

## Case study: Cathedral of Living Stones

[http://www.anglicantaonga.org.nz/news/tikanga\\_pasifika/stones](http://www.anglicantaonga.org.nz/news/tikanga_pasifika/stones)



About 800 people gathered to support Henry Bull as he was made Bishop Henry Bull of Vanua Levu and Taveuni on Sunday. They gathered, not in a splendid neo Gothic cathedral – but in a shelter pitched in the playground of St Mary's Primary School, Labasa town, under a large corrugated tin roof, propped up by scaffolding, open on all four sides to the elements:

So what was that about? Bishops are supposed to get ordained in splendid cathedrals, aren't they?

Well, Henry was born and raised on the remote coast of Vanua Levu, near the mouth of the Dreketi River and, to this day, his ministry radiates from The Church of The Holy Cross in Dreketi – which he helped build.

Around those parts, many folk are subsistence farmers – and for them, a long and complicated trip to Suva, on the far side of Fiji's other main island, Viti Levu, for an ordination in Holy Trinity Cathedral was possible in theory, maybe – but so too, is flying to the moon.

So, there was never any question where Henry would choose to celebrate God's faithfulness (that's how he sees his ordination) – he'd rather be with his many friends.

There's another thing about that setting, too.

"I wanted the people to know that the real church is not the buildings – but they themselves, the living stones."

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The setting of the service resonated deeply with both Archbishops.

Archbishop Winston said the notion that episcopal ordinations "have to be done in cathedrals... is what has trapped us in the past. What we have seen today is that where the people are – that's like a cathedral. This is eye-opening for the diocese."

Likewise, Sunday's ordination has caused Archbishop Philip to reflect:

"One of the great characteristics of Anglican leadership", he said, "is a sense of being incarnated in community. Being really embedded and immersed in community. Today was a celebration of the people of this island, and the people of Taveuni. Bishop Henry is one of their own, and his connections to this whenua go back a long way ... That seems to me the heart of the ministry of the church, embodied in this man – and reflected in every aspect of today."

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So why did they hold the ordination in the playground, rather than inside St Thomas' Labasa, which is next door to the school?

Well, there was a simple question of fit: there was no way you were going to shoehorn 800 plus

well-wishers into that church.

But secondly, the open-air setting seemed to fit with the life message of Bishop Henry himself - which is all about sharing the love of God which he says profoundly changed him.

The school playground finishes on Labasa's main street, in the heart of its shopping strip.

So, even before the clergy and bishops had processed into the church, as the choir gently sang, welcoming the Holy Spirit into the gathering — the sounds of that love washed over the main street, as passers-by were bathed in the choir's sweet singing.

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That love, that welcome, was amplified in the readings for the day, the second Sunday in Advent.

We heard:

Isaiah 40: 1-11 ("Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem... tell her hard service has been completed");

Psalms 85: 1-2, 8-13 ("I will listen to what God the Lord says – he promises peace to his people...");

2 Peter 3: 8-15a – and the chosen gospel reading, Mark 1:1-8, which tells about the appearance of John the Baptist – "It began just as the prophet Isaiah had written: 'Look I am sending my messenger among you, and he will prepare your way.'

Bishop Helen-Ann Hartley reflected on those passages in her sermon. She spoke of ... of how Bishops are called to be both "holders and heralds" of God's hope, and how a bishop's ministry takes part in "rootedness and timelessness" of God. Fixed, yet always on the move."

## Assignment

### *This is designed to develop your ability to*

- Practice key ministry competencies, attentive to the best of Reformed theological tradition.
- Demonstrates biblical/theological aptitude in ministry
- Agile and able to improvise

Take a pastoral or leadership issue that another intern has presented in a colloquium. Undertake a more considered, in-depth theological reflection by

- First, identifying one theological theme evident (choose from sources (Scripture, Reason, Tradition, experience, culture; God, Trinity, Christ, Salvation, Being human, Church, Eschatology). Dialogue with two key theologians (one from your culture, one from another)
- Second, identifying one theological theme absent. Dialogue with two key theologians (one from your culture, one from another). Discuss how that addition might change the understandings.

