

A flight of fancy.

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I have become a seasoned traveller since taking on my role as Executive Officer of UCANZ. Getting around the country and meeting people has been a real privilege, but with the joy comes the toil - I've also spent a lot of time at airports. I've sat and watched people, and have reached some obvious conclusions.

- It's stupid to yell at the counter person when a flight is delayed – they can't change things.
- Security people are not interested in your anecdotes about why you have a sharp object.
- Standing up as soon as the plane lands doesn't get you off any quicker.
- Try not to look disappointed when you turn your cell phone on and no calls have been missed.

One thing I have noticed is that the major airports are now a destination in themselves – they're not simply a transit place. The food, entertainment, and facilities all provide something more than just a place to catch a flight. We even have our UCANZ meetings at Wellington airport – it is convenient for all.

So what of our churches? There was a time when we would arrive on a Sunday morning, take a flight (a one hour long service) and then head home. The church was simply a transit point, the seats were uncomfortable, there was no food, toilets were few, and people moved in and out rather quickly. There was a good comparison with airports of the time – an age when people got dressed up to travel.

But airports have changed (and if you accept this analogy, perhaps churches have or should too). There's better car-parking to make sure that people can get to the airport. There's good signage so people don't feel lost and can find the toilets without asking. There's a great sound system so that everyone knows what's happening – along with some digital displays. There's good coffee and a place to sit around tables and have a talk. There's meeting rooms so that people can gather from a distance and share together.

You'll begin to grasp the analogy – and I wonder if you can start to see your church like an airport. How do you focus on the travellers that will pass through? Are there opportunities for them to connect with fellow travellers? Are they able to prepare for what is to come or take time and reflect on the journey that's been?

But let's be honest – few of us go to the airport just to go to the airport (the car park is too expensive for that!) The church is called to brighten up the terminal and deal with the travellers, but our central purpose is to encourage people on a spiritual journey that brings them closer to God. The buildings, the processes, the food, the people – they're all there to help people discover the good news of God's salvation through grace.

May the Spirit be with you on the journey, and may God's wisdom be with you in the terminal at the journey's beginning and end.