

Student Soul Review Report (2007) for the Synod of Otago and Southland

Issues from previous review (2004)
Approach taken to conduct the 2007 review
Key issues identified

1. Leadership
2. Integration with Churches
3. Outreach
4. Model for Student Ministry

Possibilities
Summary and Recommendations
Acknowledgments

Issues from previous review (2004)

Support structure

For various reasons the oversight of Student Soul by the committee of Dunedin Presbytery had limitations. Whilst it was an appropriate relationship in the early years of this ministry, the benefits of a more specific group of interested supporters was recognised. A **Support Team** of supporters has been operating for the last two years providing the necessary oversight, financial management, accountability and encouragement. This Support Team reports formally to the Session of Leith Valley Presbyterian Church. This team is made up of deeply committed individuals who provide critical leadership of 'eldership quality' to the ministry of Student Soul generally, and to Helen Harray and Richard Dawson specifically.¹

Counselling load

The high number of students requesting counselling was a serious issue of pressure on Helen at the last review. This has been effectively managed since with a combination of access to additional counselling support and a reduced emphasis 'from the front', to re-prioritise counselling within the overall ministry offered by Student Soul.

Documentation of the Student Soul story

The unique nature of the ministry offered by Student Soul was recognised as important to the life of the wider Church. Its effectiveness in offering a valuable and targeted ministry to people in the particular age and stage of tertiary study is something to be celebrated and endorsed. The potential benefits from the documentation and sharing of the Student Soul story were recognised. This has been largely carried out in conjunction with Mary-Jane Konings, an Ordinand on placement from the School of

¹ For details of the roles and functions of the Support Team see *Appendix One*.

Ministry, and there is enthusiasm in various quarters for this to be used to incarnate similar ministries in other tertiary student contexts.

Summary of 2004 review

The three summary points from the last review conducted on behalf of Synod were:

- Leadership: Helen Harray 80%, Richard Dawson 50%.
- Attendance: coming close to 100 per week.
- Funding from Synod: approved 2005 \$90K, 2006 \$80K, 2007 \$70K.

Approach taken to conduct the 2007 review

The Review Team was asked to conduct a similar review process to that carried out in 2004 to provide an assessment to Synod of the ministry of Student Soul over the last three years. Particular consideration is to be given to relevant issues, given Synod's relationship to Student Soul as its major funding partner. A recommendation as to future funding by Synod is required, along with any other recommendations that the team consider appropriate.

The Review Team reflected a dynamic representation of young leaders in the Church who each have a passion for meaningful ministry to young people: *Stephanie Redhead* (South Island National Youth Co-ordinator for the PCANZ), *Marie McLennan* (Former Funding Administrator for East Taieri Church focused on the Youth Trust), and the convenor *Allister Lane* (Ordinand and member of previous Review Team).

The Review Team requested a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis from Helen Harray and Richard Dawson, along with financial summaries and other important documentation. In addition to those mentioned we also had the benefit of timelines, job descriptions, planning meeting summaries, and funding applications.

This material informed the Review Team in preparation for a full day of meeting with interested parties on 20th July. We met with the Rev. Helen Harry the principal leader of Student Soul. We met with Andrew Callender, Ruth Pearce, Shona MacDonald, and Emma McPhail from the Support Team. We met with seventeen students involved in Student Soul: Rowan, Rachel, Tania, Alistair, Naomi, Ruth, Ed, Mark, Jo, Tim, Amy, Emerson, Tim (II), Matt, Alex, Rosie and Stephanie. We also met with the Rev. Mary-Jane Konings who had worked with Student Soul on field placement during her training for Ordained Ministry.

The following Sunday we worshipped with Student Soul in their evening service on campus to experience the context of this ministry directly.

Key issues identified

The most significant impression of the Review Team is how valuable and effective the ministry of Student Soul is. After five years the leadership has experienced many delights, challenges and tensions – and have adapted throughout in response to where the Holy Spirit leads them in service to God in this particular ministry with the young people on campus. All the students we met with spoke with passion about the significance of this ministry to their faith development in their varsity years. They reflected on a variety of intentional aspects of the Student Soul ministry that allow them to engage genuinely in this unique community of faith.

1. Leadership

The leadership comes primarily from the Rev. Helen Harray and the Rev. Richard Dawson. They both engage meaningfully with students and strive to remain approachable. Their style of leadership means that they take each person's situation seriously, and they serve as role-models. It is apparent that Helen carries a large workload, and the students themselves identified the burden of work that Helen carries. The Review Team recognises some classic indicators of potential 'burn out' but also acknowledges how effectively Helen manages her workload as best she can.

