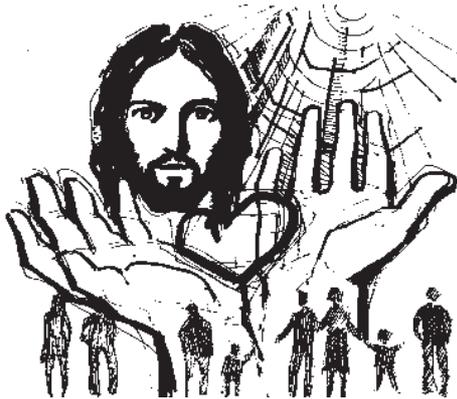


Newsletter July 2011

Community

From the Director and Canon Theologian



Community is central to the Church. "We, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another", as Paul reminded the Christians in Rome. It is simply not possible to be a Christian on one's own: even those who are, by calling or by circumstance, living a solitary life are still members of a community, a community which includes those who live in other places and other times. When we meet for Eucharist on Sundays the service begins with 'The Gathering of the Community' as the people are greeted informally and then with liturgical sentences; a recognition that, though we may have arrived at the venue as individuals or as groups of friends or families, when we worship we do so as community.

Yet for many of us in churches the *idea* of community looms larger than the reality. Over the years I've heard many comments from people lamenting what they see as the absence of real community in parishes: the extent to which they feel they must dress up, not in hat and gloves any more, but in smiling faces that mask the difficulties they are experiencing in personal, family or spiritual life, the hiding of struggles, the lack of knowledge they have of one another's Monday to Saturday lives. There are ways to break down these barriers. The simple act of being more intentional about community or taking time to share food together and to get to know each other at a deeper level can help. The parish I am part of has a shared meal once a month, and we are discovering, as one person has noted, that

we are becoming "friends, rather than fellow parishioners". Beginning each vestry meeting by reading and reflecting on scripture together also deepens our relationships with one another.

However, community is *hard*. Real communities are made up of real people, with all the tensions, insecurities and disagreements over seemingly little things that can occur. (Just look at the way Anglicans can fight over furniture!) This newsletter examines the theory, but more importantly, the practice of Christian community in a number of 'real world' settings. Justin Duckworth reflects on the way community is lived out within Urban Vision: "the good times are amazing; and the bad times are a nightmare". Darryl Ward looks at ministry to the marginalised and the demands of compassionate community in all sorts of unlikely places. Finally, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's classic on Christian community, *Life Together*, still has lessons for real parishes today: full of sometimes cranky people, complaining about each other's ways of doing things, yet called together by Christ to work and witness to love and grace. That's the thing we can so easily forget about Christian community: we think it is something we have to do, that we are in charge of making it happen. We need to remember that we are community, one body in Christ, because God has called us together like that, and God's help will form us into a truer and deeper community.

This year's Synod will focus on community: here are some perspectives to get us thinking ahead of time.

Canon Deborah Broome

Advance notice WIT roadshow on Revelation

15 October Palmerston North

29 October Carterton

5 November Wellington

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Community: dwelling together as the body



Bishop Tom and members of Urban Vision sign their Covenant.

Community is one of those fascinating words. Most people love the vague concept, but few really have a good understanding of it. In our youth, Urban Vision recognised the Bible taught a lot about dwelling deeply together as the body. The very metaphor of 'body' speaks of a close, integrated connection. Different pictures of community leap out at us from scripture: the close knit discipleship community of Jesus and his disciples; the idea of the Trinity being the community of God; that God chose in Israel to call a 'people' into being that would be a blessing to all; that we will be known as disciples of Jesus by our love for one another.

How can we say we love the God we do not see, if we do not love those we can see? As young Christians we struggled with how to live out this challenge to love - to community- within a 21st century western, urban context of radical individualism. Our desire to live more closely together, and to give 'our best for the least', while remaining passionately committed to Jesus, led us to form Urban Vision. Urban Vision was our attempt at theology in action. From reading the scripture we have learned how we can realign our lives and create structures that make it easier to be faithful to these biblical imperatives, and harder not to.

After 15 years or more, this commitment to community is still central to Urban Vision. We are still working at how to faithfully engage with scripture that calls us into deep belonging. Our response has been to connect our lives more deeply through relocating to communities with high needs, living together or in close proximity with each other, worshipping together, and serving together in these neighbourhoods.

We have made decisions that prioritise these commitments. We often choose to work part-time to have more time with each other, and in our neighbourhoods. We realise that in belonging to our Urban Vision neighbourhoods, we can't belong deeply elsewhere, so we limit our other commitments. Saying 'Yes' to a particular community means saying a strong 'No' to other worthwhile distractions. For instance, we choose to be

careful about taking responsibilities within parishes; as we recognise the best way we can serve our parishes is to be a committed, worshipping, serving community in our small neighbourhoods.

