ORGANISATIONAL DESIGN PRINCIPLES DRAWN FROM THE 2002 COM PAPER

THE CHURCH AND THE FUTURE

There are three essential principles of the church: belief in the divine nature of the Lord, belief in the holiness of the Word, and the life we call "charity." For each of us, our faith is determined by that life that is called charity; our recognition of what that life must be comes from the Word, and reformation and salvation come from the Lord. DP 259[3]

Introduction

In the latter part of 2002 the New Church in Australia's Council of Ministers (COM) met with a view to drawing up a vision of the Church in the Future. The outcome of three days of meetings was a paper called "The Church in the Future". This document was visionary in its scope motivated by an acute sense, in all those who attended, of a need for organisational change if the New Church in Australia was to move forward as a contemporary and relevant spiritual organisation able to serve the Lord's purposes in Australia and New Zealand in the future. The document not only contains a vision for the future but also has embedded within it high level guidelines for the development of organisational structures and forms, at both national and local levels, able to support the numerical and spiritual growth of the organisation. The purpose of this paper is to make these high level guidelines explicit as a series design principles to support the development of new forms that have these principles as their foundation in keeping with the spirit and vision of The Church and the Future document.

The Church and the Future Paper

The 2002 paper *The Church and the Future* formed an agreed statement of intent from the 2002 COM meeting outlining the COM's sense of where the New Church in Australia should place its focus in order to "*revitalise the church and transform it from a longstanding traditional Sunday-worshipping church into an effective, varied and contemporary spiritual organisation which seeks to share with all people the truths contained within the Writings as part of the Lord's Second Coming among people*".

While this document provides the New Church in Australia at all levels, national, local, and individual, with a high level outline of the way forward (see the 6 statements under the section *The Vision of the Church's Aims and Objectives* and the 8 statements under the section *The Framework in Which these Aims and Objectives are to be Seen*) the members of the COM were left with the important work of fleshing out the vision into a more detailed blueprint of what an organisation that captures the spirit of this paper might look like and provide a plan as to how to get there. Each minister was given the responsibility of working with the Society they serve "*to produce a document which contains the goals and strategies which is embraced by the whole church and into which all members have input and also embrace*" using the COM paper as its guide. While what is presented in this paper began as an initiative at a local societal level it has become clear that it offers a potential vision for organisational change on a national level.

If we are to use the COM paper as a guide to developing the necessary goals and strategies by which the *"Church…"* in its various national and local expressions can become a *"contemporary spiritual organisation"* then there needs to be an acceptance of them, at least in principle, as an initial starting point. It should be noted that these 14 points were arrived at by the COM after some months of discussion. This discussion was initiated from a shared deep sense of need for a change in focus if the New Church In Australia was to become a viable spiritual organisation within contemporary society. The 14 points taken as a whole certainly provide a dynamic vision of what the organisation of the future could possibly look like.

Developing The Design Principles
The following series of statements are taken from the 2002 The Church and the Future paper. They expressed at the time what the COM believed to be the essential elements that needed to be more explicitly reflected in the New Church in Australia's organisational structures and activities. "We" refers to the ministers present at the 2002 COM meeting:

1. We reaffirm as our prime use leading all people into a spiritually-rich relationship with the Lord

2. We reaffirm the centrality of the Lord's Word and the place of the Writings to bring the Word alive

3. We urge a sense of 'Church' as the forum among people to nurture what is of the Lord in all people

4. We advocate a fundamental change from 'follows' to 'seekers' and 'learners'

5. We wish to work as a Church so that the Lord can continually touch the lives of people of all kinds

6. We believe the ordained clergy are facilitators who work vigorously to empower people and give them confidence to take responsibility for their own relationship with the Lord and to become involved in the public activity and extension of the Church

7. We believe the New Church needs to start out from the truth that the Church is the Lord's

8. We believe the New Church needs to rediscover its specific and unique work for the Lord

9. We believe the New Church has a specific and unique work in promoting the truths that are contained in the Writings as the Lord's second coming

