

Unintentional Receptive Ecumenism: From Ecclesial Margins to Ecumenical Exemplar – A New Zealand Case Study

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The Community Church of St John the Evangelist, situated on a relatively remote island off the east coast of New Zealand, is a unique ecumenical venture supported by the Anglican, Catholic, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches. This paper describes and situates this venture and discusses its development and modus vivendi in light of the paradigm of receptive ecumenism. This paradigm did not feature in the thinking of those who established this ecumenical community church; nevertheless it is argued that the paradigm aptly applies, so yielding the phenomenon of an unintentional receptive ecumenism at work.

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Introduction

Since the mid-1980s four Churches in New Zealand – Anglican, Catholic, Methodist and Presbyterian – have shared in the provision of Christian ministry to the Community Church of St John the Evangelist, Great Barrier Island, and in partnership with the Community Church, to the wider island community. All pledged to support as ‘Partner Churches’ to this unique venture with the supply of clergy or lay ministers who, between them, cover about half the Sundays of the year. The local fellowship serves itself for the remainder. However it was only as recently as 2011, after some 25 years of operation, that the Community Church was able to formulate its own Constitution and a Partnership Agreement formally endorsed and signed by the four supporting churches. Hitherto, practical co-operative arrangements had been guided by the terms of the standard Joint Use Agreement that applies to many co-operative ventures in New Zealand which involve Anglican, Methodist and/or Presbyterian Churches. But as the situation on Great Barrier Island is unique, in that these three were joined by the Catholics who are not party to the ecumenical arrangement whence arose

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