Reflections on this way of life after 15 years

Many are attracted to the idea of community, they want deeply to belong, but are unwilling to pay the price of belonging.

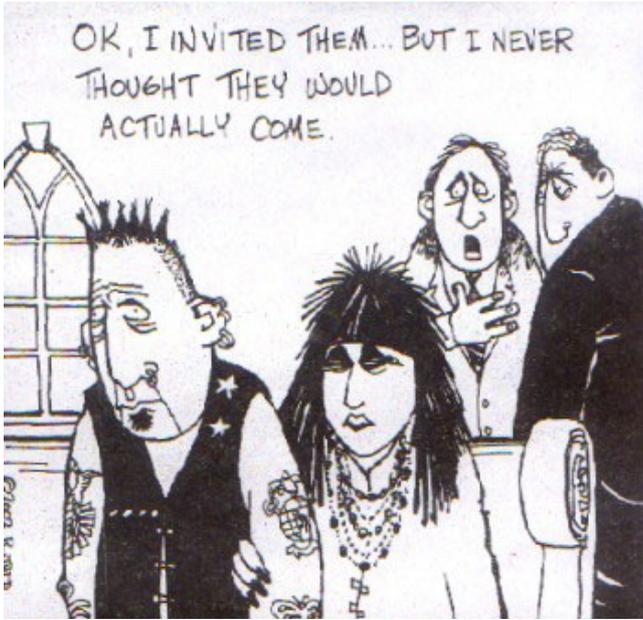
- Community is an incubator for discipleship.
- To want community is to embrace conflict.
- Paraphrasing Bonhoeffer: Those who seek to serve, build community; those who seek community, kill it.
- Community is an amplifier: the good times are amazing; and the bad times are a nightmare.
- Without community it is very hard to sustain Kingdom values in the face of the weight of cultural pressure to conform.
- Wider society is crying out for community and belonging, in Jesus and our history we have the resources to be able to offer society some hope.

The tragedy is that the Church as the people of God has often become 'individuals of God', making an oxymoron of Church.

Urban Vision is but one attempt of many at this point in history, of Christians in Aotearoa trying to connect more deeply with the Kingdom story of God calling a people. There are numerous attempts or models out there, the challenge is to, within our unique contexts, incarnate this Gospel again. The hope is that every neighbourhood in New Zealand actually has a passionate community of believers present proclaiming the good news of Jesus in word, action and community.

Reverend Justin Duckworth

An angel on Cuba Street: ministry to the marginalised



If I had to make a list of those people who have made the biggest impressions on my life, one person who would be guaranteed a place on the list would be my friend Sam. I have known some fairly unconventional people, individuals who simply did not fit the moulds into which society expected them to fit, and Sam was certainly one of them. With shocking peroxide hair, which was not as common then as it is now, and clothing that made a strong statement even by today's standards, Sam turned heads everywhere she went.

Meeting Sam for the first time could be an interesting experience. She could come across as being very militant, yet the only times I ever knew Sam to become genuinely angry were when issues of social justice were at stake, when people who could not speak out for themselves were being exploited. I also knew her well enough to know that behind her sometimes brash exterior was an individual who was not only selflessly compassionate, but also quite vulnerable. I do not actually know how Sam would have labelled her spiritual identity, for back then we did not overly concern ourselves with labels. It was our ethical principles and how well we followed them that really mattered. I would say though that she would not have been especially keen on the label 'Christian', mainly because of the hypocrisy she would have seen in some people who liked to apply that label to themselves. Sam did however have a special fondness for Mary, and her flat was filled with beautiful pictures, icons and little statues of Mary, all of which she treated with genuine reverence.

Sam's occupation as listed on the electoral roll was saint, but I do not think that she was trying to be funny. Rather, it was a statement of her innate desire to do good, and her life quite probably came closer to my understanding of saintliness than that of anybody else I have known. Sam had many varied talents. She was a poet, a musician and a film maker, but it was for her voluntary work with the more vulnerable and dispossessed members of society that I held her in the highest esteem. Organisations like City Mission do wonderful work with the homeless and the

marginalised, but Sam took her ministry to places that City Mission could never reach. She would have been too modest to have even realised it, but Sam's work was a powerful revelation of Christ in word and action. She provided love and care to some of society's most rejected and despised people, such as street prostitutes, drug addicts and people with AIDS.

