

Constitutional documents and Statements of Faith and Polity of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

Introduction

This document contains significant historical decisions of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, agreements relating to the Church's formation, constitutional documents and statements of faith and polity adopted by the General Assembly.

These were originally published as appendices to the Book of Order, and the original appendix numbers are included. The 2006 Assembly adopted a new Book of Order, which contained regulations only. Some of the old appendices were subsequently superseded by new supplementary provisions and others were repealed without replacement as they were no longer relevant. Those appendices that have not otherwise been superseded or repealed remain in force. They comprise a series of constitutional documents, statements of faith and related information that have been approved at various times by General Assembly. The purpose of this publication is to maintain a public record of such matters for reference purposes. The documents follow the sequence in which they appeared in the pre-2006 Book of Order.

Legislation relevant to the Church such as the Presbyterian Church Property Acts can be found at www.legislation.govt.nz

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Form for Commemorative Service

[Old Book of Order Appendix A-2]

(All stand)

Clerk: Since we last met in Assembly many who served alongside us in the Body of Christ have died. We remember them before God with thanksgiving, acknowledging God's grace and goodness to them, and, through them, to us and the Church. We commend to God's care those who loved them.

We commemorate by name those remembered in the courts of the Church who, with God's help, served in the spirit of Christ.

(Names are read)

(A period of silence)

Moderator: Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witness, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

(Prayer)

Barrier Act 1697

[Old Book of Order Appendix A-3]

(Act IX, 1697 of the Church of Scotland. Incorporated in the Agreement for Union 1901, Article XII).

The General Assembly, taking into their consideration the overture and Act made in the last Assembly concerning innovations, and having heard the report of the several commissioners from Presbyteries to whom the consideration of the same was recommended, in order to its being more ripely advised and determined in this Assembly, and considering the frequent practice of former Assemblies of this Church, and that it will mightily conduce to the exact obedience of the Acts of Assemblies, that General Assemblies be very deliberate in making of the same, and that the whole Church have a previous knowledge thereof, and their opinion be had therein, and for preventing any sudden alteration or innovation, or other prejudice to the Church, in either doctrine or worship, or discipline, or government thereof, now happily established; do, therefore, appoint, enact, and declare, that before any General Assembly of this Church shall pass any Acts which are to be binding Rules and Constitutions to the Church, the same Acts be first proposed as overtures to the Assembly, and, being by them passed as such, be remitted to the consideration of the several Presbyteries of this Church, and their opinions and consent reported by their commissioners to the next General Assembly following, who may then pass the same in Acts, if the more general opinion of the Church thus had agreed thereunto.

Agreement for Union 1901

[Old Book of Order Appendix B-1]

This AGREEMENT, made the thirtieth day of April, one thousand nine hundred and one, between THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF OTAGO AND SOUTHLAND, of the one part, and THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NEW ZEALAND, of the other part, WITNESSETH that the said two Churches hereby agree to become and be united as one Church upon the terms expressed in the following articles – that is to say:

Article I

'That the United Church shall include and consist of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand as existing previously to the Union, and of the Presbyterian Church of Otago and Southland, as existing previously to the Union, and that the name of the United Church shall be The Presbyterian Church of New Zealand.'

Article II

'That the doctrinal basis of the said Presbyterian Church of New Zealand shall be the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as the Supreme Standard, and the only rule of faith and practice, and the Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms, as interpreted by the Declaratory Act, as Subordinate Standards, with liberty of opinion in regard to marriage with a deceased wife's sister.'

Article III

'The United Church shall be governed by Sessions, Presbyteries, and a general assembly, designated the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, in which all the ministers of the Church and an elder from each Session shall have the right to be present and take full part in the business, but the right to vote shall be limited to the representative ministers and elders, who shall be appointed by the Presbyteries in the proportion of one-half of the number on their rolls. But inasmuch as the Synod of Otago and Southland owns and administers trust property and funds, these shall remain its own exclusive property, and it shall continue in full possession of all the rights pertaining to it in this respect – retaining its separate name and existence as a Church court, and having supreme authority in all matters connected with its trust funds; and having also authority to exercise the ecclesiastical functions of a provincial Synod, such as belong to the Synods of the Free Church of Scotland, subordinate to the General Assembly.'

