

June 2011—August
2011 Winter

Knox Life

The quarterly magazine of
Knox Presbyterian Church

WE ♥
CHCH



Dear friends

Two weeks ago I returned to work in my office at the Knox Centre at 28 Bealey Avenue. As I set about cleaning and putting things back in their places, I couldn't help noticing the clock that had fallen off the wall on the 22nd of February, losing its battery in the process. Its hands were still pointing to 12.50, and for a moment I was reminded of what was going through my mind at that time, on that day. Someone said to me recently that everyone who was in Christchurch on the afternoon of 22 February has a story to tell – some have several – and over the last weeks and months it has been a privilege for me to hear a number of them from members of our church and wider community either in their own homes or as we've gathered at various locations for worship.

As I've listened, it has occurred to me more than once that Jesus was really onto something when he couched his teaching largely in narrative, rather than in dogmatic form! As humans, we are story-telling beings; by sharing our stories we give meaning to our lives in the world.

Since 22 February 2011 – actually since 4 September 2010 – our world seems to have become a lot less predictable, and life has become much more difficult for many of us as a result. The 'new normal' is not a comfortable place to be for many of the inhabitants of Christchurch, and with winter approaching things will probably get worse before they get better for some. So it's really important for us to keep doing what people of faith and goodwill have always done in response to a crisis: keep meeting together, keep supporting one another, keep loving our God, our neighbours, our enemies (for this, perhaps substitute 'complete strangers') as ourselves. And if you're looking for practical examples of how to do that, read on... Both as a congregation and as part of the Presbytery of Christchurch, we have been blessed with the support of many other congregations and individuals in the form of donations, offers of respite care and places for people to stay outside the city for a while should a break be needed.

As the weather gets colder, I want to encourage us all to take care of ourselves and each other. If you or someone known to you in our community is in need, please get in touch with your elder, our session clerk Janet Wilson, our pastoral assistants Judith Challies and Bob Fendall or myself so that we can do something to help. And please put your own safety first on winter mornings – whilst it's always great to see people gathering for worship, I would rather visit people at home in good health than in hospital with broken ribs, legs or hips after slipping on an unseen patch of ice!!

By the time you read this, we will be approaching the year's shortest day, and I imagine all of us will be ready for some kind of enjoyable distraction from life's less pleasant realities. With the Knox Centre (hall, lounge, kitchen etc) now open we hope to be able to organise a midwinter social gathering of some kind. Details are yet to be finalised, but the aim will be to provide an opportunity for cold, tired hearts and bodies to be warmed by sharing good conversation and food one afternoon or evening – we'll do our very best to let you know!

I leave you with the words of a short poem entitled 'changes,' from the book 'Comfort Prayers,' which has in recent weeks been a source of strength and encouragement to me:

Storm settles into quiet
Darkest dusk leads to a dawn,
Bleak winter melts to springtime ,
And the tide turns –
Hold on.

[Sharon Hudnell]

Yours in the compassionate, hopeful spirit of Christ
Geoff King

Grandparents raising their Grandchildren

I have been very aware of time lately especially when I have to give my date of birth. I read in the newspaper that an elderly person has had an accident and realise that I am older than this person and here I am still raising children and dealing with problems that should have been left behind years ago.

Now it is a dress for the school formal and next week it is the braces being removed. At night it is the lying in bed wondering where they are and why their phones are on silent. The mornings bring other problems like waking up on time to make sure that they get up and arrive at school on time. I often wonder what it would be like to wake when I am ready and fill in my day choosing to do as I please.

I know that many go through with these routines just like me. They say it keeps you young but we know that underneath the young there is an 'elderly' 'wanting to get out. I look at our 'Grandparents as Parents' group and see young grandparents now acting as parents. They are able to blend into the crowd and look like older mothers but many also wish that they could just be grandparents to their grandchildren and send them home at the end of the day.