One night, she asked me if I would like to accompany her on her rounds through some of the murkier enclaves of Cuba Street. I was not overly keen, but I found myself saying yes. We walked through dark streets and alleyways and met various people that I must confess I would have preferred to have avoided. After all, it is not a good look to be seen talking to prostitutes in shop doorways in the middle of the night. However, I needn't have worried. They all knew Sam, who was right at home with them, and she seemed to understand their fears and insecurities and made sure they were as well as they could be in the circumstances. An older transsexual summed her up quite succinctly that night by telling her that she was an angel. An angel she might well have been, but Sam, a young woman with so much to give, died tragically 17 years ago at the age of 31.

Not only did Jesus mix with those who were considered outcasts, He was comfortable in doing so, and this made those people confident and relaxed enough to open themselves up to Him. As members of Christ's body, the Church, we too must show true compassion to those who need it. We are all called to be ministers, and my definition of ministry is revealing Christ in word and action. Having compassion for society's most rejected and despised people is a powerful demonstration that unconditional love really is available to everyone. Each of those whom the world seems to have forgotten is a person whom deserves to be loved and respected. To serve them as Christ did is a privilege more than a duty, and one that truly brings us closer to Him, and if we see Christ in them, then they might just see Christ in us.

Darryl Ward

Adapted from a sermon based on Matthew 15:21-28, which was preached at St. Mark's Church, Raumati Beach, Parish of Kapiti, on 17 August 2008.

Contact us

The Wellington Library is located based on the first floor of the Anglican Centre, 18 Eccleston Hill (off Hill Street), Thorndon, Wellington.

Contact Administrator/Librarian Ashley Edge at 04 472 1057 (library) or WITLibrary@wn.ang.org.nz

Contact Director Deborah Broome at 04 475-9085 or debroome@paradise.net.nz

The Palmerston North Library is located at St Peter's Church, 229 Ruahine St, Palmerston North.

Correspondence should be addressed to the WIT Council c/o the Anglican Centre.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: *Life Together*

(Translated by Daniel W Bloesch & James H Burtness. Fortress, 2005. 1st written 1938)

I first read *Life Together* while at St John's College. I read it again last year as part of my Bonhoeffer studies. It's Bonhoeffer's reflections on Christian community based on the common life he formed for those under his charge while he was running the underground Finkewalde seminary, before the seminary was abruptly shut down by the Gestapo. That tells us two things: that it's written out of an actual experience of community (rather than some merely theoretical musings); and that the community which gave rise to these reflections was a particular type of community, a residential seminary of young men preparing for ordained ministry in the Church. There's somewhat of a debate over whether what Bonhoeffer says in *Life Together* would 'work' in a 'real' community, such as an ordinary parish.

For the most part, I think it does. Bonhoeffer reminds his readers not to take for granted the privilege of being part of a community of other Christians, whether this involves living together, sharing a brief encounter, or in "the gift on Sundays of the community of the worship service". He is clear the members of a Christian community are connected to one another by Christ. "We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ." Together, we are part of the community of faith, "the community of those who are called".

Part of Bonhoeffer's appeal for me is that he consistently wants Christians to live within a real rather than an ideal world. He knows how petty, how judgemental and how

full of complaints church communities can be. He does not shrink from pointing out any of this, but he insists that we look at things not as we want to see them, but as they are in God. This includes the Church itself. "Christian community is not an ideal we have to realise, but rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate."

Christ does not only open up the channel between humanity and God, he also makes it possible for human beings to relate to one another. "Now Christians can live with each other in peace; they can love and serve one another; they can become one. But they can continue to do so only through Jesus Christ. Only in Jesus Christ are we one; only through him are we bound together."

In Bonhoeffer's view, "the goal of all Christian community is to encounter one another as bringers of the message of salvation." There is humility here, an acknowledgement that we cannot depend on our own resources but need the assistance of someone else. "Christians need other Christians who speak God's Word to them." This is a vision of community that is created and sustained by Christ and by a shared relationship with him. The members of a community are there to help each other to live the Christian life, and especially to live that life in the face of a surrounding society that may be indifferent or hostile to the gospel. That is one of the reasons why *Life Together* is as worth reading today as it was for its original audience.

Canon Deborah Broome



The economic, ethical and theological implications of growth in a finite world

A one day seminar brought to you by the Wellington Theological Colloquium.

10.00 am - 5.00 pm Saturday 6 August, St. John's Church, Willis St, Wellington.

Overview: Dr Raymond Pelly

Economic growth, biophysical limits and Christian ethics: Jonathan Boston

Growth, justice and development: Gerard Burns

The economy of God and Jesus' missional imperatives: Gavin Drew

Panel discussion: Lisa Beech, Petrus Simons, Simon Smelt and Charles Waldegrave. Chair: Lyall Perris

Registration: Pre conference - waged \$30.00, unwaged \$10.00. On the day - waged \$40.00, unwaged \$15.00. Morning & afternoon tea provided. Please bring your own lunch. For further information email: WITLibrary@wn.ang.org.nz