Article IV

'That the first meeting of the Assembly shall be held in Dunedin, and the Assembly shall itself determine and fix the next place of meeting from year to year, but ordinarily the Assembly shall meet alternately at Wellington and Dunedin.'

Article V

'That in order to secure a satisfactory attendance at the General Assembly, the representative ministers and elders appointed in accordance with the provisions of Article III shall have their travelling expenses to and from the General Assembly paid out of the Assembly's Expenses Fund.'

Article VI

'That until the methods of ministerial support at present existing in the two Churches respectively can be unified, the Sustentation Fund shall be maintained, where and to the extent to which it at present exists.'

Article VII

'That, considering the difficulties attendant on an immediate unification of the financial methods hitherto in use, the General Assembly shall at first recognise:

(1) The Sustentation Fund Scheme and Church Extension Fund as at present in operation in the Church of Otago and Southland;

(2) The Church Extension Scheme (which is for the double purpose of Sustentation and Extension) of the Northern Church as now administered; it being understood that the General Assembly shall address itself without delay to gradually effect a uniform scheme for the support of the ministry and Church extension; and

(3) meanwhile these funds shall be administered separately by Committees of the General Assembly of the United Church, in terms of their respective regulations, and, until the funds of the two Churches are amalgamated, the Committee shall have power to amend the regulations if necessary, subject to the approval of the General Assembly.'

Article VIII

'That the missionary funds of the two Churches shall be amalgamated, and devoted to the support of the Missions which are now being carried on by the respective Churches.'

Article IX

(1) 'That while aiming at an amalgamation of the Widows and Orphans' Funds, and of the Aged and Infirm Ministers' Funds, at as early a date as possible, yet having respect to the duty of administering these Funds on sound financial principles, it is agreed: That the respective Funds in each Church shall be kept distinct; widows, orphans, and ministers having claims only on the Fund wherewith they were connected at the date of the Union.

(2) That after the Union, and until further arrangements are made, ministers shall connect themselves with the Fund to which they belong territorially, and the Funds shall be administered separately by a Committee of the United Church, in terms of present regulations, and until the Funds of the two Churches are amalgamated, the Committee shall have power to amend the Regulations, if necessary, subject to the approval of the General Assembly.'

Article X

'That Dunedin shall be the seat of the Theological Hall.'

Article XI

'That while the appointment and removal of Theological Professors must remain with the Synod of Otago and Southland, in terms of the Act, 1866, yet, inasmuch as such appointments and removals are of the highest importance to the whole Church, it is necessary that the Synod and Assembly should act harmoniously in this matter, and that, therefore, prior to any appointment or removal being made by the Synod, the mind of the General Assembly shall be ascertained.'

Article XII

'That the Barrier Act shall apply to all proposals for fresh legislation.'

IN WITNESS whereof these presents have been executed by, or on behalf of, the parties hereto the day and year first before written:

Witness to the Signature of
Jacob Urwin Spence

JACOB URWIN SPENCE,
Moderator of the Synod of the

T. K. SIDEY,
Solicitor,
Dunedin.

Presbyterian Church of
Otago and Southland, for
and on behalf of such Church.

Witness to the Signature of
James Kennedy Elliott –
JAMES PATERSON,
Minister of the Gospel,
Wellington.

JAMES KENNEDY ELLIOTT,
Moderator of the General
Assembly of the Presbyterian
Church of New Zealand, for
And on behalf of such Church.

