***Chapter Extract from Slipping the Moorings by Richard Randerson, publ 2015; not for circulation*12. Would I Do it Again?**

In June 2007, I retired as Dean and Assistant Bishop of Auckland. Archbishop David Moxon[[1]](#footnote-1) celebrated a farewell eucharist in the presence of the cathedral congregation, parish representatives, the public, Maori and Pacific Island tikanga, family and friends. Prime Minister Helen Clark was one of the speakers. I listened to all the affirming comments with, I have to say, some mixed feelings. I would have liked to stay longer as dean, but at age 67 it was time to go, not just from the cathedral but from Auckland, the city where I had been born and bred.

Our three children, Rebecca, Joanna and Jeremy, had grown up and stayed in Wellington. With grandchildren now appearing it was obvious we had to join them there and it has been a joy sharing in their upbringing. We bought a 100-year-old house in Hataitai overlooking Evans Bay, Cook Strait and the airport. It needed much renovation and renewal, and our first six months were spent doing the final touches with new bookcases, curtains and the like. We feel very much at home in a snug suburban bungalow.

One of Jackie’s friends advised her that the job of a husband in retirement was ‘to do useful things under instruction’, and I hope I am proving a worthy helper. There has been too much happening to miss work and, as I have said to many, you are no less busy - they just take you off the payroll. But it’s not being busy with church services or committee meetings. I sometimes wake up in the morning thinking: ‘Thank God I don’t have to go to the archdeaconry meeting today, or the diocesan council.’

Rather it is being busy in the way one chooses, making time for family, grandchildren and friends, enjoying the rather illicit feeling of going to a mid-week movie, taking a short break somewhere, or sitting in a pew and being glad someone else is doing the driving. Eight years have run by already in this mode, but there have been plenty of ongoing church and community activities. The difference is that I get to choose the activities.

What do I enjoy? I enjoy preaching and speaking to different groups and still get a few invitations! It was stimulating serving three years each on two government committees – the ACART health ethics committee[[2]](#footnote-2) and PACDAC[[3]](#footnote-3), a peace and disarmament committee. Continuing on the Marsden Cross Trust Board became increasingly fulfilling as plans for the 2014 bicentennial project and commemoration came to fruition. And I enjoyed a half-time locum for 15 months back in my old parish of St Peter’s.

Unexpectedly I was invited in 2007 to a meeting in Singapore of the World Justice Forum (WJF). An initiative of the American Bar Association, the WJF seeks to extend the Rule of Law into communities where people lack citizenship rights, land rights, access to basic health and education facilities, or suffer such realities as gender discrimination, modern day slavery or human trafficking.

The Singapore forum led on to global forums in Vienna, Barcelona and The Hague. A significant WJF project[[4]](#footnote-4) has been the development of a Rule of Law Index whereby respondents (some experts, others chosen randomly) rate their own country for factors such as an independent judiciary, absence of corruption, democratic law-making, freedom of thought and religion, access to the courts, or accountable police and military forces. New Zealand scored close to the top in overall global ratings but, like many Western nations, was marked down on access to the courts for migrants, the poor and non-English speakers, as well as on its excessively high rate of incarceration.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Looking back over my years in ministry, how do I see the 21st century Church? I have spent 24 of my 42 years as priest and bishop in parish ministry. The parish church is a centre for worship and preaching, study of Scripture and the Christian faith, pastoral care for the sick and needy, hospitality and friendship, a place where births, marriages and dying are suitably highlighted, and service to the community is offered. Parish ministry lies at the heart of the Church’s mission and my years in six different parishes have been satisfying and challenging.

But too often parish ministry becomes an end in itself. I have several times used the phrase ‘public square’ – the Church in the public square. No one studying for ordination today would pass a paper on mission without giving a thorough outline of the Church’s central role as salt, light and leaven in society. In a paper in 1992[[6]](#footnote-6), Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey said:

I want to challenge a theology and a history which automatically assumes that the centre of Christianity is the Church rather than the world… I am calling for a suspension of all normal church activities to enable a start from a wholly new perspective: not to seek survival as an institution but to aim to be the Church of Jesus Christ in His world.

