give the church a go’, the seed may even begin to bear fruit. And the congregation may also benefit, for if they know any church it is the one they came to, who made them so welcome and who did such a good job with the marriage, baptism or funeral.

(iii) *The data base is your best friend*

Keeping in touch after the provision of the service is absolutely essential for any parish engaged in mission to its community. However it is patently obvious that you can only do so if you have obtained in the first place the contact details of those who come to you and have developed a reliable method for storing and maintaining them. There are many efficient computer programs that can achieve this. The key point is that the data base is only as good as the information put into it. No parish in this computer

⁵³ Peter Kaldor et al, *Mission under the Microscope* (Sydney: Lancer, 1994), p. 102.

⁵⁴ Andrew Body, *Making the most of weddings*, p. 66. He further observes that ‘far from feeling invaded, small and struggling communities of largely elderly worshippers have been reinvigorated by these pre-wedding visitors’.

age should not be able to call up a list of every baptism in the past five years (for example) and then generate a mail out by post or email or both advising all on this list of the next 'All Age Family service', children's Christmas service, or forthcoming Sunday school program etc.

(iv) *Staying in touch*

The potential for staying in touch and keeping in touch with those who have come across our path through the provision of the pastoral services of the parish is large. Parishes that have responded to the digital age are doing this in a variety of ways – by the use of social networking media such as Twitter and Facebook, through compiling an email distribution list (as described above), and by sending text (or SMS) messages. The downside to these forms of communication is that they are, to varying degrees, impersonal. It's very easy to dump the church or its priest as a friend or follower from Twitter or Facebook, and even easier to delete email messages. The very best form of keeping in touch will be to find a way of communicating something that the receiver wants or needs, or at least finds useful or interesting. The weekly church bulletin, written almost exclusively for the 'insiders' who attend every week, will probably not be worth sending to those who do not attend and are not, on the face of it, all that interested in what happens in the church now that their wedding, baptism, funeral is over. The alternative possibilities are, however, many. There is the old fashioned, but still useful, 'cradle roll', a congratulatory card sent on the first anniversary of marriage, that may include details of the parish children's ministry program and services also. Certainly everyone who has presented a child for baptism should be invited to children's, all age or family services, or to services that are especially relevant to children whatever nomenclature is used to describe them. It is unforgivable to miss the opportunity to do this at Christmas! No parish should be without a children's Christmas service, however simple, and this is by far the most fruitful opportunity to invite those baptized in the parish in year's past to renew their connection to the church. There are other opportunities to make full use of the church year - a special renewal of wedding vows service on St Valentine's day or nearby to which all married in past year's are invited; a service of remembrance around the time of All souls day or near Christmas to which those who have experienced a bereavement are welcomed, in addition of course to the usual invitations to Easter and Christmas services. These suggestions are by no means exhaustive and are offered here only as suggestions to commence prayerful and thoughtful reflection on what will work or be worth trying in your context, since every situation will of course be different.

(v) *Offer Christian formation*

It may come as a surprise to some that there is plentiful evidence, albeit primarily anecdotal and experiential, that the younger generations in particular are demonstrating a level of openness, interest, and respect for the Christian tradition that simply was not present in previous generations. I expect, without being a sociologist or undertaking a lot of research on this matter, that this is at least partly because those whom fit broadly into what is being called Generation X and Generation Y did not and have not rejected Christianity in the same way as previous generations (especially the baby boomers).⁵⁵ For them, the traditions, rituals, and ceremonies, and especially the more 'ancient' and mystical ones, are all new, interesting, and engaging.⁵⁶ There is certainly among those presenting for marriage and

⁵⁵ See the helpful discussion 'Challenge of the Four Generations' in *Building the mission-shaped church in Australia* (Sydney: General Synod, 2006), pp. 12-17.