We must think how lucky we are to have these children to love and cherish and have the thrills of them knowing us so well. I imagine as they grow and mature we will hear them say "My Gran taught me to" and we will always be remembered for the great life we gave them as they grew up. That is more than some of their peers will have as memories.



As 'Grandparents as Parents' we must keep up the great job we are doing .We can look at the children we have raised and now feel really proud of the job we have done. **Society should be really proud of us !!!**

Gwenda Swinney

Breathing exercise to slow the breathing

4-7-8

This exercise is utterly simple, takes almost no time, requires no equipment and can be done anywhere. Although you can do the exercise in any position, sit with your back straight while learning the exercise. Place the tip of your tongue against the ridge of tissue just behind your upper front teeth, and keep it there through the entire exercise. You will be exhaling through your mouth around your tongue; try pursing your lips slightly if this seems awkward

Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound

Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of **four**

Hold your breath for a count of **seven**

Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of **eight**

This is one breath. Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths.

Note that you always inhale quietly through your nose and exhale audibly through your mouth. The tip of your tongue stays in position the whole time. Exhalation takes twice as long as inhalation. The absolute time you spend on each phase is not important; the ratio of 4:7:8 is important. If you have trouble holding your breath, speed up the exercise but keep to the ratio of 4:7:8 for the three phases. With practice you can slow it all down and get used to inhaling more and more deeply.

The exercise is a natural tranquilliser for the nervous system. Unlike tranquilising drugs which are often effective when you first take them but then lose their power over time; this exercise is subtle when you first try it but gains power with repetition and practice. Do it at least twice a day. You cannot do it too frequently. Do not do more than four breaths at one time for the first month of practice. Later, if you wish, you can extend it to eight breaths. If you feel a little light headed when you first breath this way, do not be concerned; it will pass.

Once you develop this technique be practicing it very day, it will be a very useful tool that you will always have with you. Use it whenever anything upsetting happens – before you react. Use it whenever you are aware of internal tension. Use it to help you fall asleep. This exercise cannot be recommended too highly. Everyone can benefit from it.



SAVED !

One of our Knox ladies who had joined a pottery group gave me a bowl from her selection. At last it was my turn to arrange the flowers for Knox and I decided to use the bowl for the first time. That was the time of the February earthquake and everything, seemingly, was badly damaged.

My bowl of flowers! What had happened? There was a mess and we weren't allowed to enter the hall. I couldn't even see through the doors, but I imagined it smashed on the floor!

Time passed and we were having a special service to welcome the Lifeline folk back into the building. It was our usual Wednesday Bible study morning, so of course I was there too.

To my great surprise, my lovely green bowl, complete with oasis and wire over the top, and a good coating of dust was there on the table in the foyer, just waiting to be claimed. I was overjoyed, and shared my joy with the lady who made the bowl. It was saved to be used again.

Noeline Bain

Special Project Building Holistically for the Future

Each year the Presbyterian and Methodist Women's Groups hold a Special Project. This year the funds divided between supporting HAITI and HABITAT FOR HUMANITY in NEW ZEALAND.



In January 2010 a magnitude 7 earthquake struck 16 miles from Port-au-Prince, Haiti's capital. It was the region's worst earthquake for over 200 years. Haiti, already the poorest country in the western hemisphere, will take at least ten years to recover. Christian World Service helped fund relief supplies and now needs funds to support this work. The need for assistance remains critical.

Habitat for Humanity aims to help people who are prepared to work hard to help themselves. Low cost properties in suitable areas are purchased. Volunteers work to upgrade the properties and build basic homes. Intending home owners also work with other volunteers and in time are able to rent, then own their houses at affordable repayments.

**SUNDAY, 19TH JUNE
WILL BE OUR SPECIAL PROJECT DAY AND
THE APW MEMBERS HOPE YOU WILL SHARE
IN THIS ONCE A YEAR PROJECT.**

MID WINTER LUNCH SUNDAY JULY 10

After morning worship a Mid Winter Lunch for everyone will be held in the Knox Centre – this will be Hospitality Sunday with a difference.