10. We believe that the New Church has a specific work in reassuring disaffected Christians of the place and power of the Word in their lives

11. We believe the New Church has a specific work in providing truths for those who seek to understand spiritual life

12. We believe the Lord asks all people to share the Word together and to live in the Word together

13. We believe the Lord asks all people to take the truths of the Word out to others, and we ask people to examine anything which may be preventing this

14. We believe that a good proportion of the ministers' time is to be given to supporting the ongoing development of a Church culture focused on building networks useful for bringing seekers and learners into contact with the life of the Church

Context for the 14 Points

Before commenting on each of the statements individually a comment needs to be made concerning the context within which they were formed. As already mentioned, the ministers at the COM meeting who were responsible for the formulation of the statements had spent some months in discussion about the Church and the Future prior to actually meeting face to face. These discussions were held over the phone between individual ministers and between all ministers using email as the medium for wider collaboration.

The main issue that came to the fore through this process was how our current organisational structures, forms of worship, small group formats and the commonly held expectations around the role of "the minister" were felt to be restricting, rather than enhancing, the growth and development of the organisation as a whole. Clearly the current organisational structures, forms and expectations concerning leadership roles fall within the traditional expression found in Christian Church culture, which in turn have their roots in a very different world view and social context to that which exists with people today. These forms reflect the values, expectations and understanding of a different people in a very different world and while they may still work for those who have been socialised into them they are becoming more and more irrelevant to those who lie outside of the influence of traditional Church cultural expressions. In fact the distance between the forms offered in a traditional church setting and those beyond its bounds is so great that new contacts struggle to find anything to bridge the two world views. This can be lost on those who find that the traditional forms meet their sense of spiritual need. Essentially the current forms of our organisation and its structures cater to a passive approach to spirituality or religion.

In other words it was felt specifically that the ascribed role of our Ministers within the current forms is outdated, falling within a traditional church cultural context, and that rather than supporting people to take responsibility for their own spiritual growth and development both the forms and the roles actually create a dependency on the Minster as "expert" for understanding the Word and the Heavenly Doctrines.

It is recognised that those in Ministry are trained in this work, however what is disconcerting in regard to this is when people abdicate their responsibility for developing their relationship with the Lord in preference to the Minster acting on their

behalf, if not explicitly then implicitly. It was also felt that our dominant forms of expression in worship encouraged a passive rather than active engagement in regard to our spiritual teachings and the spiritual uses that flow from them.

In the rewording of the statements the word "church" is used as sparingly as possible having been replaced with the broader term "spiritual community". This is deliberate due to the rather immovable meaning associated with the term "church" in the minds of those of us whose experience of "church" is traditionally understood and practiced. The use of the term "spiritual community" hopefully can free our thinking from fixed meanings of what constitutes being a "church" and assist us to envision a very different organisational structure more suited to expressing the wonders of our spiritual teachings in forms accommodated to the generation we are called by the Lord to serve. The term "spiritual community" is very consistent with the Writings whose teachings on the arrangement and structure of the heavens depicts a picture of countless interconnected communities serving the whole of humanity organised to fulfil the Lord's love for the salvation of the human race. This purpose, we constantly need to remind ourselves, is our organisation's reason for existence.

The phrase "truths from the Lord's Word" in the following is inclusive of those truths contained in both the Biblical and Doctrinal Texts of Divine Revelation for the New Church.

The 14 Points as Design Principles
The conversion of the statements into a series of design principles involves some rewording of the statements and having them expressed under the following header statement;

The future organisational structures and activities will support the spiritual growth and development of others through the development of spiritual communities that…

1. have a spiritual leadership primarily focussed on leading all people into a spiritually rich relationship with the Lord

The future organisational structure for a spiritual community that embodies this design principle will encourage the ongoing development of leadership qualities in all its members. This will be done with a view to creating communities whose member's individually and collectively express a strong commitment to leading all people within its sphere of influence into a spiritually rich relationship with the Lord.