⁵⁶ For more on this see the thought provoking article by Wheaton College (United States) Professor of New Testament, Gary M. Burge - 'Are Evangelicals Missing God at Church? Why so many are rediscovering worship in other traditions', in *Christianity Today* (October 6th 1997), and the article by Eric Reed, 'Return to ritual: three

baptism, who predominately fall into these age groups, an openness and a respect for 'the church' that provides plentiful 'good soil' with which to work. It is often as simple as asking the question – 'do you want to know more'? Even to our astonishment we might find that the answer will occasionally be 'yes'. Some couples will indeed want to learn more about the church they are to be married in, its history, traditions, and rituals, and willingly join a small group offering instruction in this. Those presenting a child for baptism should be encouraged to join such a group, at least prior to the baptism of a first child. In fact, everyone coming across the path of a parish church should at least be offered the opportunity to do so. For these reasons it is important, if not crucial, to the mission of the parish that there be an existing formation program that anyone can join at any point. At St John's, *Emmaus: the way of faith* fills this need, but here are many other such course or programs that may do so. Anyone interested may enter the Emmaus program at our parish at any point as it runs continuously as part of the 5pm Evening Service of worship in the side chapel. Participants can 'jump in' and 'jump out' as they wish, and be formed and instructed in the faith at their own pace. Whatever material or program is used, and however, it is worth reminding ourselves that the provision of the pastoral service and ministry, be it a baptism, marriage, or funeral, is very frequently a beginning rather than an end in terms of a point of connection between an individual or family and a parish church. There is a strong case to be made, in the light of the missional context we find ourselves in, for re-orientating our thinking, especially in regards to baptism and marriage, about the service being an end point rather than a beginning, with those requesting the ministry being required to undertake certain programs and to meet certain requirements in order to 'qualify' or 'earn' the provision of the ministry. Whilst preparation of some nature is, of course, essential for both baptism and marriage, it would be unfortunate to present this exclusively as a means towards an end, at which point, once the marriage is solemnized or the child baptized, it need not be endured further. Far better, in my experience, to offer preparation that is neither onerous nor restrictive, nor worse of all designed to weed out those failing some sort of 'faith test', with a view of seeing the provision of the baptism or marriage, not as an end point, but as the beginning point for an ongoing dialogue and relationship between the individual or family concerned and the parish, with most of the formation, instruction, and discipleship occurring after the provision of the service and not prior to it. After all, baptism is initiation into the church, and marriages and funerals are often times of great personal transition and change, at which time there is frequently a willingness to explore matters of faith and spirituality. We would do well, very well, to shape our ministries to those presenting for pastoral services with the widely known and appreciated insights of recent research firmly in mind. Whereas in the 1970's near to 70% of practicing Christians could trace their 'conversion' to a datable moment or event, by the final decade of the twentieth-century the reverse was true, with 69% describing their 'conversion' as a gradual process or journey that could not be dated to a definable moment or event.⁵⁷ This concords with the trend among postmodern people in this post-Christian age to belong before believing with the behaving (modification of lifestyle) coming last of all.⁵⁸ Expecting those

churches find new meaning in old ways', *Leadership* (Winter 2009), pp. 33-35. Of particular relevance also is the collection of stories and quotations by Gary Charles who asserts that church attendance and belonging among postmodern people is an essentially counter-cultural activity. *The bold alternative: staying in church in the 21st century* (Louisville: Geneva press, 2001), pp. 14-27.

⁵⁷ Dave Tomlinson, *The post-evangelical* (London: Triangle, 1995), p. 143. Tomlinson quotes the researcher, John Finney, as further maintaining that 'the gradual process is the way in which the majority of people discover God and the average time is about four years' (p. 143). This is affirmed by Nick and Hazel Whitehead, *Baptism matters*, p. 54.

⁵⁸ For further discussions of the belonging, believing, behaving concept and trend, and associated ways of understanding Christian theology, praxis and ecclesiology - Eddie Gibbs & Ian Coffey, *Church Next: Quantum Changes in Christian Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity press, 2001); Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004); Stuart Murray, *Church After Christendom* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press,

who do not yet belong to both believe and behave, or insisting they do as a condition for the provision of the service, would seem a reactionary and unhelpful move in this social milieu.

Clearly, there is high potential, through the provision of the pastoral services of the church to those who come to us, for many seeds to be sown into a great many lives. Our prayer is, of course, that these seeds germinate, take root, and produce fruit bearing faith, for the glory of God and his church. But let us be mindful always that a seed is fragile and easily lost, discarded, or crushed. For us who are now Christ's disciples and followers and members of his body the church, mission and evangelism begins at home, with us. For the seeds of faith to be sown in the lives of those around us, we will need to first ensure that our parishes, our buildings, our congregations, and our ministries, are themselves fertile ground, welcoming, nurturing, and sustaining those who come to us. The sound advice of Nick and Hazel Whitehead, in the context of baptism, rings true.