All are invited to attend.

Soup will be provided but you are asked to bring finger food - sweet or savoury - to share.



Red Cross Grant

The Red Cross has available a new grant which will provide an electric heating subsidy of \$100 per month for four months to people over 65 who are living in a damaged home. For more information contact the Red Cross or visit their website: www.redcrosseqgrants.org.nz



A New Knox?

Should we rebuild Knox Church?

Should we build a new structure which incorporates part of the old?

Should we build a new church which owes nothing to former styles?

Most church buildings in Christchurch have been based upon classical or Gothic styles but there are a few which have been designed without any reference to former historical styles.

Of these are two which I think are worth a visit. One is the St Martin's Presbyterian Church in St Martin's Road. It was designed by Plischke, an Austrian architect who came to New Zealand as a refugee before World War II. Since then Plischke has earned an international reputation.

The other is the Salvation Army citadel which lies between Durham Street and Victoria Street. I hope that it has not been damaged.

I have not seen the interiors of two Catholic churches, one in Hornby, now unfortunately crowded around by mediocre buildings, and one in Woolston. They could be worth inspecting.

There is no single sacred church style. In the days of persecution the members of the early church met for worship at the graves of martyrs and in each other's houses.

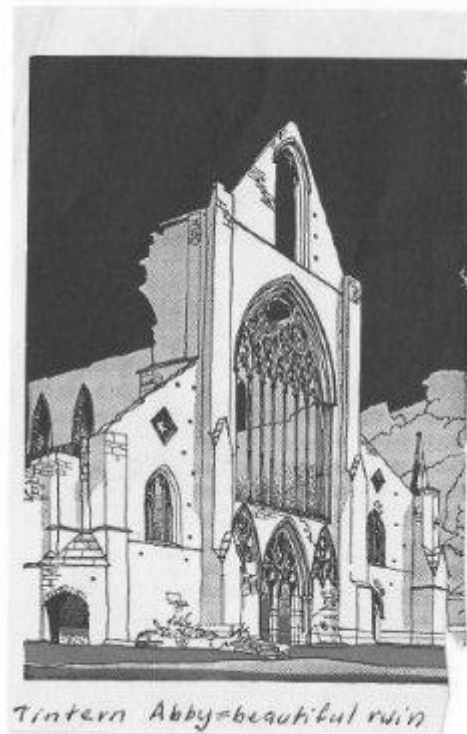
The era of the great Gothic cathedrals lasted from the 11th to the 14th century. Those buildings were the most advanced of their day. They overcame the problem of supporting a very high roof – wanted because it symbolised nearness to Heaven – by using tall pointed arches. To resist the pressure of the roof they placed buttresses at intervals against the outside walls. Everything about a Gothic cathedral is there for a structural purpose and it is a delight to the eye.

We are all familiar with the Gothic revival styles of the 19th century. Knox Church has been a fine example of this. Could some surviving portions of Knox Church be incorporated in a new building?

How do we wish to use the interior for present day worship? That could influence the shaping of the building. Do we need more flexibility in the furnishings of the church? We need to think about focal points.

Forget about pictures in stained glass. We are not illiterates who have to be taught that way, but if glass from the side windows has been saved I would be glad to see it used. I have marvelled at the iridescence of those windows. They express symbolically what the first Gothic buildings wanted in their tall churches – the light of Heaven.

Val Heinz



Earthquake Experiences

After September 4th:

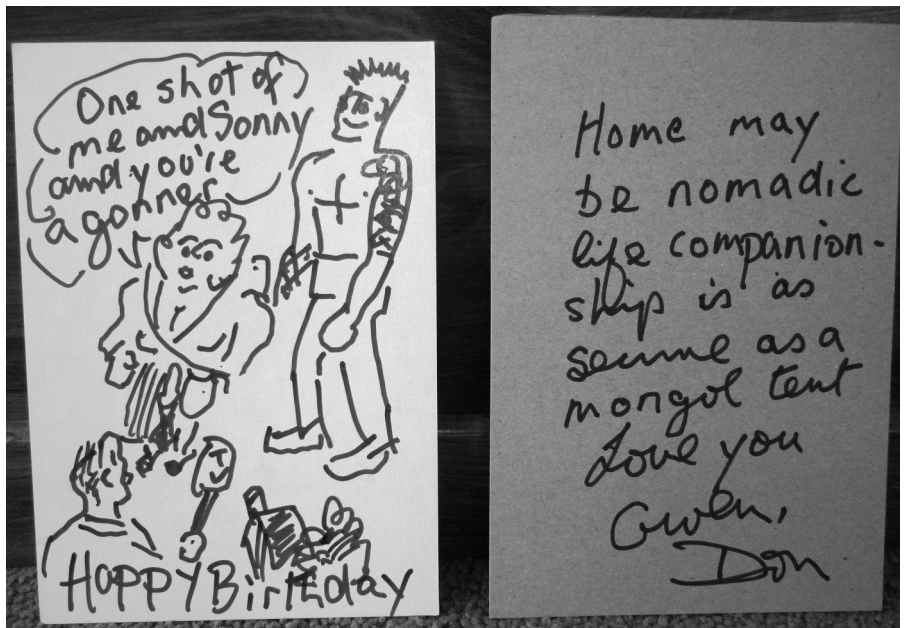
“We stood in the cold and dark in the garage internal doorway for an hour and then sat on our bottom stair for another hour or so. While in the door way I said to Gwen “At seventy five we can die from many things and if this is to be the way of it thank you for being my friend these last 57 years.” We felt very comfortable together in the dark and the after shocks.”

After December 26:

“We were thrown entirely off our feet stumbled but did not fall. People streamed evacuating the hotels. Cafes had their screaming patrons running into the street. Rescue vehicles whined their way through the city and police blocked off streets where buildings were damaged falling or having had the windows splinter to the street. We went to the centre of the open space of Victoria Square ,a great gathering place where suddenly strangers were all companions easily chatting with each other and confessing their terror.”

After February 22:

“Gwen and I were at our Aqua Fit Tuesday midday class. Gwen had showered and I was in the corridor to the changing rooms.” “We were thrown and tossed and it was clearly bigger than anything we had experienced in the over 5000 quakes and shocks to that point.” “We walked out safely. Buildings around us were gashed and twisted, the Pyne Gould building just across the bridge had unbelievably “pancaked”. The horror of the roads cracking and distorting and the pavement requiring hop-scotching over moving squares of tarmac while people screamed and liquefaction slewed around rising and whirl-pooling into drains at the first aftershock.”



“When Gwen was leaving the Centennial Pool there was a young Samoan “Adonis” alongside her. She recognized his face and touched his arm saying: “If I have to go

through an earthquake like this I am glad to find myself with someone like you.” All Black Sonny Bill Williams smiled and touched her on her shoulder. Good things come with bad sometimes!!”

“A couple of days into our evacuation, but a day before we had red stickers on our front door, We returned home for a quick foray for medication, to get spectacles, to empty fridge and freezer and get underwear! In and out, in and out. As Gwen took a first armful to the car a TV interviewer microphone out accompanied by a camera-man camera up approached. “The viewers would like to know what it’s like to be evacuated.” Gwen said: ‘If you take one shot or ask one question I’ll sock you and you can write a story of being attacked by a granny!’ They departed fairly quickly “stage left”!”

The birthday greeting I sketched (on the previous page) on a couple of pieces of card combined two of Gwen’s earthquake experiences.

Don Reekie

Tomorrow’s Church

Lord, the modern church isn’t the one I used to know.

We felt safe then with familiar hymns and dignified people leading our worship. But it isn’t like that anymore. It’s as though something has been taken away from me. The minister isn’t the worship leader anymore—anyone can do it and sometimes, it’s less of a service than a performance.

The music is foreign to me and the words seem shallow.
They speak of you and your kingdom in a way that sounds cheap.