2. actively promote the centrality of the practice of truths from the Lord's Word as the basis for individual and collective spiritual life

This design principle naturally flows on from the first and speaks to the means by which people can be led into a spiritually rich relationship with the Lord. To lead people into a "spiritually rich relationship with the Lord" is to lead them into an appreciation for the Texts of Divine Revelation provided for the development of the New Church as the primary source for spiritual life and practice. A spiritual community would reflect this design principle by its member's growth in their ability to connect truths of the Lord's Word in ways that hold deep personal significance for them.

3. promotes a culture among people that hold that the purpose for their meeting together as a spiritual community is to nurture what is of the Lord in each other

This design principle defines the primary purpose for coming together as a spiritual community. The embodiment of this principle in a spiritual community would be reflected to the degree that each of its member's are conscious of having to continually work at developing a sensitivity to what is of the Lord in each other so that what is good and true can be nurtured and drawn forth to sustain and nurture the collective person the spiritual community is becoming.

4. supports spiritual 'seekers' and 'learners'

In the original COM paper this is worded as advocating a fundamental shift in organisational focus from "followers" to "seekers" and "learners". Essentially this shift has to do with where our energy is focussed. Traditional forms largely cater to a passive approach to spiritual expression in worship and encourage a "follower" mentality. The expectations on member's captured within traditional forms is one of being passive recipients of what's offered. It is the view of the COM that this model is fast loosing its relevance. The COM felt that its energies could be better utilised in being directed toward those who demonstrate an active personal engagement with truths from the Word. It is felt that contemporary forms that support and encourage an "active" approach to spiritual life, centred on personal responsibility and repentance need to be developed as the norm for community life. Translated into a design principle the objective would be to ensure that any new forms employed would support and encourage active participation and engagement of everyone with truths from the Word as the basis for individual and collective spiritual life. Those, to whom this approach is suited and would appeal, are termed, seekers and learners.

5. supports people to work together in truths from the Word so that the Lord can continually touch the lives of people of all kinds

Organisational structures and activities with this as a design principle will create opportunities for the development of relationships between members through encouraging them to work together using their skills, abilities and talents in specific uses supported by the whole community designed to bring others into contact with the Lord as the Word working in and through their lives.

6. develops attributes of spiritual leadership that supports leaders to work as facilitators to empower people and give them confidence to take responsibility for their own relationship with the Lord and to become involved in the public activity and extension of a spiritually focussed life

Leadership is to be understood in broad terms. Whenever an individual or a community looks to consciously serve what is of the Lord in others, and acts accordingly, they embody the qualities of genuine spiritual leadership. Thus one of the objectives of being a spiritual community is to develop an awareness in its members that each has a responsibility for their ongoing relationship with the Lord (see design principle 2) and that the expectation is that all will be engaged at some

level in organisational uses focussed on promoting the extension of a spiritually focussed life to those outside the organisation.

7. keeps in the forefront of peoples minds the truth that our spiritual communities belong to the Lord for the expansion of His love towards the human race.

As a design principle this reflects a need for community life to develop within its members a strong sense of personal and collective purpose as an extension of the Lord's own purpose for creation which is the salvation of the human race. This is the Lord's own love. It is expected that a spiritually minded community that is embodying what is of the Lord must become charged with a desire to finds ways that are able to fulfil the Lord's love for the salvation of others. Thus if this design principle is integrated into communities we would see a full participation of its membership in activities that open opportunities for others to experience the Lord's love.

8. is continually challenging people to rediscover the specific and unique work their spiritual communities are called to by the Lord

This statement can be seen as an extension of design principle 7. The health of a collective spiritual entity demands that it engage in a regular evaluation of its collective life in the light of its understanding of its reason for being. As with personal spiritual growth, collective growth centres on a life of constant self reflection and a looking to the Lord to resist falling into states of collective life that draw back from the work the Lord calls us to.