In this postmodern age there are some who will disavow any faith and have scant knowledge of Christianity but this gives your church the opportunity of laying the first foundation-stone by your welcome, your attitude towards them and your honesty about the faith you and your congregation share. Do not expect a great response from such people; that joy will be for another Christian community, in another place, perhaps many years from now. The nature of the mission of the Church is that the seeds we sow may well be watered by another and the harvest reaped by yet another. We cannot expect to see the whole picture instantly and we must rest content with that.⁵⁹

Finally, the wise and fitting counsel of Bob Jackson seems an appropriate place to conclude:

God is love. Love is the only new commandment Jesus gave us. To be loved is the deepest human need. To love God and others is all we have to do. The liberation theologians were right all along – God is more interested in ortho-praxis than orthodoxy. His ultimate aim for us is right behavior rather than right belief. Nevertheless, it is our belonging to the Church and our believing in the faith that lead to our behaving as Jesus' followers.⁶⁰

2004); The Church of England, *Mission Shaped Church: Church planting and fresh expressions of church in a changing context* (London: Church House publishing, 2004); Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom: church and mission in a strange new world* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004); Stuart Murray: *Church after Christendom* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005).

⁵⁹ *Baptism Matters*, p. 24.

⁶⁰ *The road to growth: towards a thriving church* (London: Church House publishing, 2005), p. 223.

Appendix A

A sample pastoral services policy

Preamble

Pastoral ministry is an integral part of the whole ministry of the people of God. In a parish setting, pastoral ministry is the responsibility of both the clergy and laity working as a team to effectively reach out to, nurture, and care for all who come to us.

1. Definitions

- 1.1 The term 'pastoral services' here relates to the preparation and conduct of the pastoral offices contained in the A Prayer Book for Australia 1995. These are principally Marriage, Baptism, and Funerals, although other services such as Ministry to the Sick, Confession, and the Blessing of a House etc. may also fall into this category.
- 1.2 In this context 'pastoral services' are distinct to 'pastoral ministry' which encompasses much more than the preparation and conduct of services.
- 1.3 Usually requests for services such as Marriage, Baptism, and Funerals will come to the clergy or be directed to the clergy, and the service conducted by the Vicar or Assistant Curate.
- 1.4 The preparation and conduct of pastoral services are, however, the shared responsibility of the parish as a whole, and of the clergy, churchwardens, and vestry in particular: 'the Vestry is responsible for the promotion in the parish of the whole mission of the Church – pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical.' (*The Churchwardens and Treasurers Manual*, p.16). For a large number of people today, the initial or only contact they will ever have with a Church community is through the exercising of one of the pastoral services. It is essential then, that our response commend the Gospel and our parish community to all who come to us.

2. Marriage

- 2.1 All requests for Marriage in the parish are directed, in the first instance, to the Vicar.
- 2.2 Preparation is conducted by the Vicar.
- 2.3 Fees.

i. Church Fee (\$)

This provides for the use of the church for the rehearsal and the marriage ceremony, the provision of flowers inside the church, the preparation and lodging of all necessary forms and certificates

- ii. Celebrant Fee (\$), paid directly to the cleric who conducts the service.
- iii. Organist Fee – (\$), paid directly to the organist.

iv. The Vicar, in conversation with a couple preparing for marriage, may choose to waive the Celebrant and / or Church fee for pastoral reasons. Where one or both of the persons being married are regular members of the congregation, or closely related to a regular member of the congregation, the Celebrant and Church fee will be waived. The family concerned may make a donation to parish funds.

2.4 Flowers

Flowers will be provided by the parish. It is sufficient the floral arrangements be those normally present in the church on Sundays. Those normally rostered on to arrange flowers will be contacted and advised of the time and date of the wedding to assist in their preparation and may call on others more experienced to help them. The couple concerned may indicate preferences for the type and colour of the flowers.

