

The Mission *Message*

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The Damage that Accountability Does

It now seems clear that the “recovery” from the recession is not so much a recovery as a slow, bruised, recuperation.

As Neville Bennett wrote in the NBR in August, this is the “new normal”, a 10-15 year period of endemic youth unemployment, hampered exports, a downcast retail sector, reduced access to government-managed entitlements and services, growing resentment, and conflict between unions and employers.

Unfortunately, some of this is not new. Higher levels of household unemployment are a natural by-product of the low wage, low inflation, economy New Zealand has maintained since the early 1980s (a relationship well understood by economists since 1958). As a result, our nation has gone from being one of the most egalitarian countries to being the sixth LEAST equal in the world (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009), with the poor life outcomes that so distress us as a nation

“Those who face overwhelming compliance - ‘the untrustworthy’ - seem to include the needy and the poor”

This situation may, as Professor Sir Peter Gluckman recently suggested, be the result of chronic under-investment in research and development.

It may be the result of shifting from a nation of citizens to one of consumers under the policies of Roger Douglas, David Caygill and Ruth Richardson (but notably never reversed by Treasurer Winston Peters,

or Finance Ministers Birch, Cullen and English), or of New Zealand’s naked swimming in the vast ocean that is (or perhaps was) globalisation.

But however New Zealand has found itself on the edge of slipping out of first world status, the impacts have been made immeasurably worse by our national obsession with trust.

Baroness Onora O’Neill, the 2002 Reith Lecturer, and noted authority on trust, writes that *“trust is critical, without it we could not cross the street, go to the Doctor, or rely upon others in any way”*.



She goes on to say, however, that *“the culture of accountability we are relentlessly building for ourselves actually damages trust.”*

We tie ourselves in endlessly expensive compliance knots; asserting that others are by and large untrustworthy; and weaken our trust giving and judgement skills (as Sir Ken Robinson has said *“If you’re not prepared to be wrong you will never learn anything”*).

Worst of all, we may be relying on proofs that are not: ALL of the international finance companies that failed in the credit crunch of 2008 had passed their annual financial audits, those universally accepted proofs of company fitness. Accountability measures *are* useful signposts, however, when working out who government trusts: the self-regulated industries (Real Estate Agents, Advertisers, the Meat Industry, Fundraisers, much of the commercial sector in fact) are obviously very well trusted.

Those who face overwhelming compliance - the untrustworthy - seem to include (if the Welfare Working Group is any measure) the needy and the poor. >>

Enough support and challenge for you to risk a better future

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As The Mission is to undergo its fourth, routine, government mandated, audit this year (by NZQA, Child Youth and Family, the independent financial audit, and now the ERO), we can also add the agencies that work with the needy and the poor to the “untrustworthy” list.

When considering the corrosive effects of distrust, and the likelihood that the most commonly used of proofs (audits) are ineffective, we should wonder at the short-sightedness of this approach.

Those of us active in the 1980s and 1990s might also wonder at the déjà vu of Government and Unions seemingly using each other to build membership, setting battle lines, rather than negotiating. Those of us at The Mission that remember how the story turned out last time (mixed results at best), are asking: surely we can do better than this?

Research consistently shows people respond to a belief in their abilities by performing better (The Self Fulfilling Prophecy Triangle, Thornton): treat someone with suspicion and they will respond by clamming up (acting suspiciously). Perhaps the institutional distrust by government of the needy and poor, is itself creating some of the problems we see emerging.

Conversely, treat someone with respect, and with aspirations for their performance, and generally they will more than measure up.

O’Neill says that the great secret to effective trust is simply “*communicating in ways that are open to assessment.*” No hidden agendas, no stalking horse issues, no Machiavellian positioning, no power agendas: but communicating honestly and openly. Let’s give it a try.



Laura Black
Chief Executive

Recent Mission News

A step in the right direction

Another step towards high quality facilities for the children at our Early Learning Centre has begun.