Uniting Act 1901

[Old Book of Order Appendix B-2]

Whereas the Presbyterian Church of Otago and Southland, through its Synod, and the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, through its General Assembly, have agreed to enter upon an incorporating union upon the basis and terms expressed and set forth in the Minutes of the Proceedings of the said Synod for the year 1900, and in a certain agreement in writing, dated the 30th day of April, 1901, and signed by the respective Moderators of the said Churches;

And whereas in this month of October, 1901, the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Otago and Southland and the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, having approved the form of a Uniting Act, and having severally taken all the steps necessary for the consummation of the Union on the terms and basis agreed upon, have resolved to meet together for that purpose, and are now met accordingly;

Now, therefore, the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Otago and Southland and the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand thus met, desire first of all to express their devout thankfulness to the Great Head of the Church for guiding this movement to a successful issue, humbly acknowledge their entire dependence on the mercy of God for all the happy results which they hope for in connection with it, and entreat the Divine blessing on the step now to be taken, and on all the congregations and people under their charge;

And the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Otago and Southland and the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand empowered as aforesaid, do hereby in terms and in pursuance of the deliverance of their respective Church Courts, enact, ordain, and declare:

1. That the Presbyterian Church of Otago and Southland as heretofore existing, and the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand as heretofore existing, do and shall henceforth constitute one united Church henceforth to be known by the name of The Presbyterian Church of New Zealand.

2. That the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Otago and Southland, and the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, shall, immediately upon the passing of this Uniting Act, form the first General Assembly of the United Church, and may do and authorise all things necessary or convenient to be done, with a view to the orderly inauguration and conduct of the affairs of the United Church, and in consistency with the terms of Union agreed upon.

**Opinion on Agreement for Union
and the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand Act 1901,
by F C Spratt 1931**

[Old Book of Order Appendix B-3]

1. My opinion is sought upon certain questions that have been stated as follows:
 - (a) In Preamble of The Presbyterian Church of New Zealand Act, 1901, the words 'have agreed to unite on certain terms' occur. Do these words give the said Agreement the force of an Act of Parliament?
 - (b) Article XII: 'That the Barrier Act shall apply to all proposals for fresh legislation.' Does this article of the Agreement provide that the Assembly may alter the provisions of the terms of the Agreement for Union so long as the fresh legislation is carried out under the Barrier Act?
 - (c) The Assembly has for 30 years acted under the belief that it had power thus to change the provisions of the Agreement. Has the Assembly erred in so acting?
 - (d) The present Assembly is composed of members who have not been appointed according to the provisions of the Agreement because of changes which have been made. Is this a legal Assembly?

2. I understand that the questions have been raised in the following circumstances. Article III of the Agreement for Union, which is part of the Constitution of the Church, provides (inter alia) that 'the United Church shall be governed by ... a general assembly designated the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, in which all the ministers of the Church and an elder from each Session shall have the right to be present and take full part in the business, but the right to vote shall be limited to the representative ministers and elders who shall be appointed by the Presbyteries in the proportion of one-half of the number on their rolls.'

An overture has been proposed to the Assembly by one of the Presbyteries, to the intent that the proportion stated in the said Article III shall be altered from one-half to one-fourth.

The Overture coming before the Assembly, and a motion being proposed to remit the same to the several Presbyteries, an objection was taken that it is not within the power of the Assembly to remit such an overture as being contrary to the Agreement for Union.

The short question, therefore, is whether such an objection is well founded or not?

3. In my opinion, the objection is not well founded.

As I understand the rule of the Scottish Churches, they have always claimed the right to make 'any alteration or innovation in either doctrine or worship or discipline or government' of the Church, subject in all cases, where the Barrier Act or similar provisions have been adopted, to such provisions for the prevention of hasty or sudden decisions on matters of moment.

Be that as it may, the United Church, as appears from the statement submitted to me, has more than once during the last thirty years acted upon such a view of its powers, and in my opinion the power of alteration is clearly recognised by Article XII of the Agreement for Union, which provides that the Barrier Act shall apply to all proposals for fresh legislation. There is no need for me to do more than refer to [Regulations 374 to 380 and 411] of the Book of Order and especially [380] in order to show that the whole scheme of the provisions relating to the constitution of the Church contemplates the power of the Assembly, subject to the provisions of the Barrier Act, to make such an alteration or innovation as that proposed.