- 2.5 Requests for the Conduct of Marriages by clergy from outside of the parish

From time to time requests are made for persons other than the parish clergy to conduct marriages in one of the parish centres. The following policy reflects generally accepted clerical etiquette.

- i. Normally the Vicar or Assistant Curate will conduct all marriages within the parish. Other options should not be offered and only canvassed if specifically raised by the enquirer.
- ii. In some circumstances, the vicar may invite another cleric holding the Archbishop's license to assist in the Marriage ceremony and / or conduct the service, where a genuine pastoral reason for doing so exists.
- iii. Ministers ordained in denominations other than the Anglican Church are unable to conduct pastoral services in an Anglican Church, however may be invited to participate if requested to do so.

3. Baptism

3.1 All requests for Holy Baptism in the parish will be directed, in the first instance, to the Vicar.

3.2 Preparation is conducted by the Vicar according to the following process.

3.3 The Baptism Ceremony

- i. Baptisms will be conducted at a time and place determined by the Vicar in consultation with those bringing the person for Baptism.
- ii. Where the request comes from a regular member of the congregation, or a close relative of a regular member of the congregation, the ceremony may be conducted within the context of a normal Sunday service.
- iii. Where a Baptism takes place outside of a service of worship: the parent/s and / or godparents of a child baptised in the parish will be required to attend a service of worship the following Sunday at which time the certificates will be presented and the 'Welcome' liturgy conducted.

3.4 Fees

'The gospel sacraments of holy baptism and holy communion should never be subject to fees, and any freewill offerings in connection with them should go into parish funds.' (Charles Sherlock, *A Pastoral Handbook for Anglicans* [publication details], p.10).

4. Funerals

4.1 Pastoral Responsibility of the parish

The exercise of Funeral ministry occurs at a time of personal loss for the family and friends of the deceased who are involved in the preparation and conduct of the service. It will be essential for a parish policy, and for all involved with the conduct and planning of the service, to maintain a genuine concern and compassion for the bereaved that properly reflects the nature of Gospel ministry.

4.2 Requests for the conduct of Funerals in the parish will be directed to the Vicar, or if the Vicar is unavailable, the Assistant Curate.

4.3 Preparation for the service will be conducted by the cleric who will preside in consultation with the family and friends of the deceased.

4.4 Fees.

- i. Fees payable to the parish are applied by the Funeral Director (not by the parish) and included within the total cost of burial.
- ii. Where the funeral service is that of a member of the parish, or a close relative of a member of the parish, no parish related fees of any kind will be applied.

4.5. Flowers

Flowers will be those provided by the parish for Sunday services unless other arrangements are made.

4.5 Requests for the Conduct of Funerals by clergy from outside of the parish

Any requests for persons other than the parish clergy to conduct a funeral will be directed to the Vicar. The sensitive nature of funeral ministry demands that such requests be treated flexibly and with

appropriate discretion and compassion for the needs of the bereaved. The vicar will respond on a case by case basis.

4.6 Masonic and RSL services

The parish has no objection to including the Masonic and / or RSL rites at the point of the committal, if this is the express wish of the family of the deceased.

Appendix B

Resources

There are any number of resources relating to the pastoral services and ministries, and to the conduct of the liturgy, readily available today. Many are written for the 'professionals' who will lead such services, some for the participants preparing for them, and some for both. I have tried to select below, in the various categories, some resources that will be especially useful to those who are engaged in, or who wish to be engaged in, a ministry of welcome to those who come to us for the provision of the pastoral services. Whilst there will be considerable amounts of information and material within each of the resources recommended below that do not relate directly to this purpose, I have intentionally selected those which do at least address this purpose or will offer some assistance in seeking to address it. Resources about the theology of baptism, marriage, or funeral ministry, are not to be found below. The emphasis is on the provision of the ministries and the conduct of the service itself.

1. Mission, evangelism & the outward looking church

Bayes, Paul. *Mission-shaped church: building missionary values*. Grove evangelism series 67. Cambridge: Grove books, 2004.

Bayes, Paul & Tim Sledge. *Mission-Shaped Parish: Traditional church in a changing context*. London: Church House publishing, 2009.

Cowdell, Scott. *God's next big thing: Discovering the future church*. Melbourne: John Garratt Publishing, 2004.