We are grateful to Macandrew Intermediate for agreeing to share rooms with us and plans are well underway for the refit.

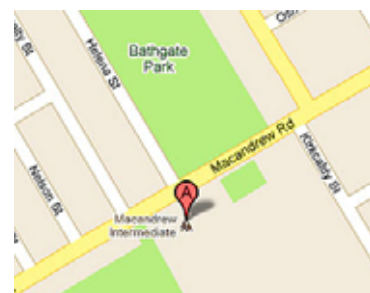
We’re looking forward to a move in the first quarter of 2011.

Our rooms at the current Wesley Street site have simply ceased to be repairable, and we cannot keep limping through: the children and staff deserve better.



Our new accommodation may well be unconventional but is good news for all involved.

“By focussing on collaboration, we have been able to get a temporary home for our Early Learning Centre that is a great improvement over the current buildings, while staying accessible to local families,” chief executive Laura Black says.



“This is another exciting step forward on the road to achieving Wesley Village.”

Māori name bestowed

We have begun using **Te Haahi Weteriana o Aotearoa** after receiving approval from Methodist Church of New Zealand Tumuaki Diana Tana and General Secretary David Bush. This is a name that has partnered the Methodist movement since the early 1800s and it is a great pleasure to bring it to use at this Mission.

Something(s) to Think On

"Management" consultants

Overseas, and unfortunately also in New Zealand, the corporate cure for any ill has stayed same as during the boom - hire more management consultants.

Following the recent budget-slashing Defence White Paper, the joke doing the rounds of the military has it there seems to be no spare cash for anything other than hiring expensive consultants to squeeze more >>

money out of the Defence budget to hire even more expensive consultants ...

And why not? We're told consultants can enter any organisation, watch its workers for a short period, and then using esoteric (and often trademarked!) graphs, algorithms, and jargon render it dramatically more efficient, for a fee.

In his memoir *Rip Off!* ex-consultant David Craig says how astonished he was to be taken on as a fresh graduate, given three weeks training, and then dropped into major corporations giving 'expert advice' - which was always to fire 30 percent of staff.

It is not surprising then, that research shows that these strategies are in fact disastrous and often hasten the collapse of a company or service.

The OECD has studied developed economies over a 20-year period, and it found labour productivity growth was much higher in the countries where it is hardest to fire people. The better you treat a workforce, the better they work. Fear, overwork and distrust in the workplace destroy productivity, not boost it.

Endlessly re-engineering a workforce, squeezing the rights of workers, and the current Government's moves to a fire-at-will economy are clearly not in the best interests of workers - or New Zealand as a nation.

Carless daze

"Breaking the driving habit has been an excellent introduction to my new job with The Mission," says our new fundraising and communications manager Alistair Stewart.

"Thanks to a miscalculation, I'm in Dunedin while our family cars are all in Wellington. However, this has been a great (re)introduction to South Dunedin. Without a car I've been living, walking, taking buses, and shopping within much tighter confines than I'm used to.



"This mirrors the life experiences of many of our clients who face limited choices as a result of low income, ill-health, or official constraints.

"It's given me an insight into the frustrating limitations, such as the sheer hard work and planning needed just to get around, but also the richer community involvement that can come when you're carless. Perhaps if we were all carless (as may one day

be the case) public transport might improve, but more importantly, we may all be a little closer."

Babies neutral on childcare?

New US research has added new balance to the working mothers/babies in early learning debate. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care followed more than 1,000 children from 10 geographic areas aged up to seven.

It found that, while there are downsides to mothers taking work during their child's first year, there were also significant advantages - an increase in mothers' income and wellbeing, and a greater likelihood that children receive high-quality childcare. Taking everything into account, the researchers said, the net effect was neutral.



Trojan horses and the power of reading

We know the value of "Trojan horse" programmes - non-threatening opportunities based around positive experiences, but with sophisticated underpinnings and highly skilled coordination, that can spark positive transformation.

