

# COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

## ***Background Information***

Methodist Church of New Zealand laws and regulations [S5 7.13.1 – 7.13.3] note that the role of the communications committee is:

- To develop and enable on behalf of the Church clear and coherent strategies for the proclamation of the Gospel, the building of community and for the critique of Church and society.

Conference 2003 approved the following vision statement to guide the life of the Methodist Church:

*Te Haahi Weteriana O Aotearoa – The Methodist Church of New Zealand is a Church:*

- *Passionate in its commitment to living out the love and grace of God known in Jesus Christ;*
- *Actively concerned with all life;*
- *Committed to the Treaty of Waitangi and to talking and walking Justice.*

*To achieve this vision, the Church will:*

- *Creatively focus its people, finances and resources in the life and Mission of the Church;*
- *Empower the people to live out the vision by establishing cost effective communication networks, and accessible education opportunities;*
- *Constantly evaluate its work against the Vision statement.*

In light of this vision statement the Communications Committee prepared a strategy which was adopted by Conference in 2005 to assist the living out of the Church's Vision Statement.

That Strategy had the overall vision that the people called Methodist communicate effectively and at depth with each other and the wider community. This was to be expressed through:

- The development of effective personal communication;
- The development of open and honest communication;
- The development of effective communication networks;
- Careful consideration of what we communicate and how the content is to be shared;
- Electronic communication;
- Being able to relate effectively with the media;
- Production of effective print media.

Over the past year the committee has considered how some of these objectives can be met.

## ***Strategy 2008/2009***

We noted the Commissioners report in August suggested that a half time communication position linked with the Board of Administration be established. This was in line with the 2007 conference decision to approve in principle a job description for a "communicator". However this decision was made recognising that no appointment was possible until funding could be identified.

While we support this direction, we felt it was important to look at what could be achieved and how the church can make progress on the communication strategy it has adopted. We noted that it was important to focus on one part of the communications strategy (as identified above). The area of focus chosen for 2008/2009 was for the church to be able to relate effectively with media.

One of the driving forces behind the suggestion of a "communicator" was so that Church leadership was supported when media are seeking comment, that the Methodist Church had an identified spokesperson, and to help local and national communities be aware of and engaged in the life and work of the Methodist Church.

We believe that it is possible to achieve some of these goals immediately with careful preparation and wise use of existing resources. The following are suggested as a way forward:

- 1. That the Board of Administration be asked to consider the General Secretary being designated as the Church's media contact person.**

We believe that this is a role that fits within the role definition of the General Secretary. In

conversation with the General Secretary designate, we think that this could be a useful starting point as we continue to consider the need for a potential half time position. The General Secretary has a wide knowledge of the church and the people with expertise and knowledge.

It is important that alongside this a list of church members, or friends of the church with media experience be developed. These people may be able to provide advice in local areas, or be used as part of training events, or be useful contacts for the communications committee and other areas of communication around the church. A request will be sent to Synods, Hui Poari, asking if they have people in their area with skills in the area of media and communications.

**2. That the General Secretary (designate), President and Vice President elect undertake a media and communication workshop as part of the preparation for office.**

If we see it as important for the Church to be able to comment on issues, and relate effectively with media, then some professional development is required. We note particularly in times of controversy, it is essential for there to be support for people who are in these positions. We believe it is also an important part of the preparation for these roles that aspects of communication are taken seriously. Consequently we have made application to the PAC media and communication fund so that a media training workshop may be undertaken. This application has been accepted. It would be our intention to seek the support of the PAC media and communication fund for ongoing support for this type of workshop each year for President and Vice President elect.

**3. That Professional development in communications and media training is undertaken by Church leaders.**

As a first step we have asked Tauwi Strategy Committee to consider having as part of their first meeting in 2009 a media training workshop. We see this as a first step to the building of skills for media relations in local communities.

We are conscious that this type of workshop would benefit a number of people in various leadership roles of the church; however, funding restrictions limit our ability at this point. Tauwi Strategy have agreed to undertake this in 2009, we ask that other areas of the church consider this as a possibility and contact the communications committee if there is interest in pursuing this matter further. Funding and appropriate resourcing for such an event can then be considered.

**4. That a communication template be developed including consideration of a process on how the church decides which issues we need to make comment on.**

We have been aware that over recent years media have often used other denominations to comment on various issues. We note that the Catholic Church for instance has a media person, and that often the media approach Destiny Church for comment. We believe it is important that the Methodist Church becomes more proactive in the areas it feels strongly about and has something to say.

