

## **Introduction**

I have been thinking lately about a confession of Christianity that comes from the first century church. It opens with a very succinct statement of what Christianity is. It reads, 'There are two ways, one of life and one of death, and there is a great difference between the two ways.' As we go about our work as members of the Board and also as members of this congregation, we have been faced with what it looks like to be in the midst of death while seeking the way of life. What follows is an account of what we have been doing to try to pursue the way of life promised in Jesus.

There are five things that I would like to touch upon and then invite questions at the end.

## **Update Items**

- Governance Review
- Culture Review
- Investigation
- Moving forward without Hughie and Karen
- Money

## **Governance Review**

The Governance Review Committee (GRC) has had feedback from lawyers that the proposed new draft constitution meets the new statutory requirements, maintains the intent of the current constitution and requires only a few minor edits for consistency. Once that final edit is done, it will be sent to the Board for confirmation and then after that we will hold a meeting for ratification by the membership. The final step beyond that will be re-registering the Incorporated Society, which has been the whole point of this first work stream being carried out by the GRC. The Committee is now turning its attention the second work stream. That is to compare the incorporated society structure with other possibilities to see what is the best structure moving forward.

## **Culture Review**

We are ready to push 'go' on the culture review. The Terms of Reference and an FAQ sheet will be emailed out soon. A concern raised with us has been that the findings will not be made public. You will see in the Terms of Reference there will be two reports, one more detailed report for the Board and another for the congregation. Both reports will be anonymised so you can participate openly and honestly without having to wonder if someone in leadership – or anywhere in the congregation – will see what you have said.

We have reached this stage after a request for proposals process, recommendations from a sub-committee tasked with doing the research, reference checking and a fair bit of back and forth on Terms of Reference. Charlotte is highly skilled and experienced in

this kind of work (including with a range of denominations, recently working with the Baptist Union of New Zealand) but is also herself a Christian – and even married a Brethren boy. We on the Board have been impressed with her professionalism and willingness to answer our questions and make the appropriate accommodations. She will have two people with her on the team, Steven Moe, a lawyer and Steve Batten, a retired pastor.

Some people may wonder if it makes any difference whether they participate in the culture review. If you read the questions, you will see that there are questions asking what you hope the future of this church will look like. If you do not participate, then your hopes will not be heard. This risks distorting the findings in a direction you may not agree with. We encourage everyone to participate to the fulness of the word limits!

### **Investigation**

Just briefly, the fact-finding stage of the investigation has been completed and will be sent for expert analysis. This is to see if the findings of the investigation have implications for policy, procedure and possibly employment practices. In order to make sure this is properly resolved, we are still unable to communicate any more detail than this.

### **Hughie and Karen – what now?**

Firstly, the Board wishes to reiterate our gratitude to Hughie and Karen for their years of faithful service to this community. They will both be taking a break from Raleigh Street for a while so you won't see them here on Sundays for the foreseeable future. If you are wondering why we haven't said a big farewell to them from the front of church, that was in keeping with their wishes.

We do have plans to pick up where they left off.

For Karen, we are creating a team to take care of the Raleigh Street Kids Sunday ministry. We have spoken to a number of people already volunteering in that ministry to create a ministry team. One thing we have found is that there is a lot of enthusiasm in those volunteers and, for the most part, excitement at the prospect of being part of a team leading our kids in their spiritual growth.

For Hughie, things are more complex. We have a few people who have stepped into the gap but they have made it clear that their position in that gap is not long term sustainable. We have advertised within the congregation for interest with no response so have now begun advertising outside the church. The role is still available, however, and our preference is to fill at least part of the role with someone from within the congregation. If it makes things more attractive, we are flexible both in regards to hours and specific responsibilities. If, for instance, you have kids at school and you could do

up to 20 hours a week, that is worth mentioning to either the Board, Elders or Julie McKenzie in the office.

There are many responsibilities that currently sit with the office staff that could be handled by a team of volunteers. For instance, Health and Safety compliance work, rebuilding and monitoring our induction systems or keeping the police vetting schedule ticking over are all possibilities. Again, if you feel you have something to contribute to this team, let us or the office know.

You might notice that the word 'team' features in our plans moving forward. We believe this is a biblical approach. Rather than leaving the work of the Kingdom to a few professionals. We believe God calls all of us to work together for the good of this community. Further, one of the distinctives of an Open Brethren church is a belief in plurality of leadership. That is to say, at all levels of decision-making, group consensus is better than a one-man-band approach. We further believe that, as you give in to the community, you will find yourself built up by this community.

As a Board, we have reflected on the example set by our young people (and a few older ones) who recently made up part of a missions team to Fiji. Every one of them, with a sacrifice of both time and money have been greatly strengthened in their faith. I doubt many of them regret that upfront cost for the benefits they and others see in them now.

### **Our financial situation**

There were a few actions that this Board committed to early in the year that we are now in the midst of. Most notable are the governance review and the culture review work. The Governance Review Committee has been operating very leanly in terms of cost but there are still some costs incurred in terms of legal and other expert advice. The culture review is another cost we would not normally anticipate in an annual budget. The board is also facing significant unforeseen costs that have arisen in the governance space including but not limited to expenses related to the management of the complaints process set up last year. In short, giving is holding steady but costs are higher than usual. A budget that is usually quite tight is more stretched than usual. We invite you to prayerfully consider your giving. One-off gifts and ear-marked gifts are one way some of us can contribute without having to commit to a long term, weekly giving increases. Others of us may find that a small increase in regular giving is a better way to contribute. Whichever way the Lord and your circumstances lead you to give financially to this community will be appreciated. I appreciate that it is not normal for this church to make these kinds of direct appeals and I am uncomfortable even as I speak. However, it is a need and we are confident that the Lord will meet it.

While speaking of finances, we are still seeking a new treasurer. If you know someone – or are someone – with the skills for this, please let us know. Alistair has served faithfully well beyond his capacity and he needs to step away as soon as he can. The position can

be split or job-shared in some way if that is helpful to you or the person you know. Alistair is happy to continue to support the new treasurer should they require it, which may include continuing for a time with accounting work with the new treasurer holding the high level, governance responsibilities. We encourage you to speak with Alistair Brown if you are interested.

### **Conclusion**

We ask you to continue to pray with us that the Lord uses all of these things to build the health and effectiveness of our church.

Any questions?