Have I got it wrong, Lord?

Can the church I see survive the modern world? I wonder.

Then, Lord, it seems so clear to me. I do have it wrong.

These young people are tomorrow’s church and they have to speak to tomorrow’s world. They’re on the same wavelength as today’s culture and tomorrow’s—and I’m not.

No, Lord, the church won’t die at their hands, it would die at mine.

No one will want a faith whose culture belongs to yesterday.

It has to be relevant to now and beyond— with music and dress and informality and language and the whole new culture of their generation.

So what do I do about it Lord? I think I know.

I will be grateful that there *will* be a church of tomorrow because there are people who seem relevant to a changing world and they will speak of Jesus in music and story in the idiom of their day.

Lord thank you for the church of today that assures me that we will have a church of tomorrow.

From Psalms of the Soul, written by Jack McFadyen (submitted by Jack Durrer)

Knox Church Christchurch
Preliminary Rebuild Proposal, June 2011

Background: After the church sustained serious damage in the Christchurch earthquake of 22 February 2011, initial make safe work was carried out in consultation with Godfreys and PESC. Congregation members were kept informed via email and newsletter of developments with respect to the building.

On Tuesday 12 April a preliminary meeting was held at Knox to begin to discuss options for the future of the church building. A full report on this meeting and a summary of its implications was sent by letter and/or email to all members on the roll, along with a questionnaire inviting responses to a number of questions concerning the building's future. Members were asked to place themselves on a scale of 0-5 in response to a number of questions, with 0 indicating strong disagreement and 5 indicating strong agreement. Space was also left for individual contributions, and many made use of this, with a number of thought-provoking and moving contributions received.

Letters and emails were sent in the week of 21 April 2011, with responses to be made to Vicki Thornton, elder and editor of *Knox Life*, by the end of May 2011.

On 7 June 2011 members of the Knox Church Rebuilding Committee appointed by the Session met to consider the responses to the survey, and to prepare a proposal to put before PESC and the Knox congregation.

Summary of responses to survey:

Some 80 responses to the survey questionnaire were received by letter and email, representing a good proportion of Knox's active membership (Sunday morning attendance averages between 100 to 120, with more than 200 on the pastoral roll.)

The overwhelming majority of respondents strongly wished to rebuild the church in some form on its current site. (5)

Most of those surveyed wished to retain as much of the original building as possible, although this wish was less strongly expressed than the desire to rebuild on the current site (3-5). No-one expressed a desire to rebuild exactly as the building was, and no one expressed a wish to rebuild in brick.

Most respondents wished to avoid spending more than the insured sum if at all possible (3-5), though most were also open to exploring alternative funding options if required (5).

Most respondents felt Knox should be open to conversations with other congregations and denominations about the possibility of a shared facility (5) and most felt we should also be open to conversations with groups in sympathy with our core values of

faith, hope, outreach, community and justice about how to make best use of our site (5).

When asked to rank the main purposes of a rebuilt church in order of priority, most people were concerned first in its use as a worship space, second as part of the wider Knox community centre, and third as an auditorium suitable for musical events, conferences etc.

Summary of financial/insurance position:

Once demolition and make safe costs have been deducted from our fixed insurance sum of approx. 1.9 million, it is estimated that around 1.5 million will be available for a rebuild.

In addition, it is likely that around 1 million may be able to be made available from the Knox Trust.

The total sum available for a rebuild will thus be between 2.5 and 3 million.

This does not include funds which may be available from other sources, e.g. the Christchurch City Council Heritage Fund or PSDS.

As at 9 June 2011, expenditure of sums insured was as follows:

Knox Centre: approx. 17K

Knox Church Organ: approx 2K

Knox Church building: approx 30K

Estimated work remaining to secure/brace church building, including demolition, removal and storage of brick and stone: approx 30K

Engineering fees are not included in the above.

(Source: Giles Rees, TPA Godfreys, email 9 June).