Sadly, passing a theology exam on mission seldom translates into robust engagement with the world. I well recall a long discussion on partnership between Maori and Pakeha at the 2002 General Synod in Dunedin. I was getting bored and frustrated as we were exhorted to listen carefully to the other partner, try to hear the nuances, note what was not being said, and to feel our way into another tikanga’s culture. It increasingly felt like an exercise in inter-tikanga navel-gazing. At length I got up and suggested the best way to build partnership was to work together on the issues of poverty and justice that surrounded us on every side. No comment was made until the tea break when a doyenne of the synod came up to me and said: ‘Richard, as soon as you mentioned the outside world you lost everybody.’

The Church makes forays into the outside world, sometimes brilliantly and persistently. Mark Beale, vicar of Clendon, a low decile South Auckland suburb, has done so over 20 years, establishing excellent programmes in housing, poverty, employment, youth activities and prison visiting. Community life has been strengthened and a thriving congregation has developed alongside. Government officials seek Mark out for advice on social and economic policy.

In New Plymouth Archbishop Philip Richardson convenes a group of leaders from different sectors – local body, business, unions, police, education, health, agriculture – who meet regularly around community issues in which all have a stake yet too often see them only from their own pigeon-hole. More widely in Taranaki he has helped declining small town and rural congregations to reach across parish and church boundaries to form partnerships with community groups, police and local schools to provide recreational activities for young people.

Overall, however, running a local congregation is the all-prevailing church activity, bolstered by proliferating committees and networks which meet at regional, diocesan, national and global levels to debate doctrine, liturgy, ministry training, church relationships and other ecclesiastical topics. Maybe the Church is no worse than other organisations, but such activities soak up huge amounts of time and money. The opportunity cost is enormous, not to mention the impact of all that travel on climate change. Those planning yet another conference would do well to recall the World War 2 poster in Great Britain: ‘Is your journey really necessary?’

The Church is well aware of this but seems powerless to change. In 2009 I sought the views of 100 Anglicans, ordained and lay, older and younger, on how they saw the current practice of mission. The results were striking[[7]](#footnote-7). One question asked if the Church had the right balance between church business and mission. Five per cent thought so, 44 per cent wanted more focus on mission, while 45 per cent called for a radical review. Another question asked if greater emphasis should be placed on linking parish ministries with social services. 21 per cent said ‘possibly’, while 77 per cent said ‘definitely’. Should there be more teamwork between parishes in outreach, such as in Taranaki? Forty per cent said it was worth exploring while 46 per cent believed it essential.

Since my eight years as an industrial chaplain, I have always regarded chaplains as a key part of the Church’s mission. Chaplains (along with laity) take the Church into prisons, hospitals, armed services, schools, universities, industry and business, into networks of society way beyond the reach of the local church. There are some great examples of chaplaincy. Warner Wilder has been an inspiration for 25 years as chaplain at King’s College in South Auckland. He not only attracts large numbers of students to voluntary sessions on faith and life, but also leads the school in working with refugees and the marginalised in neighbouring communities. There are many other chaplains who play key roles in large constituencies, and find great satisfaction in doing so.

Yet chaplaincy is generally not a good ‘career option’ in the Church. The main game is the parish and diocese and there is a perception that one might be forgotten if one spends too much time out in the world, regarded de facto as an ecclesiastical wilderness. This was reinforced by my survey. Asked if a chaplaincy was valued equally with parish ministry, 26 per cent said ‘Yes’, but 69 per cent said it was valued less. To a follow-up question, 89 per cent responded that much greater emphasis on chaplaincy was needed.