In the UK, **Get Into Reading** [pictured above], an initiative started by Liverpool lecturer Jane Davis to bring great literature and non-readers together, has morphed into a life-changer. She has found that a wide range of authors are effective therapists.

Get Into Reading participant Pip, unable to work after a devastating series of strokes, counts *Great Expectations* as his favourite. "There is a wonderful line in it... *one day in every life, and from that day is spun a chain of gold or a chain of iron...* After we read that there was complete silence. You could sense everyone finding that day in their own lives."

The programme has now been extended into high security prisons.

"Many of the people [there]... don't have the human equipment to have a therapeutic conversation," Jane Davis says. "But once they start talking about >>

Wuthering Heights, for example, it's a fantastic opportunity to discuss people behaving very oddly without talking about yourself in any way. Those thoughts can get you to a place where you can talk about yourself."

Prison psychologist David Fearnley says *Wuthering Heights*, 1984, and the WW1 poets are his patients' particular favourites. His verdict when asked if collective reading sessions helped in the rehabilitation of very troubled people: "So far, they have."

A Bit of The Mission

SPAN Caversham, a friendly group of independent older people, has been meeting every Tuesday for over 20 years.



The group starts with a cuppa at 10.30 and then settles back to enjoy activities, speakers, or other organised events. There is no joining or membership fee, just a contribution of \$3 when we use the sunny lounge at the Presbyterian Church in Thorn Street.

Activities are coordinated by Kay, with the help of a number of regular attendees. There are weekly raffles, entertainers, and a couple of special outings each year (including our midwinter and Christmas lunches).

Those who would like to find out more can check the classifieds in the Star, or contact The Mission on 466 4600.

Support & Learning - Right Now

APPROACH COMMUNITY LEARNING

Restart Your Learning!

Adult Learning • Youth Training • Family Learning • Prisoner Education

Contact us TODAY at 177 Mornington Road, Dunedin
Phone 487 7959 or email acl@dmm.org.nz

CHILD & FAMILY SERVICES

Support for Families & Children

Early Learning Centre • 20 Free hours for 3 & 4 year olds • Edible Gardens • Wise Up Walk Tall • Holiday Programme

Contact us TODAY at 11a Wesley Street, Dunedin
Phone 455 1445 or email cfs@dmm.org.nz

COMMUNITY & SOCIAL SERVICES

Advocacy & Support

Home Support • Support & Advocacy Service •

Community Support • SPAN Caversham Social Group
Contact us TODAY on 466 4600 or email
css@dmm.org.nz

HOW TO HELP

Donations

The Methodist Mission relies upon the generosity of donors to help us maintain and develop our services.

If you would like to know how a donation could make a difference please contact Laura Black, the Chief Executive, on 466 4600, write to her at P O Box 2391, South Dunedin 9044 or email laurab@dmm.org.nz.

Work for Us

We are an equal opportunity employer and welcome applications from suitably qualified people in all walks of life. The Mission has a number of job vacancies at most times, which are normally advertised in the ODT. To find out what vacancies we have, please call us on 466 4600 or email admin@dmm.org.nz.

Remember

The Methodist Mission has been serving the Dunedin community since 1890.

We are a social service agency of Te Haahi Weteriana o Aotearoa, the Methodist Church of New Zealand. The vision of the Methodist Mission is of a fair, safe, caring and sustainable society where every citizen is valued and respected and enjoys equal opportunity to lead a fulfilled life. We promote social justice through partnerships that strengthen families and build fair and safe communities. In partnership with the network of Methodist social services agencies throughout Aotearoa, ours is a commitment to Creating Cycles of Hope®.

We use the airborne seed of the native New Zealand Clematis Paniculata, also called Puawhananga ("flower of the skies") as our emblem; the Māori harbinger of spring, a traveller to far-off places, a climber that grows in harmony with host trees of the forest: a gentle, free, adventurous plant that represents our commitment to enough support and challenge for you to risk a better future.

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