Proposed way forward:

1. Situation

Knox Church occupies a prominent position at the 'gateway' to the four avenues of central Christchurch. Thanks to the unsolicited publicity we received by virtue of the fact that our damaged building provided the backdrop to so many media reports, Knox has since the February 22 quake become a widely recognised symbol of quake-damaged Christchurch, and has in the process raised the profile of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. Because it is one of very few buildings of its era that have not been destroyed beyond all hope of repair or restoration, Knox Church is also of considerable interest to heritage groups. It was stated quite unequivocally at the 12 April meeting that we would need to have a compelling set of reasons to knock it down.

Continued on next page

2. Rationale

Whilst the worshipping congregation of Knox Church has successfully managed to make the transition to meeting in the hall of the Knox Centre, there remains a clear need for a building capable of seating larger congregations/audiences on the Victoria St/Bealey Ave corner:

- a. Both in terms of the congregation's own mission, which has long included the regular hosting of educational events of social and theological interest featuring visiting speakers, and in terms of the wider presbytery's need to support ministry to the Christchurch community as a whole, a 400-500 seat multi-use (worship/auditorium) space on the church's existing site makes good economic and strategic sense.
- b. With so many hall and auditorium spaces in the city damaged and temporarily unavailable, it is quite conceivable that a rebuilt church would be in demand for musical performances, and in conjunction with the Knox Centre could also be used for conferences and meetings of various kinds.
- c. Thanks to the foresight of former elders and members of the Knox congregation who formed the Knox Trust, and thanks also to the astute management of current elders and members, Knox is in the fortunate position of being able to maintain our plant including the church building without placing a financial burden on the congregation. We are also, as an inclusive and welcoming congregation, open to sharing our facilities with others and have already initiated shared use of our office and chapel space with inner city neighbours St Paul's Trinity Pacific and St Luke's in Manchester Street. We would hope that a rebuilt church would be able to be used not just by our own congregation on Sundays but by other congregations and groups at other times during the week.

3. Proposal

The Knox Church Rebuilding Committee, having discussed the congregational survey and having considered all relevant information currently available, proposes that we request Alun Wilkie of Wilkie and Bruce Architects (appointed by the Knox Church Session and with prior experience of working with the Knox congregation) to devise a concept plan and preliminary costings based on the following main requirements (with others to be discussed during subsequent consultations):

A partial heritage rebuild, retaining existing footprint to enable seating of 450-500 persons, retaining also wooden pillars, framing, ceiling panelling, pipe organ etc, but with lightweight external cladding, increased use of glass to facilitate a warmer, more open aspect, and attention given to make transition areas more open and inviting (entries and exits especially off Victoria St and Bealey Ave, transition between Knox Centre/Hall and church spaces).

A preliminary concept plan and costings would then be taken to a duly called and con-

stituted congregational meeting of the Knox Church congregation, as the first stage in a process involving the seeking of approval from the Presbytery of Christchurch and the PCANZ Church Property Trustees.

4. Next steps

The above proposal having been approved by PESC on 9 June 2011, Geoff King is to notify the Clerk of Christchurch Presbytery, the PCANZ Church Property Trustees, and the Convenor of the Architectural Committee of the PCANZ of the situation. Geoff is also to signal our intention to make application to the Canterbury Heritage Building Fund. A meeting is to be arranged between Alun Wilkie, Grant Wilby from Aurecon, and the Knox Church Rebuilding Committee to discuss the next stage of the project (engineering options, geotech data etc), and if possible a congregational meeting will need to be called before the end of July to present a plan and costing information prior to submission to the Presbytery of Christchurch and the PCANZ Church Property Trustees.

More business...

Knox Finance Committee Summary Report for the 6 months ended 31 December 2010



Due to a number of factors such as low interest rates, Knox's income is lower than anticipated. Knox Church had budgeted a loss of \$5,427 but at present the forecast loss is to be \$8,989 for the 12 month period. Ups and downs are summarised below.

