

# General Assembly Decisions and Feedback

19.02.15



## **Dear presbyteries, Synods, Te Aka Puaho and church councils**

Please take the time to read the following Assembly decisions, and read and respond to the proposed legislative changes and discussion documents. Your feedback is important to the future of our Church.

For ease of use this correspondence is divided into three parts:

### **1. Book of Order Changes**

All presbyteries, UDCs, Te Aka Puaho, Pacific Islands Synod and church councils are asked to vote on a number of proposed legislative changes. The results of votes, either in support of or against these changes, need to be returned to the Assembly Office by 10 October 2015.

### **2. Discussion Document**

There is one discussion document requiring feedback and responses. Please take the time to read this and provide a response. Send your feedback to the Assembly Office by 31 May 2015.

### **3. Assembly Decisions**

There are a number of decisions that the 2014 General Assembly made which may have importance in the context of your own decision-making. These decisions are for your information and do not require any response to the Assembly Office

# Part 1

## Changes to the Book of Order

The 2014 General Assembly accepted a number of changes to the Book of Order, but some of these changes are subject to special legislative procedure. This means that they cannot be finally adopted until presbyteries (including Te Aka Puaho and the Pacific Islands Synod) and church councils have considered and voted on them, and the 2016 General Assembly has considered the proposals for a second time.

The proposals to be considered are below. The rationale for each is presented. If a majority of presbyteries and church councils disapprove of a proposal, the next General Assembly cannot accept it. If a majority of presbyteries approve a proposal, the next General Assembly will decide whether or not to finally adopt it. The details of the special legislative procedure are set out in Book of Order 14.9.

You are asked to approve or disapprove each of these proposals, and to complete and return the attached voting **form by 10 October 2015**. Amendments *cannot* be made to these proposals.

Please note that proposal 2 and 3 below, which are subject to the special legislation procedure, were adopted as interim provisions and are thus in use in the meantime.

### **Proposal 1: A cross-cultural and multicultural Church with a bicultural commitment**

*Following General Assembly 2012 a discussion paper was circulated to initiate a process of discussion on this matter. Following discussion at dialogue groups at Assembly the following was decided:*

That the title to Book of Order Chapter 1.5 be changed from “A multicultural Church with a bicultural commitment”; to “*A cross-cultural and multicultural Church with a bicultural commitment*”

And that a clause 4 be added to explain what this means and which reads:  
*(4) The Church affirms that it is cross-cultural in that it recognises that the richness of the Christian Gospel and its proclamation can be found in the sharing of experiences, wisdom and learning from many different cultures. The Church stands in opposition to any view that favours one culture over another as holding a monopoly on the interpretation or transmission of the Christian Gospel. In affirming the Church to be cross-cultural the church is also affirming that the Christian Gospel creates community across cultures.*

## **Proposal 2: Council of Assembly membership**

*Following the reform of presbyteries, the Council of Assembly discussed how in its makeup, the Council might fairly represent the presbyteries. A simple way to address this is to empower presbyteries to nominate appropriately gifted and available people to serve.*

That Council of Assembly membership be made up of one person from each presbytery (Northern, Pacific Islands Synod, Kaimai, Te Aka Puaho, Central, Alpine, Southern), Moderator of General Assembly, convenors of Resource and Leadership sub-committees and an Asian/multicultural representative.

That the Nominating Committee invite each presbytery (other than Te Aka Puaho and Pacific Islands Synod) to submit the names of three suitably skilled people from which the Nominating Committee will make recommendations to General Assembly - enabling a good mix of age, experience and gender.

That the Nominating Committee recommend to General Assembly names for Convenor and Deputy Convenor of the Council, with at least one of the two to have significant organisational governance experience.

That associate (non-voting) members of the Council of Assembly be the moderators of Te Aka Puaho and Pacific Islands Synod, one representative each from the Synod of Otago & Southland and the Church Property Trustees, the Assembly Executive Secretary, and the Moderator-elect in the year before taking office.