Write a response titled "Two theological issues important to this ministry issue." This must include

- a summary of two themes and four theologians
- application to the ministry issue response

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## Church as Cathedral of Living stones

The theological issue I will examine is the nature of church. I believe this is a theological issue evident in the case study, given it appears in the following ways:

- the title “Cathedral of Living Stones”
- the theology of the Bishops: “where the people are – that's like a cathedral”; “being incarnated in community ... the heart of the ministry of the church, embodied in this man – and reflected in every aspect of today.”
- Mark 1:1-8 - 'Look I am sending my messenger among you, and he will prepare your way” which suggests a new way emerging, which I understand to include Jesus gathering disciples as the church
- the experience of Bishop Henry, who was “born and raised on the remote coast of Vanua Levu ... many folk are subsistence farmers” and him wanting the nature of the church at his ordination to be able to “celebrate God's faithfulness ... with his many friends”
- the interplay between culture and tradition. “Bishop Henry is one of their own, and his connections to this whenua go back a long way.” So whenua as tradition in this case study becomes more important than “the notion that episcopal ordinations "have to be done in cathedrals.””

(Another theological issue I considered was tradition. This theme was evident in the article in the comment that things “have to be done in cathedrals... is what has trapped us in the past.” It is also evident in the interpretation of the Biblical texts, in which ministry takes part in "rootedness and timelessness" of God. Fixed, yet always on the move." This raises the question (imaginative reason), of knowing when to be fixed, and when to be on the move. However I chose to focus on church given it seemed a dominant theme in the case study and is a theological theme of significance in preparing for ordained ministry. Thus my theological question is: how should church be embodied today, in specific cultures?) – 123 words

In order to examine this **one theme**, I turned to McGrath's *The Christian Theology Reader* in order to identify two key theologians. (I also looked at Rogers, *The Holy Spirit. Classic and Contemporary Readings*). McGrath listed 32 key theologians who have discussed the nature of the church.

Being Protestant, for a **first theologian** (different to myself) I went Catholic. Vatican 2 from McGrath 438-441, includes a describing of church as field. While not a metaphor drawn upon in my case study, it strongly resonated with the ecclesiology present. A field is open to the elements and to those who pass by. Church as field would provide an ecclesiological endorsing of the locating of this ordination in an open and local building, rather than the cathedral. Further, a field is changing season by season. This would speak to the interplay between culture and tradition. It is not that this is the new way of doing things, but that in this particular season, in light of the relationship between Bishop Henry and his people, in this season it seems appropriate to build church in an open field. Third, a feature of Island cultures is the temporary erecting of open to the elements buildings. This cultural pattern of erecting temporary buildings would also make sense of the cathedral in the school in this particular season. Thus Vatican 2 would support this particular contextual, yet culturally engaged ecclesiology.

The Vatican 2 reading also developed the ecclesiology of the church as a vine. Again a vine is open to the elements. Interestingly, a vine is also rooted. This would link with the use of whenua as a theological resource in this article. A whenua is buried in the ground and names the tracing of ancestry deep into the ground. This might be seasonal, but it has deep roots, as the church puts roots down deep into the soil of Vanua Levu, among the Bishop and his people. There brings a post-colonial depth, in which historic cultural patterns (of temporary buildings) and understandings (of whenua) connect with Biblical images and the contemporary struggles of the people the Bishop wishes to serve.

A **second theologian** was chosen because I am evangelical in my ecclesiology, so I was interested in theologians that critique evangelical ecclesiology. Hence I went to John Webster on the church and Gospel (McGrath 450-1). Webster writes that modern Protestantism is minimalist in regard to church. This is positive, but does have some dangers. “Ecclesiology can so fill the horizon that it obscures the miracle of the grace which is fundamental to the church's life and activity.” Webster argues that the

“norm of ecclesiology is the particular character of God as it is made known in revelation” (451). Who God is defines who church is?

So who is God in this case study? (this could be a theme on its own and engaging it shows my attempt to think reasonably (synthetically), across theological themes. There is certainly much more mention of church than God in this case study. Reflection on God appears primarily in the Scriptures read: Isaiah 40: 1-11;<sup>i</sup> Psalm 85: 1-2, 8-13;<sup>ii</sup> 2 Peter 3: 8-15a and Mark 1:1-8.<sup>iii</sup> So the Scriptures point to God is acting to comfort (40:1-11), to speak (85: 1-2, 8-13 2), to prepare the way (Mark 1:1-8) for the bringing of peace (85: 1-2, 8-13). Hence the nature of the church is located in God who is love, according to John 13:34 (Jesus Deck resource). This God of love is depicted in these Scriptures as rooted (like a field) and timeless. So how does this theology of God shape the nature of church? The theme of God giving a leader to comfort, speak, prepare the way seems to sits with the ministry of a church leader and how the church might understand the ordination of the Bishop. It also fits with the reasons for why the change of building, to enable the bishop to bring comfort to his people. So these two theologians and their understanding of church enrich the case study theology of the church being as a temporary cathedral of living stones meeting among the specific culture of this Pacific people.