It would seem sensible for example that we might want to be making comment on issues of social justice. We note that during the past year there has been considerable media comment on issues relating to poverty, inclusion, violence; particularly in the South Auckland region. There was a lack of comment from the Methodist Church around these issues. However, it is conceivable that with our strong social justice background that comment could have been made from our point of view in conjunction with Wesleycom, or the new 'Public questions' group, or in consultation with Te Taha Maori, Vahefona, Sinoti and WaseWase ko viti Kei Rotuma.

Questions of:

1. What are the issues of conscience the church needs to be addressing?
2. What are the issues of concern to local and national and international community?

are questions that we believe should be focus of Hui Poari, synod, parish and Board discussions. We believe that these are issues that would helpfully be discussed throughout

the next year, with responses back to the communications committee, so that a communications template might be developed.

### ***Continuing Work***

#### *PAC Media and Communication application process*

Conference 2007 approved a revised application form for the PAC Media and Communications committee. This has been used over the last year. The Distribution Committee reported that the new form has made their task easier with improved information provided by applicants. However two areas for improvement have been identified.

The Communications Committee will work with the convenor of the PAC media and communications committee to ensure that the provision for sign off of applications by Synod Superintendents and Board Chairs is in place. We believe it is important that Synods and Boards are aware of what applications are being made to ensure these fit within synod and board strategies.

Further work is also required in the area of financial information. It is of concern that some applicants have not revealed other funds at their disposal or in some cases are applying to a number of different funds for the same project. While we understand the passion and desire for projects to be completed, it is important that the committee can ascertain its priorities having full information.

#### *Methodist Church Website*

We note the appointment of Alec Utting as the new webmaster. The Communications Committee believes it is important for Alec to have a link with the Committee as a resource person, rather than a Committee member. Conversation will take place over the next year looking at emerging issues in relation to the website.

We note that since Alec's appointment some Synods have taken the opportunity of asking Alec to run workshops. We encourage this across all Synods, Hui Poari and Boards to ensure up to date information can be maintained on the website.

### ***Committee Membership***

During the last year resignations have been received from Robyn Brown and Ruth Sandiford Phelan from the committee. We acknowledge the considerable contribution that both have made to the communications committee over the years and wish them well for the future.

We also note that David Bush completes his term as convenor of the Communications Committee. We wish David well as he takes up his new position as General Secretary, and note the considerable time and skills that he has brought to the work of communications. David has been instrumental in the development of the Church's website amongst a number of things. The committee will continue to link with David in his new role.

In order to strengthen the work of the Communications Committee we think it is necessary to add additional members to the committee alongside the development of a list of people who might be able to resource the committee or act as advisers. A list of skills and attributes has been identified. The attributes we are looking for include:

- People with experience in providing strategic and operational communications advice
- People with experience in the development of media relations strategy
- People with experience in communication and or marketing training
- People with a knowledge of internal communication strategy
- People who can advise on media issues
- People with a strong network of media contacts
- People who understand the different communication requirements for a diverse church (culturally, theologically, geographically)
- People who are able to generate and recognise imaginative solutions and innovations in communication.
- People who are able to adopt a flexible and proactive approach.
- People with media management experience and skills
- People with excellent written communication skills

- People with knowledge of the English language, Te Reo, Samoan language, Tongan language
- People with a knowledge of print production
- People with experience in public relations and marketing
- People with knowledge in digital developments and information and communication technologies.

Ideally the committee will be made up of people who between them have a wide variety of skills and experience in the area of communications.

### **Suggested Decisions:**

1. The report to be received
2. Conference asks the Board of Administration be consider designating the General Secretary as the Church's media contact person.
3. Conference approves the policy that the President and Vice President elect undertake a media and communication workshop as part of their preparation for office.
4. Conference encourages Board, Hui Poari and Synods to discuss the following questions:
  - a. What are the issues of conscience the church needs to be addressing?
  - b. What are the issues of concern to local and national and international community?
 And send responses to the Communications Committee by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2009 in order that a communication template can be developed and circulated for comment to August Synods and Hui Poari 2009.
5. Conference acknowledges with gratitude the work of David Bush as conenvor of the Communications Committee since 2000??
6. Conference acknowledges and thanks Robyn Brown and Ruth Sandiford Phelan for their contribution to the Communications Committee
7. Conference approves the membership of the Communications Committee for 2009 as: Nicola Grundy (Convenor), Moseley, Bill Peddie, Shelia Thorne and at least three other people (to be approved by the President).

## **METHODIST PUBLISHING BOARD REPORT**

The monthly newspaper Touchstone continues to be the primary focus of our work.

With a tight budget, highly committed board, skilled editor and lots of goodwill from the wider church and advertisers Touchstone has had another good year. Our sincere thanks to Paul Titus, editor, and his team of Pieter Van der Berg, advertising, Karen Isaacs, distribution, and Julian Doesburg, design and layout. But many other people have also contributed and every issue is a community effort -from those who research and write stories, through to those in the parishes who deliver it to other parishioners or even to the local medical centre waiting room.

