

The Great Big Growth Plan

(Please note: This was a paper written as part of the development of the Press Go initiative. Some of the suggestions and ideas contained in it were not part of the final plan)

Introduction to the Big Plan

Our Church must be a vital, outwardly focused organisation embodying God's call to seek and save the lost. We want to be a life-giving and healing place for people where God's grace is lived out.

We want people in faithfulness and hope to commit themselves to supporting the Presbyterian Church as an expression of their discipleship and sense of God's call on their lives.

We are at a tipping point for our Church. We have made a commitment to a new way of training our leaders; we have good financial systems in place; our national structures and decision-making processes have been developed to be responsive and efficient; we have a staff of motivated and competent individuals and we can identify examples of growth and development around our Church.

We now have an opportunity to focus our attention on addressing the 30-year decline of participation in and influence of the Presbyterian Church in New Zealand.

The Basics

This document is based upon five assertions.

1. Decline is not inevitable.
2. The Church's money is not ours. The resources we share, the money in the offering plate, our congregation's bank balance and buildings are not ours. Those present and past have entrusted us with the resources we have for the purposes of glorifying God and fulfilling God's mission for and in the world.
3. The Presbyterian Church is ruled by Elders. Every Elder makes a commitment to fulfil leadership responsibilities for the whole Church. No Elder can fulfil their role by basing their decisions on the singular interest of any particular congregation or group. When Elders do this they undermine what it means to be part of the Presbyterian Church. An Elder's primary commitment is to God's mission and their decisions need to reflect an earnest commitment to seek God's wisdom and the leading of the Holy Spirit.
4. Growth is possible. It is happening. Experience tells us about the best ways to organise ourselves to support growth.
5. The changes advocated here are radical and costly and can only happen through a broad consensus and willingness by Church leaders. The changes are not for someone else to make- they require an ownership by each one of us.

Our biggest fears

That we cannot trust each other enough. That we cannot trust those charged with the responsibilities of making this happen. That the money we have is ours to secure our survival. That we can't bring ourselves to make these decisions. That someone else is going to benefit at our expense. That we 'agree in principle'. That we will lose our community. That it won't work. That the money will be misused. That someone else over there will use the money we have given to support the growth of a congregation with a different culture/perspective/theology than ours.

Looking back and looking forward

The Past.

Church attendance peaked in the early 1960's at about 90,000. Now attendance is closer to 30,000. (Over this same period of time New Zealand's population almost doubled.) There is no simple reason for this decline. Sociologists tell us that membership in many voluntary organisations, sports and service clubs have declined over this period at similar rates. In many parts of rural New Zealand there has been significant falls in population.

The group most easily identified as leaving the church were the 'baby boom' generation but we have moved a long way away from a time when church participation or denominational identity could be assumed.

We need to honestly identify the overwhelming decline in support and influence which our Church has experienced over the last 40 years.

The Future.

Doing nothing

We can all do this simple exercise. Stand at the front of your church next Sunday morning. Count how many people have come along and compare it with how many were sitting there ten years ago. What is happening?

The trends in the data we have collected indicate not how slowly but how quickly the church is changing. We are rapidly becoming a church of many small congregations scattered through provincial and urban New Zealand and a handful of larger congregations situated mostly in city suburbs where there has been significant population growth. A portion of these larger congregations can be identified with a particular Asian or Pacific ethnicity.

Doing something

If you could do something which would help grow the Church and its mission in making Christ known - would you do it? Even if it meant releasing your own

Church assets? Even if it meant selling your own church and manse to support a new mission?

The solutions offered here are on one hand very simple and on the other very complex. The simple idea is the release of church assets to fund growth. This is an idea which receives broad theoretical support. The complexity is that we are very very attached to these assets. They represent a place, a history and a security for us. It may be just too hard a decision to make.

However, we know that the cost of supporting these growth solutions - the funding of leaders who will build new congregations and the purchase of a few properties – are moving beyond the means of even our larger congregations to manage.

Let's look at the Big Plan a bit more closely

The two things we need a lot of money to do are:

- **Fund the leadership which will build new congregations.**
We have made a commitment to identify and train leaders who have the skills to support growing and outward focused congregations committed to sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ. We need to ensure that those we train are placed in positions which allow them to fully use their skills and gifts. Some of these people are Ministers of Word and Sacrament and some are gifted Elders and leaders whose potential is recognised by their local congregation.
- **Support the purchase of a small number of buildings on sites around New Zealand which will be at the centre of New Zealand's largest population growth areas and provide debt relief for congregations who have already embarked on these strategic building projects.**
These are areas whose population increase will be measured in tens of thousands of people. The facilities which neighbouring congregations and Presbyteries are now and will be developing reflect the needs and character of these new communities.