## **Proposal 3: Ministers and the conduct of marriage:**

*Following the discussion, debate and decision by Assembly that "in consistency with its Christian doctrine of marriage, General Assembly declares that the ministers of this Church may conduct a marriage service only for the union of a man and a woman" a new clause in the Book of Order is required.*

"6.8. A minister may solemnize marriage only between a man and a woman".

# Voting Paper

**For proposals accepted by 2014 General Assembly and referred to presbyteries and church councils under the special legislative procedure**

**Name of voting body:** \_\_\_\_\_  
(Presbytery, Te Aka Puaho, Pacific Islands Synod, church council)

Please tick one box for each proposal.

Item	subject	approve	disapprove
1	A cross-cultural and multicultural Church with a bicultural commitment		
2	Council of Assembly membership		
3	Ministers and the conduct of Marriage		

I confirm that this is a true and correct record of the decisions made by the above body on the proposals referred by the 2014 General Assembly under the special legislative procedure.

The duly constituted meeting at which this voting was conducted was held on

\_\_\_ / \_\_\_ / \_\_\_

signed: \_\_\_\_\_

name (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

position held \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this form by **10 October 2015** to:

Assembly Executive Secretary  
Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand  
P O Box 9049  
Wellington 6141

# Part 2

## Discussion Document

Presbyteries, please take time to consider the Leadership Sub-committee report *Ordination and Ministry: A discussion paper* and forward your responses – including those from individuals and the presbytery **to the AES by 31 May 2015**

### Leadership Sub-committee:

#### Ordination and Ministry: A discussion paper

In recent years, numerous questions have arisen concerning the nature of ordination and the relationship between ordained ministries and other forms of ministry in the Presbyterian Church. In its report to the 2012 General Assembly, the Doctrine Core Group (DCG) tabled a paper on ordination as a means of helping the church grapple with ordination-related issues. That paper forms a backdrop to this discussion paper, which the Leadership Subcommittee is pleased to offer to the Church.

We begin by summarizing some of the key points from the DCG's 2012 paper:

1. Ordination to a ministry of Word and Sacrament is the primary means by which the Church recognises a call from its risen and ascended Lord for certain persons to be “set aside” for the purpose of sharing in his apostolic ministry. This is a life-long calling, akin to that which was laid upon the ancient prophets, not a short-term appointment to do a particular job.
2. The ministry of Word and Sacrament lies at the heart of the church's life because Word and Sacrament are central to the act of Christian worship, and the act of worship is central to the missional life of the church. This was true for the early church (cf. Acts 2:42) and it is no less true today.
3. The Reformed tradition, of which the Presbyterian Church is part, recognises two sacraments: Baptism and Holy Communion (or Eucharist). Both arise from the memory of Christ's life and his commands to his disciples. Baptism is the ritual through which we recognise the claim (and call to discipleship) that Christ makes upon each of our lives and our incorporation into his body, the church. It symbolises the new life, which is participation in Christ's own death and resurrection, and marks our entry into that life. Eucharist is a further sharing in Christ's death and resurrection. As we gather regularly around his table to share bread and wine, symbols of Christ's body and blood, given for the life of the world, so we are formed by his cruciform life and we anticipate with joy his return. Ministers of Word and Sacrament serve as stewards of these great mysteries (sacraments), presiding over them in the name of the One to whom they bear ultimate witness and whose life they impart.
4. The call to ministry is inherent in the act of Baptism. Just as there are many spiritual gifts, so there are many forms of ministry through which those gifts might be used by the Holy Spirit to build up the body of Christ and to contribute to the mission of the church (which is nothing less than the *Missio Dei*). The ministry of Word and Sacrament should serve rather than substitute for the ministries and mission of other members of the body of Christ. Even though those other ministries

do not bear the label of “ordained ministry”, they are no less important in the life and mission of the church. Our Lord never said that his church should have a hierarchy of ministries.

5. In the Presbyterian Church, elders are also ordained. In so doing, the church recognises the very strong link and complementarity between the two forms of ministry. As the Church of Scotland’s Second Book of Discipline (1578) puts it, “As the pastors and doctors should be diligent in teaching and sowing of the Word, so the elders should be careful in seeking the fruit of the same among the people.” The eldership is conceived, therefore, as an instrument of God’s transformative work, nurturing and encouraging the church’s participation in God’s new creation. Both eldership and the ministry of Word and Sacrament serve the life of the church through the power of the Holy Spirit; neither should dominate the church at the expense of other ministries and vocations.