4. We come now to the specific question raised, and first to that concerning 'The Presbyterian Church of New Zealand Act, 1901'. That Act is merely a property Act, the only relevant provisions of which are to ensure to the Synod representing the old Church of Otago and Southland the continued ownership and enjoyment of its separate property. The preamble, it is true, recognises the fact of the Agreement for Union. It was indeed necessary that it should do so, in order to make intelligible the enacting part of the Statute. But the preamble does not give statutory force to the Agreement for Union. The Act, in my opinion, does not limit the powers of Assembly to legislate in its own province. The other specific questions are, I think, sufficiently answered by the foregoing opinion.

F. C. Spratt
49 Ballance Street, Wellington,
June 8, 1931

Note: The references in square brackets in clause 3 have been substituted for references in the original to an earlier edition of the Book of Order.

Act of Modification

[Old Book of Order Appendix B-4]

The Administration of the Sacrament of Holy Communion and the Standards of the Church
(Adopted by 1991 General Assembly and amended by the 1993 General Assembly)

1. Assembly, in view of the Church's right in dependence on the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit to modify its Subordinate Standards, always in agreement with the Word of God and the fundamental doctrines of the Reformed Faith contained in its Subordinate Standards, hereby modifies its Standards by falling from those phrases in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger Catechism that state it is the function of the ordained minister and none other to administer Communion (Westminster Confession, chapter XXVII (iv); Larger Catechism, answers to questions 169 and 176) and instead recognises, as part of its Subordinate Standards, that the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is normally administered by ordained ministers except where, at the discretion of the Presbytery or Union District Council, certain elders may be authorised so to do, but always under the authority of the minister or interim moderator and of session or parish council.
2. Assembly affirms the reformed understanding of the essential relationship between Word and Sacrament, and the need for Communion to be administered with understanding in the context of the preached Word.
3. Assembly affirms the biblical principle of the Lord's Supper being administered decently and in order.
4. Assembly affirms that the true significance of the Lord's Supper depends upon the work of the Holy Spirit and the command and promise of Christ.

(See also Interpretative Statement page 24)

Declaratory Act 1892-3

[Old Book of Order Appendix C-1]

(Passed by the Free Church of Scotland 1892, by the Synod of Otago and Southland 1893, and incorporated in the Agreement for Union 1901, Article II.)

Whereas it is expedient to remove difficulties and scruples which have been felt by some in reference to the declaration of belief required from persons who receive license or are admitted to office in this Church, the General Assembly declares as follows:

That, in holding and teaching, according to the Confession, the divine purpose of grace towards those who are saved, and the execution of that purpose in time, this Church most earnestly proclaims, as standing in the forefront of the revelation of Grace, the love of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to sinners of mankind, manifested especially in the Father's gift of the Son to be the Saviour of the world in the coming of the Son to offer Himself a propitiation for sin, and in the striving of the Holy Spirit with men to bring them to repentance.

That this Church also holds that all who hear the Gospel are warranted and required to believe to the saving of their souls, and that in the case of such as do not believe, but perish in their sins, the issue is due to their own rejection of the Gospel call. That this Church does not teach, and does not regard the Confession as teaching, the fore-ordination of men to death irrespective of their own sin.

That it is the duty of those who believe, and one end of their calling by God, to make known the Gospel to all men everywhere for the obedience of faith. And that while the Gospel is the ordinary means of salvation for those to whom it is made known, yet it does not follow, nor is the Confession to be held as teaching, that any who die in infancy are lost, or that God may not extend His mercy for Christ's sake, and by His Holy Spirit, to those who are beyond the reach of those means, as it may seem good to Him, according to the riches of His grace.

That, in holding and teaching, according to the Confession of Faith, the corruption of man's whole nature as fallen, this Church also maintains that there remain tokens of his greatness as created in the image of God; that he possesses a knowledge of God and duty, that he is responsible for compliance with the moral law and with the Gospel; and that, although unable without the aid of the Holy Spirit to return to God, he is yet capable of affections and actions which in themselves are virtuous and praiseworthy.

That this Church disclaims intolerant or persecuting principles, and does not consider her office-bearers, in subscribing the Confession, committed to any principles inconsistent with liberty of conscience and the right of private judgement.

That while diversity of opinion is recognised in this Church on such points in the Confession as do not enter into the substance of the Reformed Faith therein set forth, the Church retains full authority to determine, in any case which may arise, what points fall within this description, and thus to guard against any abuse of this liberty to the detriment of sound doctrine or to the injury of her unity and peace.