A third thing which we will ask the General Assembly to fund:

- **Support for the process that will allow this to happen.**
We need a person whose primary task is to oversee our Church Growth programme. A person to identify the specific opportunities, negotiate the relationships between Presbyteries and congregations , support the

building of the growth fund and to communicate the good news of how God is working through our Church in this work. We may also need to invest in our Communications team to ensure that the stories of growth and development are shared throughout the church.

Getting the Money

Our Church is becoming wealthier and wealthier. The Congregations and Presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church hold between them around 90 million dollars in cash investments. The collective value of the property we own runs into the many hundreds of millions of dollars. The Trustees in fact say that our property assets are now worth over a billion dollars. .

Accessing ten percent of our wealth base to fund growth is our goal.

Our Church needs congregations and presbyteries to consider either selling their buildings and transfer their money and their cash reserves to the Church Growth Fund or to provide a 2.5% return to the Fund on all their investments. The 2.5% figures represent a 10% tithe from the commencement of investment in the fund on January 1 2009 to its review in 4 years time.

In more detail we would invite:

- Congregations who have experienced consistent numerical decline over the last 10 years to cede their property and financial assets for the benefit of the Church Growth Fund. The money realised through the sale of buildings would be used to purchase other capital assets in places of population growth and cash assets would be used to fund the leadership of new and emerging congregations.
- All congregations and presbyteries with investments in cash to provide to the fund a 2.5% return from their investments (in other words, if your annual return was 7% your congregation would keep 4.5% and provide 2.5% to the fund)
- For congregations and presbyteries with property investments we would ask that you provide a 2.5% return on your investment to the fund.

- For congregations with stocks and shares we would invite you to provide a payment equivalent to 10% of your last five years of capital gain.
- For congregations who have money invested from the sale of a capital asset (a Manse, a church building etc.) the Property Trustees can ensure that that money is used to help in the purchase of some other capital asset where it is most likely to benefit the growth of the Church.
- For congregation who have investments to consider providing loans to congregations engaged in significant new growth and development projects - with an understanding that as long as the loan is used for the purposes agreed upon, this loan would, at an agreed time, become a gift.
- Cash for Capital. There may be opportunities for congregations who hold money which can only be used for capital expenditure to swap this money with a congregation who hold unencumbered cash but need a greater sum for a capital project.

None of these things can happen without the full cooperation and support of Presbyteries and effective and pastoral communications between all concerned. The Synod of Otago and Southland and the Presbyterian Church will also need to reach an agreement about the use of funds realised in this way. We are very keen for the whole Church to be committed to this process. While there are some legislative restraints in terms of money tied up in capital these restraints do not apply to the financial returns generated from a congregation's or presbytery's investments.

Is this an impossible ask?

We have in our Church DNA some bold and highly successful initiatives from our past.

A history of Church planting.

Almost all our older congregations were responsible for taking on the challenge of providing ministry and financial support for new congregations during times of urbanisation and population growth.

Take a look at your own historical records and find out who and what neighbouring Church believed enough in mission to provide the foundations on which you exist today as a congregation.

New Life Fund

The deep financial crisis faced by the Church of the 1950's prompted a group of Elders to consider the matter in retreat. With no light at the end of the tunnel, and their retreat virtually over, a certain Mr Steele contributed, "Gentlemen, we have been talking about the wrong things. Addressing our financial woes, instead of going to the heart of the matter, over all these days, in a desultory manner we've constantly flitted from one subject to another. Our proper starting place and constant focus should have been the Lordship of Jesus Christ over all that we have, over all that we are and over all that we do." And he continued, ".....over all our time and talents and possessions". That prophetic statement soon gave birth to the Programme of Stewardship and Evangelism- proclaimed throughout the church, largely through the work of Sir Norman Perry and Mr Ken Skelton of Opotiki.

(Thanks to Keith Sellar who reminds us of the origins of the New Life Fund)

Of course many things have changed but the theology remains true and we have plenty of money now. It just needs to be reinvested in people and places that will support sustained growth and reflect a faith-based stewardship of the resources entrusted to us by God.

The Growth Fund will not be used as a source of money to prop up congregations in decline or to enable them to put off the inevitable decisions about their future. It will be used by congregations and Presbyteries to support congregational and Church developments where there is a high probability of growth. These programmes and the use of this resource will be monitored by our Church Growth Director.

So what does 'work'?

There are criteria based on our experience of the Church here in New Zealand which will guide us in the best use of the money we generate from the Growth Fund.

We have enough evidence from practical real situations to affirm the structures and Church models which are most likely to support the growth of our mission and the influence of the Gospel on our communities.

But let's look at what experience tells us doesn't work

Stand alone congregations where a minister works largely alone and where the vast majority of the Congregation's resources and fund raising efforts go to pay his or her stipend.

This is the situation from which over the last decade most of our numerical decline and minister's disillusionment emerge.