With regard to the Church’s laity there is a total inversion of mission theology. If the Church’s key task is to engage the community and its institutions on issues of faith, values, justice, compassion and service, then the laity should be the spearheads supported by the clergy, but exactly the opposite is usually the case. The regular courses available for lay training are exclusively focused on teaching lay people how to help run the local church, lead worship services, or care pastorally for the aged or sick. Here is the ecclesiastical inversion: the laity are trained to help the clergy run the church, instead of the clergy working with the laity to change the world. I recall ruefully how many of my own Sunday conversations with parishioners were about church matters such as fixing the roof, parish finances or getting volunteers for the church fair.

There were two questions on this in my 2009 survey. Asked how much emphasis the Church placed on the role of its members at work or in the community, 38 per cent said ‘some’, while 48 per cent said ‘little or none’. When asked what training they had for such a role over the years, 46 per cent said ‘some’ while 37 per cent said ‘none’. A 1971 survey by the Lutheran Church in America on this topic said:

Lay people continue to see themselves in their expected role of servants of the institutional church. No one proposed that the church should see its major task to encourage and enable its lay people to function as crucial change agents in the various institutions in which they live and work...They worship God in their churches, and serve the churches as best they can both in their institutions and service projects… But they do not find, nor seem to expect, much inspiration or guidance from the church at the most crucial level of their lives – where they carry out their daily work and influence. So, as their despair about the world deepens, the church becomes increasingly irrelevant to what really matters to them.

The late William Diehl, who reports this survey in his 1976 book *Christianity and Real Life,* was sales manager for Bethlehem Steel in Philadelphia. He was a passionate advocate for lay ministry in the workplace and I had the privilege of staying in his home in the 1990s. He took me one morning to the monthly breakfast meeting of members of his church. Supplied with coffee and pancakes at a local café, the group acted as a sounding board (in total confidence) on ethical dilemmas tabled by group members. The issue that day concerned a manager up for senior appointment but wrestling with a life-threatening cancer known only to one or two. Was it right to invest company resources in making what might in fact only be a short-term move, or should he be sympathetically side-lined? Group members shared their reflections, and the church pastor offered biblical insights. The group’s view was that the promotion should go ahead, noting that the man was perfectly competent to do the job and that any number of life circumstances could shorten someone’s job tenure.

Over the years I have run a variety of training programmes for laity on workplace issues. A biblical theology is laid out, work dilemmas shared and a sense of workplace and community vocation renewed. Many who came said this was the first time any cleric had taken an interest in what they did outside of their church life. They came away feeling their work had been affirmed, and with a stronger sense of vocation as agents for compassion, ethical challenge and structural change. I believe many have left the Church because it fails to address the complex and challenging issues they face in daily life such as in economics, commerce, industry, education, health, government, science or law.

In 1973 an American, Wes Seeliger, wrote an article called *Frontier Theology.[[8]](#footnote-8)* It contrasted settler theology with pioneer theology, and a settler church with a pioneer church. In settler theology the church is the court-house at the centre of town life, a stone structure, rather dark inside, easy to defend, where the settlers find law, order, stability and security. God is the mayor of the town, sin is breaking the rules and Jesus the sheriff sent by the mayor to enforce the rules.

In pioneer theology the church is a covered wagon, always on the move, creaking and scarred with arrows, bandaged with baling wire, always where the action is, and moving on into the future without glorifying its own ruts. God is the trail boss, and Jesus the pioneer, suffering hardships and showing what true pioneers look like. Sin is failing to take up the opportunities for serving others or righting wrong.

Today’s church needs to ask what kind of theology it lives, settler or pioneer? Being out on the trail is not an optional mission activity but the main game. Can we change? The final question in my survey asked how urgent was the need for change. Sixteen per cent said ‘urgent’, while 84 per cent said ‘extremely urgent’.

There are many lively and energetic congregations around, and it is great to see the historic parish of St Peter’s in Wellington rejuvenating with its new vicar, Brian Dawson. Jazz services, renewed links with the Downtown Community Ministry, free food distribution and leadership in the Living Wage campaign are just some of the new points of contact with the wider community.