The Leadership Sub-committee appreciates very much the doctrinal guidance provided by the DCG in its 2012 paper and summarised above. But we are conscious of the many questions that are being raised, not only by those very doctrinal points, but also by what we sense being perceived and what we hear being asked at grassroots level in our churches. These questions and issues include the following:

1. Although the Presbyterian theology of ordination does not promote a hierarchy of ministries, the perceived reality for many people is quite the opposite. The high levels of training, recognition and financial support associated with the ministry of Word and Sacrament automatically grant it a status (and power) that other ministries simply cannot match. Clericalism and the professionalisation of ministry have had a disempowering effect on other forms of ministry and service, including eldership. What can be done to address this very real problem?

2. Over the last 50 years or so, many churches have declined to the point that they can no longer afford a stipendiary ministry, which in most cases means there is now no minister of Word and Sacrament in those churches. The advent of Locally Ordained Ministers and Local Ministry Teams has enabled some churches to address this problem in part, but for others there is simply no capacity for traditional ordained ministry. What are the implications of this?

3. The history of ordained ministry in the Presbyterian Church tends to assume a congregation-based model of church life which is increasingly becoming a thing of the past. What does ordination mean in the sort of pioneer ministry context in which the church now finds itself?

4. Often the distinction between ministers of Word and Sacrament and elders is described in terms of “teaching elders” and “ruling elders”. To what extent is this distinction helpful or unhelpful?

5. Under the category of “lay administration of the sacraments”, presbyteries can train and authorise elders to administer the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. Does this further blur the line between eldership and the ministry of Word and Sacrament? And what of the category of ‘lay preachers’? What additional clarity might be needed around these terms?

**The Leadership Sub-committee would be very interested to receive responses to the above questions. Any responses that we receive will help inform a paper which we hope to bring to the General Assembly in due course.**

## Part 3

### Assembly Decisions

The Assembly determined that the following decisions be shared with all Church bodies to inform their own policy and decision making:

#### **Mission Enterprise Fund**

Assembly instructed Council of Assembly to consult with presbyteries on the establishment of a Mission Enterprise Fund, including timeframes for implementation. That 10% of the net sale of property proceeds, where exclusions do not apply, are released to the Fund. Parishes with money in the Presbyterian Investment Fund are to be asked to agree to release 10% of interest to the Mission Enterprise Fund.

#### **Inter Church Bioethics**

That ministers and elders encourage people to access the Inter Church Bioethics website and to raise relevant issues with the Council.

#### **Tertiary Chaplaincy**

Assembly affirmed the importance of on-going support for tertiary chaplaincy in Aotearoa New Zealand through involvement in the Inter-Tertiary Chaplaincy Council and Regional Ecumenical Tertiary Chaplaincy Trust Boards.

#### **Active commitment to peace and reconciliation**

Assembly encourages congregations, Church schools and social service agencies with a connection to the PCANZ to establish a programme of *Just Peace* based on the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Call to Just Peace.

[http://www.overcomingviolence.org/fileadmin/dov/files/iepc/resources/ECJustPeace\\_English.pdf](http://www.overcomingviolence.org/fileadmin/dov/files/iepc/resources/ECJustPeace_English.pdf)

[http://www.overcomingviolence.org/fileadmin/dov/files/iepc/resources/JustPeaceCompanion\\_2ndEd.pdf](http://www.overcomingviolence.org/fileadmin/dov/files/iepc/resources/JustPeaceCompanion_2ndEd.pdf)

#### **Fossil Fuel divestment**

Assembly requested Church Property Trustees and other agencies to divest funds from coal, oil or gas companies listed on the New Zealand Stock Exchange and from the 100 largest global coal companies and 100 largest oil and gas companies. Assembly requested no future investment in those companies be contemplated but rather investment in sustainable energy industries be considered and all congregations and individuals of the PCANZ consider the same action in relation to their own investments.