One **theme absent** is friendship. I identified this theme in Ellen Charry, *Inquiring after God*. I chose her because she was once one of my lecturers, is brilliant, is a woman and frames theology using categories of theological practices of nurture rather than categories of doctrine. Charry brings 32 theologians into conversations around the activities of life.

A **first theologian** was Aelred of Rievaulx (1109-67). He writes to monks about finding intimacy in interpersonal relationships without abusing self or other. Aelred argued for a rule of friendship in non-sexual intimacy using a theological lens. He advised monks to choose friends slowly and carefully, to test the friend before disclosing too much and then to be loyal and faithfully cultivate being a good friend over decades. Aelred makes friendship a spiritual discipline that enables one to foster Christian values.

So how might this relate to the case study? Friendship is not the theme of the article. Yet using Aelred, I realise that Henry Bull is being a friend as a spiritual practise among his people. He is honouring his people and place by not leaving to be ordained in Suva. He does this because he wants to care: "I wanted the people to know that the real church is not the buildings – but they themselves, the living stones." This provides a way to understand his ministry, as that of friendship, in which he is loyal and faithful over many years. This provides a way to understand leadership and speak of the nature of the church in mission in this specific culture: as friends of people and place. It offers a practical, relational, everyday and empowering missiology.

A **second theologian** was “Anne Carr on feminism” (in McGrath’s *The Christian Theology Reader* 213, 214). I chose Carr aware of my need to listen to womans’ voice. In browsing McGrath, I became aware that friendship is an important theme to feminist theology. Anne Carr locates this theology, of friendship in God. God is a friend in John 15:13; of tax collectors and sinners (Matt 11:19) and in parables of lost coins, good Samaritan and God’s table fellowship. Jesus transforms the lives of the friends he invites on mission with him. “The theme of God’s friendship is intensified in the life and death of Jesus, who reveals a God who suffers for, with, and in people and invites them into a community of suffering with God and for others” (Carr, 214). A church of friends would thus met Webster’s call for the church to be grounded in who God is. God is a friend, so the church is a friend. Hence the nature of the church and of friendship is located in God who is love, according to John 13:34 (Jesus Deck resource). This provides further encouragement to think of church and ministry through the lens of friendship. It is also quite ironic, finding a feminist theologian to read alongside John Webster!

So I have identified a theological theme (church) and considered two theologians (Vatican 2 and John Webster. I have identified an absent theological theme (friendship) and considered Aelred and Anne Car).

What does this mean for **the ministry issue response**? First, I love the image of church as a field. I’ve never thought about what that means for outdoor church, for example Forest Church in UK. Second, I am intrigued by the close relationship between God and church. It appears in a number of ways and I

found that empowering. Third, I want to think more about ministry as friendship. I was told to avoid friendships with my church, so I find Aelred challenging. In that sense I also find Jesus challenging, in the ministry friendships he formed. Ministry is located in “Christ giving himself to us as our Friend for us to love, so that charm may follow upon charm, sweetness upon sweetness and affection upon affection.” (Aelred, in Charry 116) I like how Henry Bull lives this, as he becomes a friend of his people. I hope my next ordination embodies this.

Second, my case study actually speaks back to my theologians. For Bishop Bull, friendship emerges from whenua, rooted in the earth and the relationship of his people with place. Friendship means God of love coming to his island, to friend both people and place. Being church as a friend of a place is not evident in the writings of Aelred, Webster or Anne Carr (although being a friend of place is certainly part of church as field and vine). So while my theological reflection informs this case study, I think this case study – our ministry practice – needs to inform the theologies of Aelred, Webster or Anne Carr. Such is the gift to the global church as we befriend our Pacific partners.

*1519 words*

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<sup>i</sup> "Comfort, comfort my people, says your **God**. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem... tell her hard service has been completed."

<sup>ii</sup> I will listen to what **God** the Lord says – he promises peace to his people.”

<sup>iii</sup> "It began just as the prophet Isaiah had written: 'Look I am sending my messenger among you (**who is God in Christ**), and he will prepare your way.'”