Helen and Richard benefit from others who support them in different ways. The Leith Valley Presbyterian Church is a critical partner to Student Soul and expresses its generosity in numerous ways.

The Support Team ensures a formalised stable presence to consistently share the load and pick up the various tasks they can. The membership of the Support Team includes both those who have been involved in supporting Student Soul from its inception and those who have embraced the work of this ministry recently.

Emma McPhail's support this year, for Helen especially, has been particularly welcome and has functioned in a very complementary manner. The benefit of this support has prompted a desire to pursue more 'mature' leadership in the Student Soul team.

Attempts to draw in and develop leadership from the pool of students have had mixed results. At times there have been delights (including a student called to Ordained Ministry) but also frustrations at the unreliability of busy students. It is inevitable that more effort and time is required to develop leaders, than to work with those who have more experience.

The existing leadership recognises the potential to expand the ministry of Student Soul (including the development of students as leaders) by bringing in additional paid staff who have the appropriate gifts and experience.

The creative and strategic strengths of the leadership are evident in the five year history of Student Soul. The leadership has largely remained the same over that time and what difference any change in personnel would make is unknown.

2. Integration with Churches

One of the most intriguing issues that emerges from the review is the tension evident between offering a unique faith community, verses enabling students to identify with the wider Church.

The creativity that goes into developing stimulating approaches to worship and discipleship has resulted in a style of ministry that is quite unlike that of the average Presbyterian church community. It is this unique style that the students engage with and appreciate most about Student Soul: their questions are welcomed and handled seriously; they are enabled to explore 'wholeness'; there is a discovery of what it means to be a Christian for this particular generation. This is unique not just amid Presbyterian congregations, but also in relation to the other 'student churches' near the campus who attract those students who are more accustomed to a 'Charismatic-Pentecostal' style of church.

As one body in Christ, we can indeed celebrate this exploration of faith that is enabled for tertiary students, but to what degree is there an expectation that Student Soul is primarily charged with nurturing young Presbyterians during their varsity years in order to enable them to participate in Presbyterian congregations once they graduate? The Review Team suspects that this implicit expectation may be reasonably widespread. The Review Team invites any such an expectation to be abandoned.

The Presbyterian Church has demonstrated a courageous attitude toward the ministry of Student Soul, allowing it to develop and function with minimal interference. It has funded the majority of this unique ministry without attaching strings to that funding. In maintaining this courageous attitude the Church may recognise that the model of Student Soul may be able to teach something about being the Church. The new styles of ministry being forged in the Student Soul context, rather than departing from the Reformed tradition, may well be offering new ways for the Church to engage the generation that is so often missing in congregations around New Zealand. Any gap between the expectations of Student Soul graduates and a PCANZ congregation is not just an issue for Student Soul. It is the hope of the Review Team that rather than expecting Student Soul to be more like the average Presbyterian congregation, the emerging authentic approaches to ministry in Student Soul may be embraced by congregations. This may well occur where graduates who have been sustained and developed in their faith by Student Soul are encouraged to participate in the leadership of churches, not because they have been 'retained' but because they have been inspired for service of God.

At the same time Student Soul is encouraged to acknowledge its context within the wider Church and to journey with an appreciation of the guiding principles of the Reformed tradition. To forget either of these is to risk ecclesial isolation; self-amputation from the body. Students from Student Soul have participated in services of worship at Presbyterian congregations around Dunedin. There is also significant leadership given by students for Presbytery-wide events, such as Easter Camps and 'Going Somewhere' youth leadership training courses. Such initiatives should continue to be encouraged.

3. Outreach

As with most ministries, Student Soul faces the tension between numerical growth, and an authentic and caring ministry. The challenge is to hold these two together; without neglecting either.

Numbers of participants are down at the evening worship services (the focus for the weekly community time) from where they have been in previous years. This is not a substantial decline, and is more cyclical than terminal. There is a dedicated gathering of students who appreciate the style of ministry at Student Soul and who have benefited from the community. These students have either been involved for a number of years, or are recent arrivals to Student Soul but in their third or fourth year of tertiary study. The group that is relatively low in numbers is the first year students. Student Soul has picked up on the importance of the need to intentionally and proactively focus on the first year students, as it faces the very real risk of an aging congregation (even faster than other churches around the country!)

