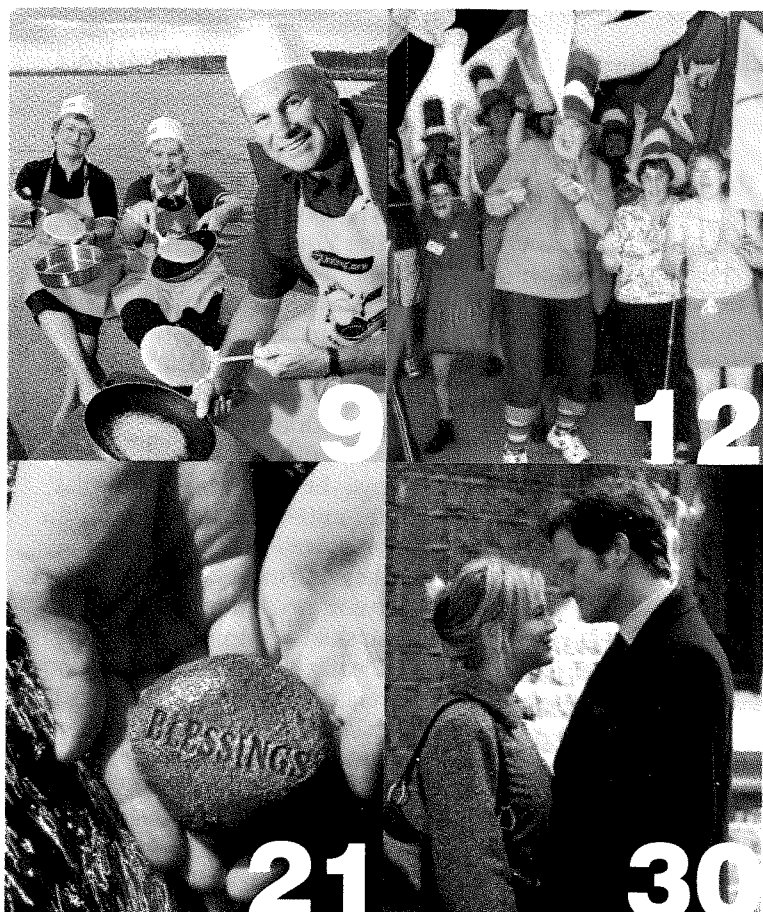


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editorial.

NCLS figures suggest, says New Congregations Coordinator Glen Powell, that small congregations have five to six times as much representation in presbyteries as large congregations.

A proposal at Synod that tried to redress this problem was referred to Council of Synod. The movers thought existing regulations actively restricted the voice of larger congregations throughout the church. Opponents accused it of gerrymandering or branch stacking against small congregations.

Mr Powell thought the proposal didn't go far enough.

The church suffers from malapportionment — when an electoral system violates the norm of equal representation according to population.

Whether presbyteries are dominated by fragments of the "traditional rump", "latte sipping liberals", or declining rural congregations, the current structures by which they are formed electorally deny large, thriving congregations the chance to have their vision represented through the councils of the church.

Since large congregations are so unfairly represented in presbyteries, many presbyteries don't really understand their issues and are not prepared to support their mission strategies. When presbyteries are so preoccupied with the agendas of small congregations that they exclude and discourage the participation of regional churches, they are the poorer for it.

Some change may come, however, thanks to the voices from those small congregations keen to tap into the experience and resources of talented personnel from their larger counterparts.

As we well know, the church is not a democracy, governed by majority votes. It strives to be ruled by God and governed by councils which aim to discern the guidance of the Spirit. But that's no reason to make those councils unrepresentative. What godly purpose is served by leaving large congregations frustrated, resentful and distanced from the life of the church?

As Sydney Presbytery Secretary Peter Bentley said in a recent newsletter, if presbyteries are to survive and develop in the future, we will need to encourage and develop active lay membership and involvement in presbytery committees and consultations.

Addressing this injustice is a chance for the church to think missionally, rather than along theological or sexual divides.

■ **Stephen Webb**

cover feature.

New Moderator Jim Mein set the tone for Synod 2004 with reference to hope, faith and leadership, and a call to recognise that the church's unity is in Jesus Christ.

December 2004:
 Christmas, consensus and
 holiday reading.