INCOME overall is down
Offerings \$8,000 under budget
One off donations \$6,400 over budget predominantly due to earthquake donations
Rents from Knox Centre \$7,600 under budget
Income is currently \$5,200 under budget.

EXPENSES

While Operating expenses are \$1200 under budget there are some increased expenses such as pianists forecast to cost \$1000 more than the organist budget.

Conservative? Liberal? Radical?

Dick Dodds... now there was a character.

Those with an interest in mid 20th century history of our church may have heard of him - a likeable, affable, congenial character. He was certainly all of those things - and the life and soul of the party at everything from baptisms to Bible Class camps at Tirohanga in the foothills on the western fringe of the Taieri Plains south of Dunedin. Now those really were camps to remember back in the 1950's. From tramping through the hills to careering down the mudslide into the freezing, sludgy-green waters of the tired, old, derelict swimming pool or cooking up hearty breakfasts and night time feasts on the massive, old army-style diesel stoves in the kitchens. Wonderful times! Dick, complete with heart condition was right there in the thick of everything.

In the pulpit, I remember him as a powerful, colourful orator. By today's standards he'd probably be considered as an ultra-conservative. But what a leader he was. Kind, compassionate, humorous and always willing to listen and I never remember him as being judgemental.

The fun and hilarity we enjoyed in those times (somewhat at odds with the stern Presbyterian values of our Otago/Southland tradition) were largely instigated by Dick - a very real, larger than life character. Can you imagine a man of the cloth wearing a GREY suit (light gray at that) with ministerial stock and collar in the early 1950s?

Although he never talked openly of the of his wartime experiences, our family knew of his time of service in the desert. I seem to recall it being said that with his health problems, he should never have been accepted for active service. With his strength of purpose, I doubt that anybody in the chaplaincy service, or the army for that matter, would have stood a chance of stopping that man when he had determined on his chosen path of service in that horror war zone of North Africa. Rommel didn't stand a chance!

Before he left for the Middle East in 1940, as minister at South Dunedin (later to become St James) Church, he married my parents. Dad was on his final leave from the Otago Southland regiment. With petrol rationing in place, there was little chance of Mum and Dad going on a honeymoon, even though Dad's trusty Austin 7 was hardly a gas guzzler. Dick Dodds' wedding gift to them? 2 gallons (9 litres) of petrol in a biscuit tin - one of those square ones with a 7 inch (175mm) bung in the top - just enough to make the round trip to Milton, 34 miles away. At that time it was highly illegal to hoard any rationed products and, had it been discovered that he had been 'saving' for this gift, he would almost certainly have been charged and convicted. Imagine the potential consequences of that act of kindness!

You may question the relevance of dwelling on the character of a man such as Dick Dodds of more than half a century ago?

In recent times there has been much discussion and ‘labelling’ of conservative versus liberal values in our church. Such labelling must surely have the potential to stimulate conflict to the detriment of healthy discussion, with only a small chance of opposing parties achieving a reversal of their opponents’ positioning.

As a role model, Dick Dodds was right up there... but was it as a conservative, a liberal or a radical?

He was a man of unswerving faith and conviction who was as tough as teak yet softened by caring compassion. I don’t actually remember him being into labelling. I do remember that he was almost a fearsome opponent and almost unbeatable at the game of Lexicon. Had he wanted to engage in semantics, there were few who could have bested him in expression or debate.

Perhaps it was because he just wasn’t into labelling.

Graeme Downie

O God— What Have You done? Where are You Now?

As we all know so well, the earthquakes have thrown up a multitude of questions, spoken and unspoken, but set deep within our hearts. For people of faith communities it is to question the nature/existence/whereabouts of God. This in turn asks the question about the kind of God reflected in the scripture, experience and tradition. Traditional attributes ascribed to God include such epithets as ‘almighty’ and ‘all-loving’. These are still used in any liturgies and are linked together, but there surely are contradictions inherent in these. If by ‘almighty’ we mean ‘all-controlling’ then there can be no place for love as we know it in the person of Jesus.