There are more young Christians in tertiary education than ever before in New Zealand's history. This fact further legitimises the importance of a ministry targeted at students. The leaders of Student Soul recognise the potential of the ministry and what it means for the church to face the community in a missional way. To this end they have attempted to encourage the students to participate in evangelism among the wider student population. So far these attempts have not been embraced enthusiastically. This dream to engage in evangelism is admirable and is again something the wider church could learn from. Careful consideration needs to be given as to the best strategy for approaching this goal. Much of the additional funding requested from Synod is toward this goal. It is suggested that staff could work in colleges (ie: 'halls of residence') to draw students into the community. Care needs to be taken that this is in harmony with the existing students' expectations; there is potential for the leaders and the students to be working with different expectations. The Review Team is confident that the leadership of Student Soul would also work on teaching the existing students the missional importance of evangelism and widening their perspective. In addition to nurturing the students there is the need to challenge them appropriately toward mature discipleship.

4. Model for Student Ministry

For some time there has been a desire by the leadership of Student Soul to explore the possibility of sharing the 'model' of this ministry to other cities. This initiative reflects where Student Soul sees itself within the National Church, and its commitment to exploring authentic integrated ministry among young adults.

Far from 'empire building' this desire is about encouraging the church in other regions to benefit from the learning of the last five years in Dunedin and creatively plan how to connect with tertiary students in those areas.

Without a doubt, the major obstacle to developing similar ministries in other centres is the lack of such generous funding that the Synod of Otago and Southland has provided to Student Soul. While the Student Soul 'model' may

have many attractive aspects, the reliance on funding from the wider Church remains as the major resourcing platform. In five years this essential dependency has not been mitigated. It will take great vision and determination to achieve that which has to date has not been part of the Student Soul experience. Alternative funding has certainly been sought by the leadership of Student Soul, but this inevitably takes time away from the ministry work and so continued support is sought from the Synod. Other initiatives to minister specifically to tertiary students in other centres may have to start out more modestly without the resources that are available to Student Soul.

However, although the journey of Student Soul may not provide all the answers, it is encouraging to gauge the interest expressed by parties both within New Zealand and overseas; there is keen interest in the unique work being done on the Otago campus.

Possibilities

The Review Team is encouraged by the ministry undertaken by Student Soul over the last five years. It is a unique ministry to a specific age group that has been approached creatively and with great commitment by numerous parties. We have a real sense that through the work of the Holy Spirit in Student Soul the wider Church shares in ministry to young adults in a formative time in their lives, and therefore participates in the commitment to nurture young people given in the sacrament of Baptism.

As the Review Team members all have considerable experience in ministry to youth, we likened the funding of Student Soul to funding Youth Ministry - on a provincial scale. By targeting the catchment area of tertiary study the Church is engaging in the lives of people in the age group which is so often absent from our congregations. Student Soul is a shared ministry; it offers something parishes cannot and contributes to an overall healthier Church body.

The approach that enables such effective engagement with tertiary students means that it is necessarily located on campus. This 'edginess' presents an authentic community of faith among the daily reality of student life. It also presents challenges of resourcing not faced by most congregations of the Church. The Review Team recognises the substantial financial commitment made by the Church to enable Student Soul to continue. However, by again using the comparison of local Youth Ministry, the Team considers the investment per participant in Student Soul to be similar to the financial commitment of parishes that employ a youth worker. A significant difference of Student Soul is that it is accessible by a wide range of young adults from many parts of the country.

The desire by Student Soul leadership to develop evangelistic outreach has been mentioned above. Moving ahead with this would require targeted energy above and beyond what is required to maintain the current programme. Most significantly, additional personal would be required to both have a presence in the residential colleges and to help students themselves feel comfortable and

able to participate in the *Missio Dei*. Through careful selection of such personal, a further hope is to offer more significant ministry to male students, primarily through programs aimed at the specific interests men have.

In practical terms, this expansion of the Student Soul ministry equates to approximately a thirty percent increase above the level of funding needed to simply maintain the status quo.

Summary and Recommendations

Just as the 2004 Review of Student Soul for Synod reported, this current Review Team recognises and appreciates the significant work being done among young adults on the Otago campus. Student Soul represents the mission of the Presbyterian Church in a unique yet authentic way in this ever-changing environment of learning and burgeoning leadership.

There have been a number of challenges as Student Soul has journeyed through its third, fourth and fifth years. These have at times stretched the leadership and resources; but they have been met creatively and provided opportunities to learn.

There have also been a number of joys as God brings forth fruit from this ministry. The testimonies of the students themselves acknowledge the significance of this ministry in the sustaining and developing of their faith. Their questions are welcomed and they are invited to explore issues together, while being supported in times of doubts and difficulty.

The Review Team has not carried out a formal financial 'audit' but is comfortable with the historical management of resources and that appropriate procedures are in place for continuing stewardship.