There continues to be the sense that readers have taken ownership of the newspaper. A wide variety of people have contributed to its lively pages in the many stories that have been covered in the past twelve months. It was said last year and we need to say it again, that dollar for dollar, Touchstone offers great value to the church in the form of up-to-date reporting and analysis of what's happening around the connexion and in wider society. It is difficult to think of another resource that more effectively provides a sense of connexion both for the Methodist church and cooperating ventures.

During the year the Rev. Inoke Siulangapo completed his term on the Board, representing Vahefonua Tonga o Aotearoa. We thank Inoke for his contribution to our work and wish him well in his future ministry commitments. We welcomed on to the Board Rev. Saikalone Taufu. His skills and knowledge have already been a benefit to our work.

### **Editor's Comments**

In 2008 Touchstone consolidated changes initiated last year and brought some new people on board. The newspaper also weathered another financial crisis.

Due to budget constraints and retirements several people have left Touchstone since my last report. Two valuable contributors, Anne Millar and Julia Stuart, decided their writing days were

over, while the need to cut costs meant Berryl Tuppen is no longer paid to prepare book reviews and we finished our subscription to Pam Hutton's crosswords. I am now organising the book reviews with help of Connexional office staff, and, in place of the crossword, Rosalie Sugrue is contributing a monthly Bible Challenge free of charge.

Discussions at Methodist Youth Conference 2008 revealed there was an interest in a regular youth column or news spot in Touchstone. When momentum for this floundered after the gathering, Mataiva Robertson stepped forward and picked up the ball. Daughter of Sinoti Samoa presbyter Limu Isaia, Mataiva brings an insight into the church as well as young people to her role as youth correspondent. In the past few years, she has also attended two World Council of Churches events, including a seminar at Bossey, Switzerland, on human rights, which she reported on in the September issue of the paper.

Another young person who has provided input to Touchstone is Corazon (Cory) Miller, an aspiring journalism student at Auckland University. We hope that she will continue to write for us as she pursues her degree. Thanks also to Kidz Korna organiser Doreen Lennox and cartoonist Brendan Boughen, who both began contributing to the paper last year and kept up the good work this year.

Methodist Church of NZ webmaster Alec Utting also provided valuable help to Touchstone. When I up-graded my computer to the Vista operating system it was blocked from access to the MCNZ website, and Alec volunteered to post the Touchstone articles on the website. He has continued to do this throughout the year.

Influenced in part by my visit to MYC08, early in the year, I also decided that Touchstone needed to have more stories on events and issues of interest in the Pacific sections of the Methodist church. I sent an email to the heads of the ethnic synods and other Pasifika leaders in the church and have received a very good response. Items to emerge from the initiative include a story on how Tongan Methodist women are helping ACC get safety messages out to the community, interviews with theologians Rev. Nasili Vaka'uta and Rev Dr Ama Tofaeono Siolo, and an account of how the young people of Ellerslie's Tongan Methodist congregation are raising funds to take part in a mission trip to Papua New Guinea.

Once again, as we neared the end of the fiscal year Touchstone went through another financial crisis. As in 2007 and 2006, we made an appeal for donations in the paper and Board chair, Rev. Mark Gibson, put out a strategic request to parishes and trusts. And once again, the response was both positive and humbling. As detailed in the September issue, by the end of August we received \$11,500 and another large grant later came in to bring that total to nearly \$15,000.

Financial officer Peter van Hout would like to see parishes and individuals contribute to Touchstone throughout the year, as they are able, so that the budget remains on an even keel rather than hit panic stages every winter. We will attempt to get this message across in Touchstone. Also in a discussion at a Board meeting, it was suggested that if the Prince Albert College Trust were to top up Touchstone's endowment at some point it would alleviate the short fall and potentially reduce the annual grant sought from the Connexional budget.

We are also looking into other ways to cut the cost of producing and distributing Touchstone. Currently Touchstone is printed in Ashburton and then shipped to other parts of the country. In the past we have explored the possibility of printing in the North Island but it was not cheaper. Now, with the rise in fuel costs and the fall in printing costs owing to the introduction of new technology, the numbers may add up to shifting production.

### ***Financial Performance***

The net loss for the year ended 30 June 2008 was \$1,640 compared with \$20,119 (2007) and \$38,116 (2006).

The reduction in loss to a virtual break even was because of the strict control kept on costs, an increase in advertising revenue, the generosity of the editorial team and the wider support of the church through grants, the connexional budget and interest from the PAC endowment received two years ago. We are extremely grateful for the grants and donations Touchstone received during the past year, in particular from Wesley Wellington and Hamilton East parishes; and PAC communications.