But the Church at large has too many old buildings and not enough innovative personnel. In some places demographic change is leading to the sale of churches, halls and clergy houses, and the amalgamation of parishes. But these are reactive responses to decline rather than a proactive move towards more effective mission. Too often clergy work alone with small and ageing congregations, a reality which can be very depressing. Teamwork across parishes and with the community, such as in Taranaki, can revitalise the local church and build strong community links.

In 2014 I attended the launch in Wellington of the Centre for Christian Studies, an initiative to assist students and professionals to think more deeply about life and work in the light of the Gospel. In the capital city where national policies are hammered out, and major ethical issues confront public, corporate and professional leaders, what could be a more focused and appropriate enterprise for the Church? A university lecturer commented that for many students today religion is a totally blank page. There is a task to fill that void and connect faith with life.

Dr John Dennison, a young, visionary and imaginative leader, has been appointed as the first director of the centre, but tragically there are only funds to employ him for one day a week. The amalgamation of two parishes could free up enough capital to fund the centre on a full-time basis. The centre is ecumenical, so a joint churches approach would make funding even easier. But the prevailing parish-focused paradigm and unimaginative institutional thinking makes such a move unlikely. Many other enterprising projects might be funded if the churches were bold enough to rearrange their assets.

In my 2009 survey I asked respondents to outline creative programmes of community engagement they or their congregations were involved in. I expected about 25 examples but was astonished to receive 125,[[9]](#footnote-9) each an example of the stunning variety of things churches are doing locally today. Theology in the pub, housing for the homeless, coffee shop conversations, coffee clubs for young mums with kids, Mainly Music, programmes on marriage and relationships, men’s sheds, grief counselling (eg Seasons), foodbanks, support and housing for people leaving prison, budgeting advice, community building, environmental advocacy, opportunity shops, learning English, refugee support, weekend events for teenagers, early childhood centres, aged care and many more. Here are churches establishing bridgeheads with people they would never see on a Sunday. Sometimes the contact leads to people wanting to explore spirituality and faith, as Mark Beale has found in Clendon, but church membership is a by-product of programmes that have their own integrity and purpose. Caring for people is worthwhile in its own right.

*Engagement 21[[10]](#footnote-10)* sold well and found a home in many congregations on both sides of the Tasman. But I was disappointed it was not taken up by theological colleges where clergy prepare for ministry. Ordinands need to be challenged with new ideas on church outreach and equipped with the tools necessary for change. Was *Engagement 21* too close to the coal-face, and might have moved the Church outside its comfort zone?

*Engagement 21* addressed the critical issue of climate change. Coastal properties in New Zealand are facing increased erosion from storms and rising sea levels. Our neighbours in low-lying South Pacific islands are finding water supplies contaminated and homes at risk of being over-run by tidal surges as the water creeps higher. In more distant nations like Bangladesh, millions will be affected, losing homes and food supplies.

The *Genesis 1* story of creation is a clear call to care for the planet that provides life for ourselves, our children and grandchildren. Do we care enough for our descendants to break out of the self-centred, income-protecting policies of business, individuals and government? These policies placed New Zealand 25th out of 26 nations in a 2014 World Bank review of emission trading schemes. On such shortsighted self-serving policies, Professor Gus Speth[[11]](#footnote-11) has said:

I used to think the top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change. I thought that with 30 years of good science we could address those problems. But I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy…and to deal with those we need a spiritual and cultural transformation and we scientists don’t know how to do that.

And former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, has written[[12]](#footnote-12):

Our present ecological crisis, the biggest single, practical threat to our human existence in the middle to long term, has, religious people would say, a great deal to do with our failure to think of the world as existing in relation to the mystery of God, not just as a huge warehouse of stuff to be used for our convenience.

