

***New Frontiers: Redefining Christian Ministry in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Contexts*, edited by Jon K Newton (Preston, VIC: Mosaic Press, 2013). 241 pages. ISBN 978174320519. RRP AU\$34.95.**

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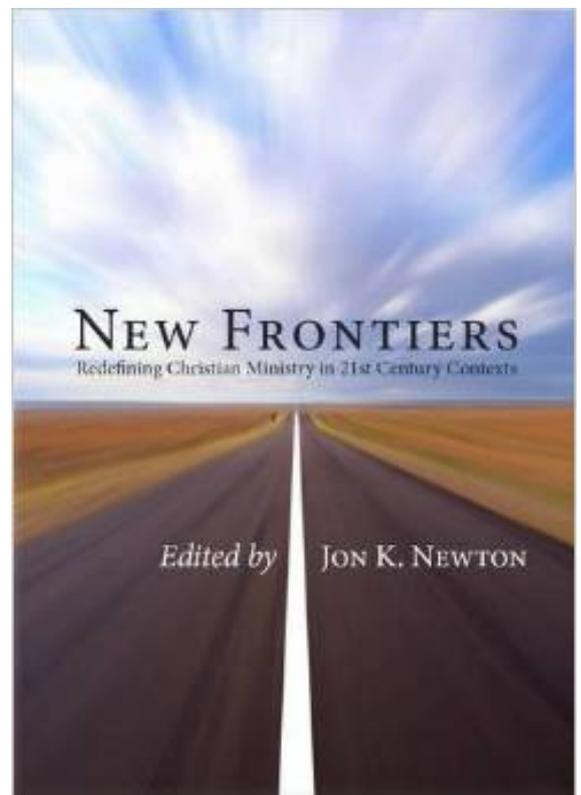
Church leaders and consultants, theology teachers and students face complex issues for ministry in today's contexts. We are in post-Christendom, multi-religious, digital world where society is experiencing discontinuous change, leadership expectations are changing and we need innovative approaches for communicating what still really is good news.

To grapple with some of these issues, a conference of ministers, academics and students was convened by Harvest Bible College on August 23-24, 2012. The book *New Frontiers: Redefining Christian Ministry in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Contexts* is a compilation of ten of the best papers, with contributions from fifteen writers, and published by Mosaic Press in 2013. It is edited by Jon Newton who is Head of Research and Biblical Studies at Harvest Bible College in Melbourne, Senior Minister of Oasis Church, and who was part of the team who convened the conference. Harvest is 27 years old, and is now moving into more postgraduate and research spheres. The book is a credit to their commitment to research that is engaged with the praxis of ministry, and a sign of things to come from Harvest.

Mark Conner, who leads Melbourne's largest church CityLife, discussed the leadership development needs for local churches. He offers practical steps for churches of any size that want to foster a "leadership farm". Anglican theologian Kevin Giles discusses the place of ordination in ecumenical and gender perspective. Tabor Victoria's interim Principal Cheryl McCallum discusses the changing roles and expectations of minister's wives, and the trend and implications of ordaining them.

Three MA students Amelia Pickering, Daniel Sanders and Andrew Groza and their lecturer Ian Grant reported on a study tour of ministries in US, UK and China – including Alpha, Hillsong London and Fuller Seminary – and implications for leadership, focus in ministry purpose, inclusive community and valuing people. Another international perspective comes from New Zealand Pentecostal pastor Linda Flett's analysis of Assemblies of God mission paradigm trends in her country. In the early 1990s they focused on evangelism and church planting, in the late 1990s they hoped for revival, and after 2000 mission methodology shifted to more community engaging ministries – a trend paralleled in Australia.

Michelle Sanders reflects on her church planting of Kaleidoscope in Melbourne and its engagement with the arts, social justice and unchurched people. This



was my favourite chapter with her appeal to reclaim the arts and use them as a medium for discussing things that matter and communicating the good news of Christianity. Sanders uses painting to invite people to tell their story, an “Art and Soul” course to teach people who suffer from anxiety and depression to paint, and “Art for Justice” involvement at local markets. This is a case study of the sort of innovative experiments in missional engagement that we need more of across the churches. Grant Buchanan, in another chapter, discusses leadership implications in a context of discontinuous change and cites more Kaleidoscope experience.

Nigel Pegram explores the relationship between emotional intelligence and sustainability/burnout for ministers, and offers some helpful self-assessment tools. This is a critical issue with National Church Life Survey figures suggesting a majority of pastors struggling with unrealistic expectations and on the borderline to burnout. Pegram’s work points to the need for training pastors in relationship, stress-management and trust-building skills.

Jon Newton appeals for churches to teach apologetics and doctrine and grapple with worldview issues, and not just pragmatically deliver what people look for. Diane Hockridge writes on distance and online learning for ministry training, asserting that ministerial formation and supportive community can be fostered online, but needs careful design, process and management of interaction and student cohorts.

Some of the writers acknowledge the multicultural and multi-religious context of the Western world, but a dedicated chapter on multicultural ministry would have strengthened the book and its appeal for “redefining Christian ministry in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Contexts”, as would have contributions by non-Anglo writers whose absence is unfortunate. What is the church in Australasia and its Pentecostal arm learning about multicultural ministry, what does it still need to learn, and what can we learn from culturally diverse voices? I hope future conferences and books will invite more of this sort of conversation, which depends on the invitation and hospitality of the group as well as the willingness of culturally diverse contributors.

As it is, *New Frontiers* helpfully draws together the thought of 15 writers – men and women, students and practitioners, academics and reflectors, from New Zealand and Australian contexts. It reflects a conversation among practitioners and academics about some of the pressing issues of ministry they are facing or grappling with in local churches and leadership training. As such, the book is a gift to the broader church. It is ideal reading for those engaged in ministry, preparing people for ministry, and budding researchers looking for ideas to explore and develop further.

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