Congregations with a history of decline merging with neighbouring declining congregations so that they can afford together to fund a Minister.

Decline continues. Whether these congregations merge with a congregation from a different denomination and become a Uniting Congregation, or whether they join another Presbyterian congregation, the result seems to be the same. Merging declining with declining does not work as a strategy for growth and in fact often complicates issues when another denominational structure becomes involved.

Congregations using their remaining financial assets to improve foyers, fix kitchens, buy new organs, repair stained glass windows or get the lighting sorted out.

These things are expensive and almost never make much difference in terms of the congregation's growth or the extension of its mission.

What works?

Our growth and vitality as a Church appears to be supported by some particular ways of organising ourselves and viewing our ministry and mission.

Churches that are led by an active and mutually supportive team of people with complementary skills and gifts. These Churches typically have large congregations and often fund some of their activities from income generated through the provision of various social and community services. (grants, fees, contestable funding etc.) These Congregations take responsibility for training new leaders and will call or employ people with particular skills to support new areas of ministry. There is a strong sense of mission, and a continuing and intentional commitment to engage with their wider community. Some of these Congregations reach agreements with smaller congregation in the wider geographical area to provide various forms of ministry, leadership and pastoral support.

There are larger and not so large congregations that have developed multi use facilities. These Parishes provide for congregations of different size, cultural background and ethos. There are multiple services held on Sunday and often at different times of the week.

Ministry is shared between a team of ordained and non ordained leaders.

We know of new faith communities and emerging congregations. These are communities that may not require their own buildings but emerge out of a specific context or outreach commitment. These may require very significant external funding, especially in their early years of growth. These congregations almost always are associated with a stronger, established congregation from which they draw leadership and support.

Common characteristics to all these are:

- A strong pervasive commitment to focus resources on outreach based on Gospel imperatives. “We are not here first for ourselves but for others.”
- An administrative structure which supports gifted and skilled Christian leaders to do the things that they are good at doing.
- A readiness to support and fund innovation and to try new ideas.
- Worship that reflects the culture and communication medium relevant to the congregation.
- A resource base which allows for generosity, good hospitality, food and warmth in surroundings that are appropriate for the size and culture of the group.

Looking at our own back yard.

Small Congregations

We need to collectively address the challenges and needs of our fastest growing parish type: small congregations.

In the early stages of this consultation paper the strongest feed back we received related to the treatment of small congregation (which we define here as normally unable to support full time ministry and probably have fewer than 40 in attendance on a Sunday morning)

Sustaining

The fact is that we have in the Presbyterian Church a significant number of small congregations which are doing well. They are typically in rural or provincial areas, have always , or for a long time been small and have developed systems of sustained leadership and organisation. They cover the costs of their buildings and are often able to fund some part time ministry or administrative support.

Emerging

Starting small and growing. These congregations are almost always supported by a larger and stable or growing congregation. They most often reflect the commitment to plant a new congregation, provide the base for outreach and mission to a particular community or come about through the presence of a growing ethnic group. While often financially expensive to support in relation to their size they represent critical opportunities for our growth as a Church. A congregation developed to support and reflect the needs of tertiary students, a commitment to develop a new 'family service' to meet the needs of children and their parents, a congregation that worships in the language and style of a growing immigrant community could all be seen as emerging congregations.

It is these congregations in particular which we will support through the New Growth Fund.

Declining.

Every few months a congregation somewhere in New Zealand realises that it will no longer be able to fund a full time Minister or meet its other financial obligations. Often this decision is made when the current minister moves or retires. Sometimes it is the enormous cost of painting the building or fixing the roof which brings this realisation home. These congregations often look to their investment earnings, use the income from their Op Shop, stop paying their Assembly Assessment or Presbytery levee or defer maintenance , in order to meet their most immediate and pressings costs. We need to address the assumptions behind a view that support a belief that once a parish has been

established, it has been established for all time. Situations, times, places and opportunities change.

We need these congregations in particular to make a decision about their future:

They can celebrate the years of witness in the community , release their assets for new work elsewhere and close. None of us find it easy to deal with closure or the end or death of a Parish. But this is what the Presbytery and the congregation may need to do.

We would ask Presbyteries and the congregations themselves over the next two years to consider these decisions. The resources released in this way would then be able to support new growth elsewhere.

Presbyteries and the National Church do not have the resources to support congregations that are not committed to growth and outreach beyond themselves.

Small Congregations represent a point of particular vulnerability for us. We would encourage all smaller congregations and Presbyteries to ensure that effective Interim Moderators are active in the lives of congregations unable to support stipendiary ministry. A good option might be for a smaller congregation to contract with the congregation supplying the Interim Moderator for the provision of training, planning and some worship leadership. Real problems have emerged over the last few years when the link between a Presbytery and a congregation has been diminished through poor Presbytery oversight and involvement.