There is an unexpected church conflict on climate change. On the one hand the Church benefits financially from investments in companies involved in carbon-producing activities that contribute to climate change. Meanwhile church aid agencies struggle to raise money for communities devastated by floods and storms arising from climate change. The benefit of the investment income is undermined by the extra funds required for overseas aid. Rod Oram, Richard Milne and Auckland’s Diocesan Climate Change Action Group are lobbying decision-makers to divest church funds from carbon-producing companies. Divestment campaigns take a while to make an impact but, as was found with the tobacco industry, they generate a groundswell for enlightened change.

All of us can take action on important issues in our own life and work.  Our daughter Rebecca has become an advocate on climate change issues through her work as a GP. With a colleague she created a *Greening Your Practice[[13]](#footnote-13)* toolkit for health practices on issues of sustainability. To date 250 practices throughout NZ are using this resource to take action on energy efficiency, reduced wastage (including unused pharmaceuticals) and better insulated and heated homes for patients. And noting that many health professionals have a high-carbon footprint in both their work and personal lives, they have established a health-sector Carbon-Offset Forest and website to provide colleagues with better understanding of carbon reduction and an avenue for offsetting unavoidable carbon emissions.[[14]](#footnote-14)

What disappoints me about today’s church is its absence from the public square. I smile wryly whenever I read the words from the Hebrew scriptures 3000 years ago: ‘The Word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.’[[15]](#footnote-15) Could this be said of the Church today? Where are the prophets, the visionaries, those with the big picture of the Church transforming society? There was a time when the media regularly covered church matters. Sometimes summaries of Sunday sermons were published, and in the 1960s a *Herald* reporter was assigned for five days to cover the annual Auckland diocesan synod. But such assignments were relics of the days of larger congregations and when the Church had a widely recognised role. Today the Church will be reported only if it has something of significance to say, and the courage to say it.

The public silence from church leaders on same-sex relationships for over a decade is very sad. Many bishops at Lambeth 1998 would have voted against the clause declaring homosexual relationships to be incompatible with scripture, believing that texts written 2000 years ago and more did not address the 21st century context. But I am not aware of bishops subsequently setting this out publicly (with apologies to any who did).

Some bishops have been brave in ordaining as priests some openly gay and lesbian candidates but most, in line with the Anglican Church globally, have kept their heads down, calling for listening, prayer, dialogue, respect, biblical study, and patient waiting for a word from the Lord. Such a word seems a long time coming. Thankfully, others in the Church have taken the lead. I was heartened when Clare Barrie[[16]](#footnote-16) sponsored a petition to the 2014 General Synod calling for progress on same-sex blessings and ordinations. The petition attracted 771 signatures and was read formally to the synod at Waitangi. In the same week, the first of her new appointment[[17]](#footnote-17), Helen Jacobi made a forthright statement on the need for progress and sparked wide media coverage. Is it a case of where clergy and people lead, the bishops will follow when the path is clear?

It is not easy for bishops to speak out when they are under intense pressure from factional lobbies. I have not been a diocesan bishop but have felt the heat when going out on a limb. Bishops are usually elected because they are judged to be pastorally caring, spiritually inspiring and competent managers with the capacity to preserve unity in the Church. Unfortunately, once ordained, keeping the peace seems to become the all-consuming goal for many bishops.

Yet at their ordination bishops are also given the role of prophet, one who discerns injustice and wrong and acts boldly to counter it. The prophets of ancient Israel were courageous men and women who ‘spoke truth to power’. They were forthright in their condemnation of poverty, injustice and allegiance to false gods (of which there are many in today’s society). The 7th century BC prophet Jeremiah ended up at the bottom of a muddy cistern for ‘disloyalty’.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Fear of modern day muddy cisterns can blunt the prophetic voice.

A good leader takes care to represent other viewpoints on a topic but should also express his or her personal view, even if this is unpopular and stirs opposition from those who disagree. Much heat was generated in both church and nation in the long campaigns against apartheid and for a nuclear-free New Zealand. Yet today many church and political leaders who kept silent in the heat of debate proudly proclaim our hard-won policies on these issues.