Statements of Fundamental Doctrines, 1965-71

[Old Book of Order Appendix C-2]

Statements of Fundamental Doctrines, 1965-71, Related to the Last Paragraph of the Declaratory Act.

(The 1968 Assembly adopted these statements, with the exception of the last one under *Resurrection* added by the 1969 Assembly, when it was resolved that the statements, apart from the opening paragraphs 'be printed as an Appendix to the Book of Order and related to the last paragraph of the Declaratory Act by specific reference'. The 1971 Assembly agreed that the opening paragraphs be included in the Appendix.)

The Apostle's Creed

The fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith find one of their earliest expressions in the words of the Apostles' Creed which the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand with joy affirms.

The Trinity

The Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, as part of the Holy, Catholic, or Universal Church worships one God Almighty, all-wise and loving, in the Trinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the same in substance, equal in power and glory; adoring the Father, infinite in majesty, of whom are all things; confessing our Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son, made very man for our salvation; glorying in His Cross and Resurrection, and owing obedience to Him as the Head over all things to His Church; trusting in the promised renewal and guidance of the Holy Spirit; proclaiming the forgiveness of sins and acceptance with God through faith in Christ, and the gift of Eternal Life; and labouring for the advancement of the Kingdom of God throughout the world.

Regarding the Bible

"That the Word of God contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the supreme rule of faith and duty and is the Supreme Standard of this Church." (B.B., 1966, p. 38)

"The Bible is uniquely authoritative because it is the inspired record and interpretation of God's redeeming acts among men and above all of His supreme act of self-giving and self-disclosure in Jesus Christ." (B.B., 1966, p. 39)

Regarding God and Nature

"God the Father is the Creator of all that is. He is the Sovereign Lord of the Universe and controls it in its immensity by His Almighty power and wisdom, according to His unfathomable purposes. The origin and destiny of nature and of man are with Him." (B.B., 1966, p. 39)

Regarding the Person of Jesus Christ

"Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, was sent into the world by His Father." (B.B., 1966, p. 39)

Regarding the Resurrection of Jesus Christ

"God raised Him from the dead in triumph over sin and death to reign with the Father as Sovereign over all." (B.B., 1966, p. 39)

"Our Lord and Saviour is raised and is alive for evermore as the active personal Head of His Church." (B.B., 1966, p. 42)

"The words 'God raised Him from the dead in triumph over sin and death to reign with the Father as Sovereign over all' (B.B., 1966, p. 39 para. 4) and 'God raised Him to life on the third day' (B.B., 1966, p. 41 para 3 (d)) mean that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is a saving act of God in history, and is therefore more than a continuation of the memory and example of Jesus Christ and the awakening of faith in the disciples." (Y.B., 1970, p.111)

Regarding Judgement and the Christian Hope

"All men will be judged by God in Christ and in the light of His perfect knowledge, holiness and love." (B.B., 1965, p. 271a)

"He will come again in glory as our Judge and Saviour to accomplish the final victory." (B.B., 1965, p. 268a)

"In Christ all that God has been doing in the creation and redemption of men and the world will be fulfilled to His glory. This conviction is the basis of the Christian hope that beyond death God will raise the Christian to eternal life in direct and unshadowed fellowship with Himself and His people." (B.B., 1967, p. 160a)

“The eternal life into which the Christian is to be raised begins here and now in the day to day experience of the presence of our risen Lord through whom we enter a new joy and depth of living.’ (B.B., 1967, p. 16 la)

Statements on Phrases ‘Fundamental Doctrines’ and ‘Substance of the Faith’, 1969

[Old Book of Order Appendix C-3]

(In answer to the request of the Assembly in 1967 (Blue Book, p 89) that the Committee on Doctrine should ‘state what the phrases “Fundamental Doctrines of the Christian Faith” and “The Substance of the Faith” mean, in order that the vows taken in Ordination and Induction of Ministers and Professors might have a meaning commonly understood,’ the Committee offered the following which was adopted by the Assembly in 1969.)