### ***New Initiatives***

Funding constraints have meant that the Board has not in the past been in a position to venture into new publishing initiatives. However we are in discussion with Bill Wallace, a well-known Methodist hymn writer, over the possibility of publishing a collection of 110 hymns in 2009. All effort will be made to keep costs to a minimum if a final decision to proceed is made, but it is an exciting project.

As flagged in our report to Conference last year the Board has also begun an exploration of ways that we can better utilize new technology. We believe that blogs and chatrooms are powerful new communication tools that the church needs to discover how to use. Potentially they could open up for us another kind of connexionalism for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These tools are already being used in the Pacific to hold church conversations between different countries. We are also looking at how we can get more of the material in Touchstone on to the Methodist website. Our conversations will continue in 2009. Any input from members of the wider church who have expertise in this field would be greatly appreciated by the Board.

### ***Mark Gibson*** ***Chairperson***

#### ***Suggested Decisions:***

1. That the report be received.
2. That conference encourages parishes and individuals to where able to contribute financially to maintain Touchstone.
3. That the Methodist Publishing Board for 2009 be: Mark Gibson (chair), the General Secretary, Jim Stuart, Paul Titus (Editor), Pieter Van der Berg (advertising), John Wilson, Chris Ambrose, Barbara Peddie and Saikolone Taufua.

## **PAC MEDIA & COMMUNICATION FUND**

The 2008 grants were fewer than in previous years but still as difficult to allocate. The following organisations received grants.

Te Atatu Union Parish Auckland	\$ 2,000	Data projector
Meadowlands Community Church Auckland.	\$ 5,000	Updating and purchasing more children's resources
Redeemed Media Publishing Ltd Hastings	\$ 3,500	Assisting with resources for community projects
Methodist Publishing, Christchurch	\$ 750	New camera for Touchstone Editor
Methodist Publishing, Christchurch	\$ 5,000	Assisting with costs of Producing Touchstone
St Paul's Co-operating Parish – Taumarunui	\$ 3,000	Screen, Data Projector
Churches Broadcasting Commission Wellington	\$ 2,000	Scholarship for Christian Media Tertiary Student
Methodist Social Services – Palmerston North	\$ 4,000	Assisting with advertising costs
Disability, Spiritual & Faith Network Lower Hutt	\$ 4,000	Assisting with production costs for their next brochures/booklets
Mt Albert Methodist Parish Auckland	\$ 5,000	Data Projector, screen, whiteboard and associated

		equipment
Waimea Methodist Parish- Richmond, Nelson	\$ 2,000	Assisting with costs to produce book on their church history and DVD/TV
Methodist Communications Committee	\$ 5,000	Media training for President and Vice President
Epworth Camp-Cambridge	\$ 3,000	whiteboard, data projector

**Suggested Decisions:**

1. The report be received.
2. The committee for 2009 is – Sheila Thorne, Brian Peterson, Lana Lazarus, Te Rito Peyroux, Trish Moseley (Convenor).

## **CHURCHES BROADCASTING COMMISSION (CBC)**

“Praise B” has continued to be produced in different regions of New Zealand and incorporating many New Zealand choirs and hymns. The cut of 10 weeks programmes in 2007 to “Praise Be” has continued for 2008 with ‘My God’ as its replacement during those weeks. The ‘My God’ programme is diverse in faith but we (CBC) still feel it could have been in addition to “Praise Be”.

Radio NZ has continued with ‘Hymns for Sunday’ and “Spiritual Outlook’ in its 2008 programming and the Concert programme had a series on ‘hymns’.

Once again CBC are very grateful to the churches and individuals who have provided us with funding towards our scholarships for Christian Tertiary students in media/journalism training. We are fortunate the Christian Broadcasting Association (CBA) once again provided a scholarship under the CBC umbrella and we were able to present 3 scholarships this year. It is important these students with their Christian backgrounds and journalism qualifications are part of the media reporters working in the public arena helping to convince the public that spiritual/religious views, statements and programmes are still important to the New Zealand public. It is encouraging to know from our continued contacts with the recipients, several of them are working successfully in difference aspects of media already.

With the major changes in the way both TVNZ and RadioNZ are working, with many programme producers and directors being outsourced, or under contract, CBC will need to look at our Constitution and decide what changes, if any, are necessary to bring it into line with current practice. The churches associated with CBC will be advised of any decisions in changes and be asked for their recommendation before any final decisions are made.

Trish Moseley is continuing as the Chair of CBC for 2009.

**Suggested Decisions:**

1. The report be received.