I would like to see our bishops taking a greater lead on issues of justice. Maintaining peace within the Church is highly desirable, but a peace that merely papers over the cracks, or works for unity at any price, is not a peace that reflects the way of Jesus or the prophets. What about the Church’s goal of unity with all of God’s people? The prophetic words of Isaiah (49.6) ring out compellingly:

It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.

Christ called us to stand in solidarity with the poor, the homeless, the marginalised, and those who suffer the discrimination of race, class, gender or sexual orientation. It is a defective theology that places the unity of the Church ahead of unity with the suffering of humankind.

But the two are not mutually exclusive. Over the years I have found that presenting a reasoned position on difficult topics, backed with good biblical exposition, is often successful in getting a good slice of the middle ground on board. Superficial populist opinions come to be seen as inadequate in the light of greater awareness of the facts and alternative perspectives. Bishops who take a reasoned stand on divisive issues can do much to lead both church and society forward.

But if clergy and people want bishops who will lead and not merely manage, they need to drink deeply at the well of diversity. Anglicanism is a broad church with agreement on the creeds but diversity on a variety of doctrinal and social issues. If a bishop is only allowed to express views with which all will agree, only bland utterances will come forth. The Church needs to allow its bishops to set out their views on key issues, while at the same time being assured that bishops respect the views of all under their oversight. Those in the Church who equate orthodoxy with their own beliefs drive cautious church leaders into silence.

On social justice issues the Church is also largely absent from the public square, although good local initiatives abound and church agencies work tirelessly to care for people in need. Wellington’s bishop, Justin Duckworth, well publicised as the 45-year-old bishop with dreadlocks, jeans and bare feet, and his wife Jenny, have worked for years in Urban Vision communities in Wellington, creating places of refuge and renewal for many of ‘the last, the lost and the least’.

Justin has also worked closely with prison inmates and in October 2013 imprisoned himself in a porta-cabin, surrounded by high wire, on the cathedral forecourt. He lived there for a week, emerging at lunchtime each day to celebrate a eucharist for supporters and passersby. During his long hours of solitude he prayed for each prison inmate in New Zealand by name. His witness was for penal reform to reduce the high rate of incarceration, reverse the punitive attitudes of many politicians and their constituents, and put more emphasis on restorative justice. Ridiculed at first by government leaders, Justin’s action sparked some useful dialogue to substitute rehabilitation for revenge.

For 35 years Anglican priest Charles Waldegrave has been a leader in a Maori, Pacific and European/Pakeha social service and community development team based at the Family Centre in Lower Hutt, Wellington. With its beginnings in family therapy, the team soon recognised that many family problems stemmed from poverty and cultural marginalisation. Adequate income played a key role in improving relationships and the Family Centre developed a social policy research and advocacy role in income and housing, leading to anti-poverty policy changes in New Zealand. They also recognised the need for cultural self-determination, this leading to the provision of Māori and Pacific services led from within their own cultures.

But in terms of a national voice on social issues the Church is MIA – Missing in Action. The only Christian body in New Zealand today with a credible national voice is the Salvation Army. For 40 years Major Campbell Roberts has led the way on social policy, developing a comprehensive expertise and building rapport with politicians of all parties. The Army’s Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit produces an annual State of the Nation report on poverty and other social indicators, developing policy recommendations based on reliable research.

The Anglican Church has funded such work in the past, and has the financial capacity to do so again, but cumbersome inter-tikanga decision-making procedures, along with a lack of urgency and vision, have pushed such a project off the agenda. Nationally, the Anglican Church is invisible in the public square. In my view the Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops, backed by solid cutting-edge research, could become a very effective advocacy group for social justice and for raising public awareness of the plight of many New Zealanders today.

And where is the voice of the Church in public debate on key issues of theology? That field is dominated by atheists, fundamentalists, extremists and stream-of-consciousness journalists who delight in taking potshots at the Church. It is 50 years now since the late Bishop John Robinson of Woolwich sparked a global debate with his book *Honest to God.* A thoughtful layperson wrote to me on the need for good theological debate:

Where is the Anglican Church? Why are they keeping their commentaries in-house? Certainly at parish level the demand is not being satisfied.