Which leads us, I think, to dispense with the ‘almighty’ and to see God as vulnerable and subject to the suffering we all experience. As St Paul declares “God was in Christ” we can only come to terms with the cross if God is also victim. Love was crucified.

This hardly helps us through our own perplexities, but it at least assures us that in all we suffer we are not alone. And, moreover, that the one whom we believe brought into being the whole creation and saw that it was good, is also subject to its vicissitudes.

This flies in the face of the traditional view that God is over and above the pains and struggles of humanity and that the same God may or may not save us from all harm and danger. But if we believe in empathetic love and that such love shares fully in our suffering, then this is the only understanding that can bring us assurance and hope.

Continued over the page

Again, we can only see all this in the light of the cross.

One of our besetting problems is to see all life as anthropomorphic—that is, seeing human beings as the centre and crown of creation. A more sober view consists of seeing humankind as but one strand in the web of life. Furthermore, if the theory of the biologist James Lovelock is correct, namely, that the earth itself is a self-conscious, living organism, then such movements as earthquakes would be consistent with such an organism. You cannot have life without movement, Lovelock gave it the name of the Greek goddess of the earth—Gaia. This is not inconsistent with the creation story of Genesis: The living God brings to life a living planet.



It may just be that without a living planet other forms of life may not be sustainable. Is this the cost we have to bear for the privilege of living here?

But without some hope this is a rather bleak prospect. We want to know that there is a purpose, an end to all this.

St Paul struggled with this in his letter to the Romans: “We know that all creation is still groaning and is in pain like a woman about to give birth. The Spirit makes us sure about what we will be in the future. But now we groan silently while we wait for God to show us that we are His children... And this hope is what saves us.”

(Romans 8:22-24)

Perhaps the only response is to turn to poetry and prayer, for it is in this that we come closest to the mystery of our suffering. The Bengalese poet, Rabindranath Tagore writes ‘On the Fear of Death’

Let me not pray to be sheltered from dangers, but to be fearless in facing them.
Let me not beg for the stilling of my pain, but for a heart to conquer it. Let me not
crave in anxious fear to be saved, but hope for the patience to win my freedom.
Grant me that I may not be a coward, feeling your mercy in my success alone; but let
me find that grasp of your hand in my failure.

Kim Bathgate

Gone-away God

God
Where are you?
Where have you gone?

My city is broken and I cannot find you
I need you
 I need you
 I am desolate
My spirit grieves. I weep.
I weep for the city that was.
I weep for the city that is.



Broken Buildings - Skyline Gaps
Fallen Bricks - Mortar - Dust
 Rubble - Puddles - Silt
Roller Coaster Roads - Cracked Pavements
 Sirens - Barricades - Cordons - Machinery

Where do I find you amidst all this?
How do I understand what the earth is saying to me—to us—if you are not there to interpret what is happening?

The shaking saps my spirit.

The building which was my spiritual home is gone.
Eyeless it looms passing traffic.
Where do I find you amongst these unlovely ruins?
My mind tells me that you are there in the midst of it all
 But
My heart cannot find you. It weeps.
My spirit grieves.

Hear my cry God—give me strength and courage. Hold me in your arms and comfort me. Tell me that my city will heal—that time will cover the scars—that new buildings will rise—that people will laugh and sing and dance once more.

That my city will be restored.

Lola Bathgate 14 May 2011

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Knox Life Editor

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Knox Church is a congregation within the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand.

We aim to create Christian community in which people of all ages, sexual orientations, cultural backgrounds and socio-economic situations are included as equally valued participants in our congregational life.

We cherish our diversity, offering a safe place of belonging to any who wish to explore their beliefs in an atmosphere promoting discussion, the development of healthy relationships and spiritual growth.

We strive to be open to dialogue and shared experiences with people of other faiths.

We enjoy worshipping the God made known in Jesus, endeavouring to do so in ways that are relevant to our daily lives, respect the integrity of creation, and make a positive difference