



The Revd Dave Clancey

Interview

Andy Carley speaks with Dave Clancey about his ministry in Methven, and their seasonal church initiative 'feed'.

Rev. Dave Clancey has been the minister at All Saints Anglican Church in Methven since 2008. Methven is a small town in mid-Canterbury, which in winter months transforms from an agricultural centre to the service town for Mt Hutt ski field. Dave moved to All Saints in 2008 as curate-in-charge and last year they initiated a seasonal church called 'feed' reaching out to those in Methven for the winter season. Latimer caught up with Dave to ask him the background to feed.

Ministering in Methven with its rural farming life on the one hand and the ski industry based at Mt Hutt on the other must present some very interesting dynamics. How do you minister to such a diverse community?

Methven is a diverse community, even the distinction drawn between farmers and skiers is more complicated than it first appears. Dairy farmers are different to sheep farmers, skiers are different to snowboarders, locals are different to visitors. And yet I'm not sure that Methven is significantly different to any other place in New Zealand, in that there are many different groups living in the same geographical space. Maybe what is different here is that in a relatively small community those groups are so visibly different. This makes ministry both easier and harder. Easier, in that you know pretty much who you're dealing with and you can speak their language, wear their clothes, grasp their worldview and what is important to them. But harder, because as a church, and those who are united in Christ, we are called to put aside those visible distinctions and give expression to the union we have in Jesus. Practically, it involves a few things. As soon as I arrived we preached our way through Ephesians, making much of the union in Christ which God has brought about, and showing how the 'dividing wall' between people groups (be they Jew and Gentile or snowboarder and farmer) has been broken down in the gospel. This is a recurring theme in much of our ministry. We've taken this idea theologically as well, seeing in the gospel Christ's humiliation for the sake of others. He did not what pleased himself but what was for the good of others, coming not to be served

but to serve. And so we encourage some of our more mature members to come and serve food at feed, and encourage some of our younger members to come along on Sunday mornings to engage, encourage and join in with the wider body of Christ.

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feed has been running for a season now. How did it come about? What inspired you to run such a service?

From day one it was clear that there was a great need for the gospel to go to a group of people for whom 'normal' church was culturally too far away from their way of life. And yet I didn't want to rush into anything straight away, preferring to focus in our first year here on ministering to the existing congregation first, gaining their trust and support. This time also allowed me to observe the culture of those who were in Methven just for the winter. During that year (2008) I met with a couple of Christian guys who were working on the mountain—one evening each week we opened the bible and prayed together, sharing the gospel and our lives. This was invaluable because it allowed me to understand the culture, as well as encouraging them to live godly lives within that culture. The next winter season (2009) I approached the management at Mt Hutt offering my services as industrial chaplain. One of the things which I had seen was that many involved in the winter industry were young, from overseas, and had very little in the way of friendships and support structures around them. The offer of chaplaincy services (which was thankfully accepted—there is a great relationship between feed and the

mountain) was a way to care for such people, as well as a way of continuing to go to those we hoped to see reached with the gospel. As well as being on the mountain as chaplain, in 2009 we continued to meet one evening a week, sharing a meal, opening the Scriptures and praying together. One of the guys from the year before came back, and four others joined us. I tentatively called this group feed, and it was during this season that I decided that the next year we'd turn this mid-week group into a church.

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It is called feed for three reasons: first, because our central purpose is to feed people with God's food—His Word. Second, because we feed physical food to people. This was key for a variety of reasons. Not many in the snowsports industry are flush with cash—if we could give food to them we would be ministering to them in a very practical and real way. Also, after a day on the mountain you're starving! We wanted feed to be outward looking and a place where those who have had no (or bad) experiences of church could feel welcome. Sitting around tables eating together was an easy thing to invite friends to, and made it easy for strangers to walk in to. Relationships and fellowship flourish quickly over a meal. Third, we called it feed because we wanted to feed people from Methven in to churches in other snowsport towns around the world, where they might serve and minister. The inspiration to start feed was simply the outworking of a desire to see people engage with the gospel in a way that didn't mean they had to abandon their culture, or adopt another culture in order to hear the stunning news of Christ and his cross.

No doubt it costs quite a bit to fund a project like feed. Have you had much support from outside the parish?

Yes, when you base a church around a meal it does cost a bit! Our only funding from outside the parish came from the Bishop's Mission Fund, which was a great blessing. However, the primary support for feed has come from within the parish, who have seen the ministry to the mountain develop and grow over the past couple of years. Twice during the season we published a list of a variety of ingredients needed—they were all donated within a couple of weeks. Similarly, parishioners donated

produce from their farms, and one lady, a professional artist, donated an original artwork which we auctioned with the proceeds going towards feed. We were also given a substantial financial gift before the season started which allowed us to purchase a 4wd, giving feed a very visible presence on the mountain. God in his great grace has provided everything we needed—usually without us asking! Most significantly, however, has been the support received from Christian skiers and snowboarders who have chosen to come to Methven to get involved in feed. Last year we had people come from Australia, the UK, Canada and the USA to get involved on the mountain and at feed. They were an incredible blessing.

As feed only operates during the ski season what happens to the locals who have come along during the off season?

We had originally intended to hibernate feed over summer, but one of the unexpected joys of feed were the number of Christians in Methven who were not involved in any church but joined feed and wanted to keep on meeting. When you have people asking 'please can we keep meeting because we want to hear the Bible' it's hard to say no! So we've started an evening service which, like feed, is relaxed and seated around tables, but we've replaced the meal with cake and coffee.

Do you run any other courses alongside feed, such as Christianity Explored?

Yes. Last year it was a little haphazard, as, to my shame, I hadn't expected feed to grow numerically as it did (I thought we might start off with 6–10 people—on the first night 21 turned up, and we averaged around 30 a night for the season). But we ran Christianity Explored halfway through the season, and also started another Bible Study group in the parish called 'seconds', where folk from feed could come for more Bible food. This year we're being a bit more strategic about when and how we run Christianity Explored and hook people up with small groups earlier on. We're also going to work a bit harder at forming a strong church community early on in the season.

What have been the highlights of this ministry?

Seeing people become Christians and growing in their love and knowledge of Jesus is hard to beat! Seeing God's people serve those who aren't 'like' them in a worldly sense, and the fruit of sanctification played out in real life is a constant joy. The way the existing congregation at All Saints supported, prayed for, and gave towards the ministry has been wonderful! While exhausting, the entire season last year was one big highlight.

Any lowlights?

It's ministry—of course there are! Seeing people turn away from the gospel is hard, but not unexpected. Being aware of your own failures, of opportunities missed and mistakes made is always difficult, but by God's grace drives you back to Him, the source and goal of all ministry.

What advice would you give to others who may be ministering in a similar situation?

I think we're all in similar situations, in that we live in parishes where there will be diverse and separate people groups and cultures. My experience—the successes and the failures—has shown me the importance of taking your time to go to those people or into that culture, watch them, listen to them, engage with them and think through how the gospel challenges and comforts them. I think it's also vitally important to set before your Christian brothers and sisters the need to reach others with the gospel. This is not about selling a strategy or casting a vision, but rather about being grounded in the nature and purpose of the gospel—it's a theological issue. And it can take a long time! That said, you then put to them how you can go about that, and involve them in a wide range of ways. Most importantly, we must remember that growing his church is God's work. By the power of his Spirit his Word goes out, and only by his grace does anyone respond to it in repentance and faith. Because of that we must be faithful, prayerful and persistent in proclaiming the glorious news of Jesus crucified and risen.

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