In the ‘agnostic’ and related faith debates I have engaged in publicly over the years, and in preaching, I have always sought to lead people to a deeper understanding of articles of faith. Simple demolition of traditional views with nothing of substance to replace them is irresponsible. But as people are led beyond literal interpretations of biblical stories to an awareness of the truth those stories point to, roots in the faith are strengthened.

Would I sign up for the priesthood again? Church and society have changed out of sight since I started. It is 60 years since, when still at high school, I set my sights on ordination. It is 50 years since I was ordained as priest, and 20 years as bishop. I have been privileged to stand with people at significant life moments of birth, death and marriage, in times of pain as well as rejoicing, to unpack the richness of the Christian faith and biblical tradition, to preside at worship where traditional words still point powerfully to the divine mystery, to sit in silent reflection alone or as part of a small group. When I retired one person wrote to me:

A lifetime of ministry in the church is a powerful contribution to the spiritual, emotional and social wellbeing of the world. All those marriages and other relationship blessings, funerals and other rites of passage that you have celebrated. All those conversations over the big questions, the ordinary questions, the life crisis questions. The clear messages on social justice, ethics and understanding between faiths. Sermons, speeches, articles, interviews…an incredible witness to faith.

So Yes, I would do it again, but there have been times of darkness and doubt. As I outlined, my first three years of ordination had some very dark days as I wrestled with the stark contrast between the 1950s Christendom Church I had signed up for as a teenager, and the rapidly secularising society and post-Christendom Church I was ordained into in the 1960s. By my mid-twenties, the church tide was going out fast. Many of those who started out with me on the road to ordination as teenagers chose other careers. It was the three years in New York City and on Teesside that opened my eyes to the huge challenges, and excitement, of the outside world and to a ministry that was world-engaging rather than ecclesiastically bound.

I sometimes joke with my brother, Tony, that one of the great things about being a judge is that he doesn’t have to generate the business. Each morning the courthouse opens and the business simply walks through the door. The Christendom era was a bit like that for the Church. But today a church that simply waits for the business to arrive will be waiting for a long time. The Church today needs to go out and engage with people and community. Former Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey called for ‘a Copernican revolution’: instead of the Church seeing itself as the centre around which everything revolves, it should find an orbit along with other planets in the social order.

To do this the Church needs more outstanding clergy, such as those I worked with in Holy Trinity cathedral in Auckland. There is no shortage of Sunday priests, often very lightly trained, who can do Sunday church in traditional mode. But these will generally not be the drivers of the change we so urgently need. New modes of worship will be required in many places, with more robust music than the ‘mindless ditties’ one bishop referred to in an unguarded moment.

More ‘worker priests’ would be invaluable, clergy working in another discipline not primarily as an income source but because of the opportunity to work with an entirely different network of people. I remember from our Canberra days a priest who taught in a local high school. She was first and foremost a teacher, but around the edges of her teaching, students, staff and families would often approach her to explore personal, relationship or work-related issues.

I have never felt more alive than when engaged in community life. It beats church committees hands down. I have loved working with the media and, apart from the ‘agnostic’ *Herald* article, have always found journalists and interviewers skilled in catching not just the content but also the flavour of what is being said.

Someone said to me that once I was retired I would be free to speak out and say what I really thought. I have two problems with that: I have never felt constrained in speaking out, and in retirement I still feel part of the Church I have belonged to all my life. Loyalty to the Gospel and to the demands of truth and justice has always been there. But loyalty at its best includes the courage to critique religious and other institutions, including one’s own.

Over the years I have felt a strong sense of vocation, but not the sort of vocation that feels my life has been mapped out by God and I just need to follow the script. Rather, I have a strong sense of grace, a bit like the man who found treasure in a field[[19]](#footnote-19), an unexpected but great gift. Going to Union Seminary in New York 45 years ago was such a gift for me, a gift that changed everything. I had to make the choice, but opportunity and choice together made the gift.