Recommendations

1. Continued financial support of Student Soul by the Synod is necessary for this ministry to continue into the future. Alternative funding has been explored and tried, but is either inadequate or requires inordinate time and energy to procure. The ministry is still very worthwhile and therefore worthy of support.
2. The application for \$130,000 is supported on the basis of the desire to expand the effectiveness of the ministry of Student Soul. This higher level of funding would enable additional leadership to provide additional support and to develop targeted outreach and meaningful ministry for men. Synod may want to consider the following alternatives, in consultation with Student Soul:
 - a) providing \$130K on a 'probationary' basis of one financial year only; or
 - b) providing \$100K with the view to simply maintain the existing ministry.

3. The Church has much to offer Student Soul, and vice versa. Future possibilities to allow Student Soul and the wider Church to 'interface' should be explored by the leadership of both Student Soul and Synod.
4. The documentation of the Student Soul story should be completed within the next twelve months, and made available to interested parties. (Student Soul leadership to take responsibility for the first part and Synod responsibility for the second part)

Acknowledgements

The Review Team has enjoyed the opportunity to learn more about the ministry of Student Soul and its relationship with the Synod of Otago and Southland. We have been greatly impressed with the visionary nature of this ministry and the integrity with which it is handled.

We sincerely thank Rev Helen Harry for so willingly responding to all our requests for information and clarification, for her superb organisation in getting so many people together for the Review Day, and her patience through this necessary process.

We greatly appreciate all those who contributed to the review by providing us with their perspectives, experiences, joys, frustrations, stories, SWOT analyses, financial data, and hopes for the future. Your honesty and time is greatly valued. We were impressed by the enthusiasm with which people were prepared to speak up in strong support of Student Soul and the significance it has for them. It has been a great pleasure to share in the positivity generated in this environment and to sense something of the vision of this ministry in the midst of tertiary students. May God bless all those who participate in His ministry to the world.

Appendix One

ROLES AND FUNCTIONS OF THE SUPPORT TEAM

1. That the ongoing management of Student Soul is undertaken by the **Student Soul Support Team**, as commissioned by the Leith Valley Session. It meets as necessary and reports to the Leith Valley Session. It is moderated by Helen and is comprised of the ministers, at least two students, Treasurer, Secretary, and invited Presbytery reps, plus two members of Leith Valley Church.
2. That matters of overall budgeting and employment remain the final responsibility of the Leith Valley Session. However, matters concerning Student Soul are brought to Session to ratify based on the recommendations of the **Support Team**.
3. THE **SUPPORT TEAM** HAS THE RESPONSIBILITY THEREFORE OF MANAGING THE AFFAIRS OF THE STUDENT SOUL MINISTRY:
 - a. The SUPPORT TEAM undertakes to assist the minister in all temporal matters including the management of finance. They are required to keep minutes of meetings and record all decisions.
 - b. The SUPPORT TEAM does not have the power to alter the terms of the minister's appointment.
 - c. The SUPPORT TEAM is accountable to the Leith Valley Session for its management and will report, with financial details, to its monthly meeting.
 - d. The SUPPORT TEAM is responsible for the preparation of Synod Grant applications and any other fund raising.
 - e. The SUPPORT TEAM is responsible for calling and appointing any new ministry to Student Soul, in association with the Leith valley Session.
 - f. The SUPPORT TEAM is a body that provides accountability for its employees. It receives reports from all employees. It manages a review process of Ministry Assistants and secretary. It is allowed to ask the hard questions concerning the ministers of Student Soul.

The SUPPORT TEAM holds the vision of the student ministry, agreeing as far as it is possible to try and ensure this ministry will continue in the future. To this end it commits to prayerful oversight of the ministry, encouragement and moral support of the ministers and other paid staff.

Appendix Two

LETTER FROM UNIVERSITY CHAPLAIN

Dear Allister,

I am writing to support the continuation of studentsoul ministry on our University of Otago campus. The establishment of this ministry was carefully negotiated with the Otago Tertiary Chaplaincy Board. Over the years since its establishment I have admired the work done by Helen, Richard and other studentsoul leaders. I have personally done all I can during this time to support studentsoul. I see this ministry as a very positive and healthy one on our campus. It is a distinctive ministry. Although numbers have fluctuated over the years the quality of the ministry has been sustained.

I have come to know many of the studentsoul student leaders and members and I know that their involvement with studentsoul has been edifying, spiritually uplifting and a real blessing.

I therefore give my support to the ongoing presence and witness of studentsoul on our campus, as a sign of God's love and care in the midst of the tertiary world.

Please contact me if you require any further information.

Yours in Christ

Rev. Greg Hughson M.Sc. B.D.

University Chaplain

Dunedin

New Zealand