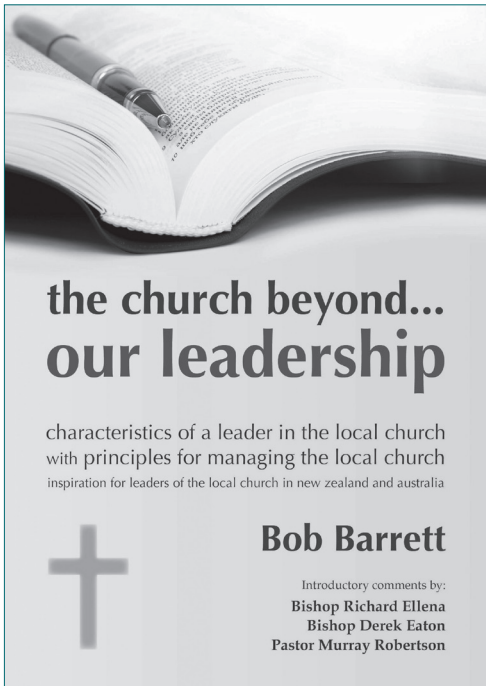




# The Church Beyond... Our Leadership. Review of Bob Barrett's new book



## THE CHURCH BEYOND... OUR LEADERSHIP.

Bob Barrett (CP Books, 2014, \$25\*, 255pp,  
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### Reviewed by Bob Robinson

For the past thirty years I have spent many of my Sundays visiting churches around New Zealand. I am often discouraged by what I find. Which is why I say that every church leader, lay and ordained, in NZ—whether Anglican or not—should read this book, and read it prayerfully, carefully, thoughtfully and then discuss how its practical wisdom must be put to work. The book distils what Bob himself found when leading two quite different parishes into fruitful growth. And what he learnt and read about during his years as a consultant, mainly in the Diocese of Nelson, but even more widely from his international travels and reading.

The book is partly biblical, partly pragmatic, and often based on Bob's own observant, listening and reflective analysis of what actually happens in church leadership and management. He mainly has Anglican churches and leaders in mind (mostly evangelicals) but his net is widely cast and all the better for it. (Murray Robertson—Pastor Emeritus of Spreydon Baptist Church—is, for example, an enthusiastic commender of the book.)

The book is subtitled 'Characteristics of a leader in the local church with principles for managing the local church. Inspiration for leaders of the local church in New Zealand and Australia.' Bishop Richard Ellena sums it up by saying, 'This is a book written by an experienced leader to stretch and challenge developing leaders. Effective leadership is essential to the health and vitality of the local church. Bob is able to identify those key concepts that transcend time and setting.' I think this is true; Bob makes frequent references to writing for an Australasian setting but many of the transferable examples he uses are lessons learnt from the wider English-speaking world. Bishop Richard also adds,

I encouraged Bob to write this book because he had the habit of challenging me in such a way that led me to reflect on aspects of my own leadership and each of these occasions were times of personal growth and development.

Or, as Bishop Derek Eaton puts it about the book:

One would be hard pressed to find better help so practical and so soundly based on Scripture. In a day when solid, sound, and dare I say it, successful examples of leadership are hard to find, this book is a goldmine of relevant, sensible information which will challenge the reader to be the very best he or she can be for our Lord and for his kingdom.

The first two-thirds of the book are about leadership—mostly a very readable set of 21 leadership principles spread across short chapters and ending with helpful questions for reflection and discussion. It has some sharp and even courageous observations, including the assertion that leadership can be *learnt*; it is not simply a gift and any Christian can learn from the biblical

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principles behind the attitudes and skills leaders need both to cultivate and to avoid. The book then goes on to discuss *wisdom* (that often neglected Biblical category) in leading—what Bob calls ‘21 Principles for Managing the Local Church.’ This is also very helpful and even uncovers some reasons for those times in church when we wince and say to ourselves, ‘Why would someone ever want to come back to this place?’! As Murray Robertson says about this part of the book: ‘Effective management is often neglected in leadership books. A failure to grasp essential aspects of this has been the undoing of some pastors’ ability to lead.’

**I urge Latimer readers to buy this book and to aim to read it slowly because almost every page will both challenge and enrich anyone who cares about the local church. There is nothing to match this helpful resource for this part of the world.**

So, I’m an enthusiastic reviewer. However, the book might have a few shortcomings (that a second edition might at least mention). I increasingly meet people who want to know how to lead and manage churches that have Maori, or Pasifika, or Asian or other multi-cultural members (or would-be members except that ‘they never come’ or ‘they never came back’—why?). This topic is not mentioned. Nor, I think, is there much help for another issue I encounter: vicars and others

asking about the leadership and management of community-facing ministries with their huge (and proven) potential both to *grow and* to deplete churches. I also wondered how much Bob’s own personality type shapes his views of leadership and management. What about other quite different Myers-Briggs types to his? (Such people do lead and manage somewhat differently.) And, although the book’s subtitle promises ‘inspiration for ... the local church in New Zealand and Australia,’ there isn’t much that is distinctly Australasian in tone. Almost all the quotes and references, and many of the examples, are to British and American sources—which raises the missiological question: ‘Shouldn’t local churches look and feel *local* and not mostly British or American?’ (And one minor grumble: a book of this size, with so much packed into it, needs an index to help track its richness. Even after a second careful reading my head was spinning with: ‘now where did Bob comment on ... ?’) But having said all that, this remains an excellent and affordable book: very clear in its message, very readable in its style and endlessly sensible, courageous and oozing with wisdom and relevance on every page. And if that’s not enough, Bob waits until the last three pages to list the *sixteen* free booklets he has available electronically on a further range of practical church-related issues! I urge Latimer readers to buy this book and to aim to read it slowly because almost every page will both challenge and enrich anyone who cares about the local church. There is nothing to match this helpful resource for this part of the world. Thank you, Bob, for writing it!