And once I had taken that step, further steps followed. My own vocation was being shaped by choices already made. Looking back over a lifetime of ministry, I can see a distinct pattern, a continuity in which each new step built on the ones taken before, so that a vocational path is discerned, as it were, in the rear-vision mirror. At times when I was uncertain what would come next, something came from an unexpected direction, like the call to Canberra. Openness and a willingness to go where vocation leads is a spiritual pattern. As Jesus said to Nicodemus[[20]](#footnote-20):

The wind (spirit) blows wherever it wishes; you hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going. It is the same way with everyone who is born of the Spirit.

I am immensely grateful for the gifts of life, health, family, friends, faith and calling. At 75 the end is closer than the beginning! I enjoy good energy and continuing life, and I pray the prayer: ‘God, give us work till our life shall end, and life till our work is done.’[[21]](#footnote-21)

Jackie and I say morning prayer together each day, using the prayer book for ‘ordinary radicals’[[22]](#footnote-22) given by Philip Richardson to the bishops present at his installation as archbishop in May 2013. We enjoy its fresh approach to daily prayer built around the saints and martyrs who have been ‘ordinary radicals’ past and present.

How do I see the end? Not too soon, I hope. I return annually the Certificate of Life required by the church pension board staff who kindly send me a birthday card expressing the hope there will be many more. Although what the actuary thinks of that, I’m not so sure. So, the end? Many years ago in New York I was greatly taken by the words of theologian Henry Nelson Wieman who talked about life beyond death in terms of ‘hope without prediction’ – the details unknown, the subject not open to prediction or speculation. But ‘hope’ in the sense of confidence in the presence of God, the divine Other who transcends the boundary between life and death. I say nightly as I drop off to sleep the words Jesus used on the Cross: ‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.’

Meanwhile I follow the practical advice of our daughter Jo who wrote a short story about the sinking in 2000 of the Russian submarine *Kursk.* She reflected on the last hours of those Russian sailors trapped in an air bubble at the bottom of the sea. One of the sailors in the story, knowing it was only a matter of time, decided nonetheless that he would ‘run until he was touched on the shoulder’.

And I pray the prayer of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the twentieth-century French Jesuit theologian and philosopher:

Since once again, Lord, I have neither bread nor wine nor altar, I will raise myself above these symbols, up to the pure majesty of the real itself; I, your priest, will make the whole earth my altar and on it will offer you all the labours and sufferings of the world.

1. Now the Archbishop of Canterbury’s representative to the Holy See and Director of the Anglican Centre in Rome. David was knighted in 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Chapter 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Public Advisory Committee on Disarmament and Arms Control. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [www.worldjustice.project.org](http://www.worldjustice.project.org) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See *Chapter 6.* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Empowering the Priesthood of all Believers.* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Reported in *Engagement 21: a Wake-up Call to the 21st century Church in Mission,* Richard Randerson, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <http://www.servant.org/writings/parables/pa_ft.php> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The projects are outlined in detail in *Engagement 21.* [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The book is now sold out but an electronic version is available free of charge from randersonjr@paradise.net.nz [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Yale School of Forestry and Environment Studies, on the BBC Shared Planet programme, 1 October 2013, http:/www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03bqws7 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See Footnote 22 for reference. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. DVDavailable from greeningyourpractice.com [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. www.forestsforhealthnz.org  [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. *1 Samuel 3.1.* [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Vicar of St Luke’s, Mt Albert, Auckland. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. As Vicar of St Matthew-in-the-City, Auckland. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *Jeremiah,* chapter 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *Matthew* 13.44 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. *John* 3.8. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *A New Zealand Prayer Book,* p.125. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. *Common Prayer: a Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals.* Shane Claiborne, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, Enuma Okoro. Zondervan 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)