

Final Address – General Assembly 2006
Gary Marquand

Moderator, and members of the Assembly. I greet you in the name of Jesus Christ. Kiaora Tatou.

Four years ago when I was elected as Moderator Designate a number of people, in affirming me said, “I’m not sure whether I should offer you congratulations or commiserations.” In retrospect I can now say they should have said, “You will be wonderfully blessed.” These last two years as your Moderator have been great years for me – ‘energising’ is the word I use. I want to thank God and the Presbyterian Church for these years of service, and of grace. Wonderful blessing!

Firstly, in travelling to Presbyteries Val and I have been blessed by New Zealand! From Kaitaia to Stewart Island we have really enjoyed our country’s incredible beauty, its amazing diversity, its history and art and people.

Then, everywhere we have been, we have received such a wonderful welcome from the people of the Church. Their warm hospitality, their encouragement and co-operation, their special efforts on our behalf have been really appreciated.

We have also been really encouraged by the widespread and growing desire among so many people to talk about the issues we face as a Church and to grapple with God’s call to mission. There have been some really stimulating mission events and inspiring services of worship.

There have been so many enriching occasions in serving and representing you: such as: participating in the funeral service for Dame Te Atairangikahu and the crowning of the new Maori King; hearing Bishop Tutu speak at the World Council of Churches Assembly; attending two inspirational Youth Leaders Connect Conferences; sharing in the re-opening of Te Wananga a Rangi at Ohope; honouring Sir Norman Perry who had an enormous influence in our Church and community; being part of student.soul – twice; celebrating 100 years at Turakina Maori Girls College; visiting the Marsden Cross at Oihi Bay; and enjoying the hospitality and confidence of our Pacific Island Fono.

I have also had the immense privilege of working with the employees of the General Assembly. The Assembly Executive Secretary and National Mission Enabler, Personnel in the National Office in communications, finance etc, School of Ministry staff, Andrew Bell in Global Mission, key leaders in the Presbyterian Youth Movement and in Kids Friendly. Add in the leaders of Te Aka Puaho and the other Synods, and the Conveners of the Council of Assembly.

Friends, these are impressive people who serve us:

- they are passionate and visionary people seeking to create a better Church,
- they are gifted people who work really hard, in the midst of pressures and change.
- and they keep on serving , despite the flak they collect on occasions,

It has been an immense privilege working with them.

Then as Moderator I have spoken, individually and in group settings, with many of the Ministers of our Church. Ministry may well be a high calling, but it is also a tough one in today’s world –

and some of our Ministers serve in very challenging circumstances. I want to say publicly that the Ministers of our Church are a fantastic group of people!

Speaking more directly to you today: your strong sense of call, your love for the church, your servant hearts, your faith and resilience and courage, your vision and the sacrifices you are prepared to make – is really impressive. Engaging with you has been a wonderful blessing to me – I want to honour you.

I have also been blessed with the ecumenical dimensions of my service as Moderator. Within New Zealand, through the Uniting Church in Australia, and to the diversity of the Church of Jesus Christ throughout the world – expressed so well in this year's World Council of Churches Assembly in Brazil; I have rejoiced in, and have been so enriched by, being part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. Further, I believe a broadening ecumenical dimension needs to be an important feature of our future. In particular, we should strengthen our relationships with the churches of the non-western world – they have much to share with us about mission.

Four years ago, I expressed to the Assembly something of my passion for the local church, for the gospel and grace, and of the call for our churches to be mission centred in identity and action. Out of that I have sought to serve you: to provoke thought (I did manage to upset some people), to be more real about current realities of Church and context, to suggest some radical changes in our understanding of ministry and church life, and to have countless conversations about it all. I don't really know how all this fits into God's sovereign will for us, but I do know that to have provided some leadership in mission and to have linked into this core reality of who God is, has been a wonderful journey. I remain passionate and positive about local churches in mission.

What I also know is that throughout our denomination, and in Uniting Churches, there are some healthy, growing congregations. These range across all the diversity of context – rural, town and city, the diversity of leadership arrangements – ordained, lay, and teams, and the diversity of style and life. These congregations have forged new ways of being church: mission centred and with confident leadership, they are adventurous and spiritually vibrant, they have transformed themselves and/or planted new congregations, and so on. As the rest of us seek them out.

To all the words I've spoken about mission – may I add three footnotes today.

Firstly, for us Ministers with all our theological resources and experience: to reform ourselves in mission, we have to do more than just change our language. Mission terminology is common in the Church today – very PC perhaps, but if it doesn't reflect actual reform they are words alone.

Then there are the many issues we face to do with our structures and ways of operating. In a rapidly changing, diverse, and needy world a church in mission needs to find new and flexible ways of being responsive. In both Presbyteries and parishes – we need more courage and less caution. We need more faith and less defensiveness. And in creating a new future, for God's sake, let us learn how to trust one another.

Thirdly, I believe we must reclaim and place in the centre of our mission task as local churches the proclamation of the gospel. Friends: we are an Easter people – people of the resurrection. We are people of the Spirit – we believe in transformation. As a church we have a fantastic

record in responding to the needy, working for peace and justice, and caring for people as individuals or in church-based initiatives. But in all things we serve the Lord Jesus Christ, and we are servants of his gospel – so let us all learn how to ‘name his name’, let us speak of his love, of the forgiveness and shalom and reconciliation he offers, and thereby help people journey to faith and into the body of Christ. The proclamation of the gospel is at the heart of our mission task.

Members of the Assembly. As I finish, I want to thank you for all your support and prayers. I want to thank Kerry Enright for all the help and encouragement he has been to me in this role. I want to acknowledge the support of my Committee, and the consistent encouragement the people of my Parish have offered. And most of all I want to thank my wife Val – she has been a fantastic companion on this journey. That Mission Presentation I gave to Presbyteries – Val engaged with it and gave feedback 28 times!

Val – thank you for your wonderful support and love.

So – thanks to God, for two great years of ministry and grace.