

# An interview with Michael Hewat, the newly appointed Executive Officer of the AFFIRM network

Rev. Malcolm Falloon

**Michael Hewat is the Vicar of West Hamilton in the Waikato Diocese and a member of the Latimer Executive. He has recently also become the first part-time Executive Officer of AFFIRM, a partnership of Anglican societies to which Latimer is affiliated. I recently caught up with Michael to find out more about his new role.**

*Michael, can you firstly tell us a little more about Affirm?*

Affirm is an acronym for Anglicans for Faith, Intercession, Renewal and Mission. It was originally set up as a partnership of voluntary societies. The voluntary societies being: the Church Missionary Society (NZCMS); South American Missionary Society (SAMS); the Latimer Fellowship; the Church Army; and (in those days) Anglican Renewal Ministries (ARMS). Today, SAMS has become part of NZCMS, and ARMS has left to become the ecumenical ministry, New Wine. Two further organisations have now joined the Affirm family: Sharing Of Ministries Aboard (SOMA) and Bishopdale Theological College in Nelson.

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On top of that, there has always been provision for parishes and individuals to associate with Affirm. That is now being activated, with a number of regional groupings being formed and individual parishes associating with the Affirm network. An individual person could potentially associate directly with Affirm, but we would rather

encourage people to do so either through their parish or through one of the partner societies.

*What is your role as the Executive Officer of Affirm?*

Basically to make things happen! There've been lots of good intentions over the years but, without someone paid, or released from other ministries to do something for Affirm, there's been a struggle to actually do a lot. My first objective is to re-assert Affirm's influence in the church, to make it known and try and encourage people to get excited about the things that Affirm is excited about – God's mission!

*So what is the mission of Affirm?*

At this juncture, we have set ourselves the immediate goal of restoring confidence in the gospel.

*So, you are working part-time for Affirm. How is your position funded?*

The position has been funded by an anonymous donation in order to launch the position. So, if it is to carry on for the longer term, we will have to build up a financial base. We hope to do that with the support of associated parishes as well as a wider circle of individual supporters.

*West Hamilton is a large and busy parish. How does that work being a parish Vicar as well as an Executive Officer?*

To be honest, at the moment it's something we are working out as we go, as I've only been doing it since the beginning of the year. The way I'm presently doing it is I'm trying as hard as I can to divide the month into two blocks, the first

block goes to Affirm, and the second block goes to the parish. Now, it's not possible to do that legalistically, and I wouldn't want to, but that's the basic principle. I intend to be away from the parish only one Sunday a month.

*Do you have the support of your Diocesan Bishop doing this?*

Yes I do. He has certainly given his assent and been supportive in trying to make it work from the point of view of the pension board, stipend payments and that sort of thing.

*I know you've also been visiting a number of other Bishops to introduce yourself. How have they responded to this initiative?*

Generally they have been very positive about what Affirm stands for and the mission possibilities which Affirm brings. But I think it's also fair to say that they are a little bit concerned in the current climate that Affirm could be drawn into a divisive sort of role. That's not Affirm's intention or desire at all, and I've expressed that to them.

*What events are you planning?*

The main event this year is a series of regional seminars around the country called "Restoring Confidence in the Gospel". These seminars will have four components: firstly, restoring confidence in the Bible as God's word; secondly, restoring confidence in Jesus as Saviour and Lord; thirdly, restoring confidence in the Church as the Body of Christ; and the fourth component will be a plenary session asking the question, 'What does all this mean for our parishes and mission units?'

*Which centres are going to host these seminars?*

At present the confirmed locations are Whangarei, Auckland, Tauranga, Wellington, and Christchurch. But I'm also working on the possibility of holding the seminars in Hamilton, Gisborne, Taradale, Taranaki, and Dunedin.

We are also planning a big mission/evangelism conference next year in Auckland, 1-4 May, as part of our contribution to the 2014 celebrations. This will be immediately prior to the General Synod, so hopefully some will be able to attend both.

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*Long term, what is your vision for Affirm and its involvement in the life of the Anglican Church?*

Perhaps the nature of our partner societies dictates this a little, since they are basically mission-orientated societies. If you think of the five-fold marks of mission, Affirm's long term goal is really to encourage the Church in the first two: to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom, and, to teach, baptise and nurture new believers. This will probably be the main focus of Affirm long term.

*How can parishes and individuals get involved?*

The best thing, if you are an individual, is to encourage your parish to associate with Affirm. You can do that through the form on the website. The website has a sign-up page so that people can receive by email the monthly e-newsletter, "Enthuse". The newsletter is the best way of hearing about up-coming events. We are also looking to build up an intercessory prayer ministry (the 'I' in Affirm). Individuals can sign up for that too on the website.