9. encouraging people to see that this specific and unique work is the promotion of the truths through which the Lord has made His Second Coming

The underlying purpose for every activity we engage in is summed up here. Our communities exist to create opportunities for people to connect with the Lord in a real and personal way. This design principle if adopted would encourage a culture that proclaims the Lord's Second Advent with boldness. This proclamation or witness of course is not something divorced from the quality of the life a community expresses, nor can it be disconnected from the ongoing practice of truths from the Word. In the final analysis it is the quality of life, the quality of love within a community that makes the essence of this principle come alive for people. So while the design principle encourages communities to developing external activities in keeping with the principle, these can only be done with conviction when the principle exists as an internal reality for community members.

10. *engages in the specific work of reassuring disaffected Christians of the place and power of the Word in their lives through exposure to its spiritual sense reveal in the Writings*

While some groups may wish to take this on board as a "design principle"; i.e. those communities who feel that this is a field of use they are passionate about, it is too specific to serve as a general design principle for all communities. Each community's

life will involve finding the best outlet for their energies and talents suited to their own unique situations and call. Certainly it would appear that disaffected Christians is an area to which the healing properties of truths from the Lord's Word could be applied with some success.

> 11. makes every effort to provide truths from the Lord's Word for those who seek to understand spiritual life

The essence of this statement is caught in principle 9. It is to be recognised however that this statement is more general and speaks to the accommodation of truth within the context of other spiritual philosophies and paths people hold to. The core focus for the work of our spiritual communities' centres on the practice of truths provided through the Lord's Second Advent. This is where the uniqueness of our identity lies. This must be strong if we hope to make any significant impact in the multifaceted spiritual landscape our culture offers. It should be a goal for every community to be able to work with others from the uniqueness of our own spiritual base and to be able to clothe what we have in forms able to be of use to them. This ability arises out of; 1. Being other centred as a community and sensitive to the needs of those who sit outside our specific boundaries and 2. Having communities consisting of individuals with a well grounded spiritual identity based in a very real and personal connection with the Lord in His Second Coming as the internal sense of the Word. It is the strength of community member's personal experience of truths from the Word as the basis for their spiritual life that will determine its ability to present the universal spiritual truths found in the Word in ways suited to and in support of other traditions without compromising its own sense of identity.

> 12. encourages people to share and live in the truths of the Word together

This has been adequately addressed in commenting on previous statements. (In particular see principle 3)

> 13. encourages all people to take the truths of the Word out to others, and to identify and deal with anything that may be preventing this

This has been adequately addressed in commenting on previous statements. (In particular see principles 7,8,9 & 11)

> 14. releases its spiritual leadership to support the ongoing development of an organisational culture focused on building networks useful for bringing seekers and learners into contact with the life of our spiritual communities

This has been adequately addressed in commenting on previous statements. (In particular see principles 1 & 6)

Defining the Spiritual Outcomes for Collective Spiritual Life.

The following consists of five outcomes that might be evident in a spiritual community that is looking to support the Lord's love for the salvation of the human race as its end goal using the design principles above.

1. People are being led into a spiritually rich relationship with the Lord through connecting with Him as the Word (see design principles 1 & 2)

2. People are motivated by a desire to develop and use their abilities and talents individually and co-operatively to nurture what is of the Lord in each other (see design principles 3,4 & 5)

3. People are taking responsibility for their own spiritual growth and development and for the growth and development of their community as a whole through living and sharing in truths from the Lord's Word together (see design principles 6 & 12)

4. People developing a sense of responsibility for the expansion of the Lord's love toward the human race and are exhibiting a desire to express this through a commitment to organisational activities and personal efforts to take the truths of the Lord's Second Coming out to others (see design principles 9,11,10 & 13)

5. People are actively assessing what their own and the organisation's efforts are being expended towards in the light of the organisations statement of purpose, and are willing to explore and suggest how things can be done to better fulfil the organisations purpose in the light of its desired outcomes (see design principles 8 & 13)