Drane, John. *The McDonaldization of the church: spirituality, creativity, and the future of the church*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000.

Ford, Kevin G. *Transforming church: bringing out the good to get great*. Tyndale house publishers, 2007.

General Synod, Anglican Church of Australia. *Building the mission-shaped church in Australia*. Sydney: General Synod, 2006.

Gibbs, Eddie & Ian Coffey. *Church Next: Quantum Changes in Christian Ministry*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity press, 2001.

Gilchrist, Alison. *Creating a Culture of Welcome in the Local Church*. Grove evangelism series 66. Cambridge: Grove books, 2004.

Grierson, Denham. *A people on the way: congregation, mission & Australian culture*. Melbourne: The joint board of Christian education, 1991.

Hale, Stephen & Andrew Curnow (eds). *Facing the future: bishops imagine a different church*. Melbourne: Acorn press, 2009.

Harnish, James A. *You only have to die: leading your congregation to new life*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2004.

Hughes, Bronwyn & John Bellamy (eds). *A passion for evangelism: turning vision into action*. Adelaide: Openbook publishers, 2004.

Jackson, Bob. *Hope for the church: contemporary strategies for growth*. London: Church house publishing, 2002.

Jackson, Bob. *The road to growth: towards a thriving church*. London: Church House publishing, 2005.

McLaren, Brian D. *A Generous Orthodoxy*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004.

Mead, Loren B. *The once and future church: reinventing the congregation for a new mission frontier*. New York: The Alban institute, 1991.

Murray, Stuart. *Church after Christendom*. Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2004.

Roxburgh, Alan J. *Reaching a new generation: strategies for tomorrow's church*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity press, 1993.

Schroeder, Annette. *Welcome to our church: a handbook for greeters and ushers*. St Louis: Concordia, 1997.

Slaughter, Michael. *Unlearning church*. Nashville: Abingdon, new edn, 2008.

The Church of England, *Mission Shaped Church: Church planting and fresh expressions of church in a changing context*. London: Church House publishing, 2004.

Thomas, Richard. *Counting people in: changing the way we think about membership and the church*. London: SPCK, 2003.

Warren, Robert. *The healthy churches' handbook*. London: Church house publishing, 2004.

Webber, Robert E. *Ancient-future evangelism: making your church a faith-forming community*. Grand Rapids: Baker books, 2003.

2. Pastoral ministry (general)

Kinast, Robert L. *Sacramental pastoral care: integrating resources for ministry*. New York: Peublo, 1988.

Osborne, Kenan B. *Christian sacraments in a postmodern world: a theology for the third millennium*. New York: Paulist press, 1999.

Sherlock, Charles (ed). *A pastoral handbook for Anglicans: guidelines for pastoral ministry in the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne*.

3. Baptism

Buchanan, Colin. *A case for infant baptism*. Grove worship series 20. Cambridge: Grove books, rev edn, 2009.

Carter, Kenneth H. *Just in time: Baptism services, sermons, and prayers*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2008.

Earey, Mark, Trevor Lloyd & Ian Tarrant (eds). *Connecting with Baptism: a practical guide to Christian initiation today*. London: Church House publishing, 2007.

Whitehead, Nick & Hazel. *Baptism matters*. London: Church House publishing, 1998.

Withers, Margaret. *The gifts of baptism: an essential guide for parents, sponsors and leaders*. Oxford: The Bible reading fellowship, 2002.

4. Marriage

Body, Andrew. *Making the most of weddings*. London: Church House publishing, 2007.

Dormoor, Duncan. *Just cohabiting? The church, sex and getting married*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004.

Forster, Greg. *Taking a Wedding: A Step-By-Step Guide for Church of England Ministers*. Grove pastoral series 121. Cambridge: Grove books, 2010.

Langford, Andy. *Christian weddings: resources to make your ceremony unique*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2008.

Lewis, Brad (ed). *Marriage Ministry in the 21st Century: The Encyclopedia of Practical Ideas*. Loveland, CO: Group publishing, 2008.

Pratt, J. Wayne. *Just in time! Wedding services*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2008.

Read, Charles & Anna de Lange. *Common worship marriage*. Grove worship series 162. Cambridge: Grove books, 2001.