Medium Sized Congregations.

Going on recent past experience the future does not look good for congregations where a minister works alone . Ministers ideally need to be part of good leadership teams which allow for the minister's skills, gifts and training to be used for maximum benefit in supporting the outreach and mission of the congregation. Congregations need to have sufficient resources to enable them to meet specific mission challenges.

We need to address the nostalgia and romanticism which surrounds the view that a Minister can come to a congregation and through the sheer force of personality, skill of preaching or depth of pastoral care, single handedly, build and grow a flourishing congregation. There are virtually no contemporary examples of this happening. Almost all the congregations who do not have a minister once had one.

Congregations need to start speaking with their neighbours. Think about how some tasks can be rationalised and resources released to support new initiatives. Think about the particular skills and gifts of your Minister and how you can create the optimum environment which will allow these to be used.

Maybe there is an opportunity to grow a new congregation. Contact the Church Growth Director.

Maybe it is time for you to sell up move in with your neighbours and release the capital to support growth elsewhere.

Larger Congregations

It is well run congregations with organisational depth and a history of innovation, growth and outreach which we will particularly rely on to:

Provide a centre for training

Provide a hub with spokes reaching out to support smaller congregations

Coordinate the expenditure of capital funds for the purchase of land and buildings in areas of rapid growth

Presbyteries

This is going to be a difficult time as Ministers and Elders come together to make the decisions that need to be made about closing congregations and to decline applications for capital expenditure where there is very little likelihood that money spent will make any difference to the growth and outreach of the church concerned.

Presbyteries will also have the joy of seeing resources released to support the growth of new congregations in their midst.

National Church

This growth strategy anticipates several specific roles for those employed by the General Assembly and for the Property Trustees.

The Trustees will administer the fund and ensure that money from it is only used for the purposes for which it has been given. The Trustees will also ensure that money transferred into the fund as a result of the sale of capital assets will only be used for funding relating to the purchase of other similar assets.

Clearly there will be some administration time involved in coordinating the transfer of money into the fund and distributing to congregations involved in the new ventures. It is envisaged that this work will be able to be managed within existing capacities.

A Centralised Fund?

A key concern which has been voiced during the development of this document has been focused on matters to do with the establishment of a large central fund. There have been strong advocates for the ideal of supporting several congregations coming together sharing their resources to support a mission or ministry or development beyond themselves. There are benefits in such a process in terms of a strong sense of accountability, identification with and ownership of such a commitment.

While the establishment of a Church Growth Fund does not negate this possibility our real hope is that by bringing our resources together we will be able to more easily and effectively support projects which would otherwise be beyond the means of even a cluster of congregations to support and administer. Our intention is to employ a Church Growth Director with skills in project management who would not only work to grow the fund and to standardised processes of project assessment, monitoring and support but who would also establish strong networks among congregations who were participants in the fund and communication with the wider Church.

The kind of opportunities that are waiting for this investment:

Debt relief for 4 congregations who have either built new church buildings or have outgrown their current facilities and need help so that they can invest more resource in outreach and mission.

\$ 2. 5 million

Support for the development of new and emerging congregations in the midst of our largest student campuses

\$100 000 pa each for 5 years.

Help through the transition time for three congregations located in a large suburban area to centralise their resources to provide a major worship and community focused resource for the area.

\$1 million free bridging finance

Support for the leader of an emerging congregation of new migrants worshipping at a Presbyterian church in Auckland.

\$30 000 pa for 4 years.

Support for a congregation building a new Kid Friendly Service.

\$20 000 pa for 3 years.

Support for a newly trained minister with real skills in community building focused on reaching out to dispossessed youth in South Auckland

\$70 000 pa for 5 years.

Final Word

In a world in which our first priority should be sharing the Good News, the Presbyterian Church is showing a remarkable talent for accumulating wealth. We need to preach against this idolatry and we need to articulate a renewed vision for our future.

Christian discipleship is costly and high risk but also the source of abundant life. We have a unique message for a society that is destroying itself and the environment through rampant individualisms and consumerism.

We are the beneficiaries of generations that have made huge investments in resources, whose benefits we are blessed with. But these resources will not be a blessing for others for as long as they are tied up in largely decaying buildings and investments growing for their own sake.

There are parables that Jesus told that speak to our situation, touching on talents that are buried and accumulated wealth that ends up damning us. Perhaps as we look forward, the parable Jesus told in Luke 14:15 of the Great Banquet provides an alternative way ahead; a gracious invitation to the banquet gives way in the end to compulsion. Let us hope and pray that our ability to articulate a vision for our Church provides the invitation that will draw us together in this wonderful Gospel endeavour of serving God by renewing the mission of the Presbyterian Church.

Only through the Grace of God can we make changes; your prayers are invited for the way ahead.