

A DISTURBING TREND

By Bill Pugh

For a variety of reasons, people are choosing a civil celebrant for the conduct of marriages and funerals. However, there is something unsatisfactory about this shift, particularly as families with one-time church connections are choosing these options. There is evidence of failure in the church's teaching.

I was invited to the funeral of an old friend whose family was once regular in attendance at our parish church.

A civil celebrant was invited to conduct the service and MC the occasion. It was an oily performance, with poetry, weak humour and platitudes about this man he had never met. Lastly a man from the yacht club, a mate, added his bit. What a good bloke was so and so ... and he

hasn't really left us. Really, I thought? And the widow and his family looked glum. "Why won't he come home with us then?" was the unheard expression. Then our celebrant invited us for drinks and a super afternoon tea. No word of hope.

Next was my brother's funeral in his home church. No celebrant but a Minister of the Word.

Years ago my brother had set out the order of service, hymns and selected scripture, with the present minister to officiate.

We sang his favourites, heard Psalm, Epistle and Gospel, and a family eulogy. Then the Minister delivered his message of hope, 25 minutes on the immortality of the soul.

Reflection:

So what has happened? Somehow the church and its ministry has failed in preaching, teaching, mission and witness. We need to get the fundamentals right.

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