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5. Funerals

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6. Liturgy & worship (general)

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Earey, Mark & Carolyn Headley. *Mission and liturgical worship*. Grove worship series 170. Cambridge: Grove books, 2002.

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Michno, Dennis G. *A priest's handbook: the ceremonies of the church*. Harrisburg: Morehouse publishing, 3rd edn, 1998.

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Varcoe, Gillian (ed). *A Prayer Book for Australia: a practical commentary*. Sydney: E J Dwyer, 1997.

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7. Liturgical resources

Churches' Group on Funeral Services at Cemeteries and Crematoria. *Funeral services of the Christian churches in England*. Norwich: Canterbury press, 2001.

Liturgy Office of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. *In sure and certain hope. Rites and prayers from the Order of Christian Funerals for the use of lay leaders*. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999.

McCarthy, Flor. *Funeral liturgies*. Dublin: Dominican publications, 1994.

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The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia. *A New Zealand Prayer Book*. Christchurch: Genesis publications, 1989.

The Anglican Church of Australia. *A Prayer Book for Australia*. Sydney: Broughton books, 1995.

The Archbishop's Council. *Common Worship: services and prayers for the Church of England*. London: Church House publishing, 2000.

The General Convention of the Episcopal Church. *The book of occasional services*. New York: Church publishing, 2005.

8. Software

e-pray (distributed by Broughton publishing)

www.e-pray.org.au

An indispensable resource for anyone using A Prayer Book for Australia 1995 on a regular basis. Containing the full text in digital form, with numerous helpful tools and applications.

Together in Song

www.togetherinsong.org/Software/ParishEdition/tabid/66/Default.aspx

Digital form of the Australian Hymn Book II Together in Song.

Celebrant Assist

www.celebrantassist.com.au

A very helpful resource for those with a good number of weddings. The software contains templates of all government certificates and allows the user to easily enter the relevant data. In addition are several helps such as calendar, checklist and planning tools.

9. On line

<http://www.alban.org>
<http://churchconsultations.com>
<http://www.cpas.org.uk>
<http://www.grovebooks.co.uk>
<http://www.churchesandfamilies.org>
<http://www.flamefamily.co.uk>
<http://www.focus.co.uk>
Useful groups, organizations or publishers.

<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/lifeevents/lifeevents/baptismconfirm/baptism1.html>
<http://www.yourchurchwedding.org/default.aspx>
<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/lifeevents/funerals>
The Church of England site contains a wealth of useful information for those preparing for, or planning for, the pastoral services of the church.

<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/worship/liturgy/commonworship/texts>
<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/worship/liturgy/commonworship/texts/newpatterns/index.html>
The full text of the pastoral services from the Church of England Common Worship 2000 Prayer Book, and the excellent companion New Patterns for Worship 2002, are available online.

<http://www.bride.com.au>
<http://www.i-do.com.au>
<http://www.easyweddings.com.au>
Australian sites providing wedding general resources for the wedding ceremony.

http://www.ag.gov.au/www/agd/agd.nsf/Page/MarriageGetting_Married
The web site of the Attorney-General's department (Australian government) provides information regarding the legalities of marriage in Australia, including downloads of official forms and of the marriages certificate, together with other relevant legislation.

<http://weddings.about.com/od/yourweddingceremony/a/ReadingsLibrary.htm>
<http://www.weddingreads.com>
Sites providing a library of readings, biblical and non-biblical, for the wedding service.

<http://www.funeralhelper.org/index.php>
A comprehensive collection of resources, sacred and secular, for the funeral service.

<http://www.suite101.com/content/how-to-plan-a-memorial-service-a51910>
Resources and information specific to a memorial service.

<http://www.grief.org.au>
<http://au.reachout.com/find/articles/suggestions-for-managing-grief>
<http://www.youthbeyondblue.com/factsheets-and-info/fact-sheet-16-dealing-with-loss-and-grief/>
Resources for those coping with grief and loss.

<http://bible.oremus.org>
Full text of the Bible, in searchable format, especially useful for printing, cut and paste, or emailing the text of readings.

<http://www.cyberhymnal.org>

<http://www.weddingguide.co.uk/articles/wordsmusic/hymns/hymnsforyourservice.asp>

Searchable data base of hymns with words and sound files.