1. The expression ‘fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith,’ as used in the Book of Order, refers to those affirmations of faith essential to the Church’s doctrine and life, without which it does not fulfil its calling to be the community of the Lord Jesus Christ, the One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.
2. The other expression, ‘the substance of the faith,’ is widely used, but is not found in precisely that form in the Book of Order. The closest approximation to it is: ‘The substance of the Reformed faith’. A third expression used is: ‘The fundamental doctrines of the Reformed faith’. In the opinion of the Committee, in the use of these three phrases in the Book of Order no difference of meaning is intended.
3. These phrases have come to us out of the striving of the Church in the past to preserve the fullness and integrity of the Christian faith, and to proclaim it effectively. By continuing to use them, we acknowledge that we have the same responsibilities.
- 4 The phrases used in the Book of Order and their locations are as follows:
 - (a) ‘Fundamental Doctrines of the Christian Faith’:
 - (i) Questions at ordination or induction of minister, professor or elder.
 - (ii) The formula signed by the above.
 - (b) ‘The Substance of the Reformed Faith’.
 - (i) Preamble to services of ordination and induction.
 - (ii) The Declaratory Act.
 - (c) ‘Fundamental Doctrines of the Reformed Faith’:
 - (i) Preamble to services of ordination and induction.
 - (ii) Section A, Regulation 1 (e).

Note: In Clause 4 above the word ‘deaconess’ and page references to the 1960 edition of the Book of Order have been omitted.

What it Means to Subscribe to a Statement of Faith

(Adopted by the General Assembly, 1969)

[Old Book of Appendix C-4]

1. For a minister or office-bearer to subscribe to a Statement of Faith means the affirmation of the Christian faith as expressed and preserved in the Church by the historic creeds and confessions.

2. It must be clearly understood that while faith can be expressed in words it can never wholly be defined by words.
 3. Therefore where any minister or office-bearer affirms a Statement or Confession of Faith he is bound by the faith expressed in the Statement or Confession rather than by the precise words themselves.
 4. It will, however, belong to the integrity of every minister or office-bearer who makes such an affirmation he will seek to enter as fully as he conscientiously can into the faith the words express.
 5. The Church's right to judge as to whether such faith as he confesses entitles him to holding office in the Church, and the procedure to be followed, is sufficiently set out in the Book of Order, Chapters 9-10.
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A Simple Contemporary Statement of Faith

(Adopted by the General Assembly, 1969)

[Old Book of Order Appendix C-5]

Introduction

The teaching of our Church is set out and available in various documents. Within this teaching it is extremely difficult to select some particular statements as 'fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith' because any statement which could be made is open to different understandings.

Recognising the limitations of any brief and simple statement, and with no attempt to be exhaustive, this Church holds that the following affirmations express fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith.

Statement

We worship the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; with Him are the origin and destiny of nature and of man.

Our knowledge of God and His ways comes primarily from the Bible. Through these writings God speaks.

He is holy and righteous, merciful and steadfastly loving. He desires that men should live in fellowship with Him and each other. In their selfcentredness all men defy God's purpose for their lives. They are alienated from God and unable to find their own way back to Him.

In the life, teaching, crucifixion and triumphant resurrection of Jesus Christ, His one true Son, God has revealed Himself to men and reconciled them to Himself.

By the working of the Holy Spirit we are invited and enabled to turn from our sin and put our faith in Christ. In the Christian fellowship we enter upon a new life of praise, joy, peace, freedom, service, witness and love.

As Christians we are not immune from grief and pain, and are called to be ready for sacrifice in serving Christ. Yet we are assured of the help of God in bearing the burdens of life and overcoming its difficulties.

The reality of God is greater than any man's understanding of it; we can set no limits to His power.

In the light of the resurrection Christians face all their future, including death, with confidence in the sufficiency of God.

The Faith we Affirm Together, 1968

[Old Book of Order Appendix C-6]

(Adopted by Assembly in 1968 as a contemporary statement of faith, drawing the Church's attention to its purpose, 'the instruction of its people and the guiding and ordering of its life.' B.B. page 64.)

The negotiating Churches accept one another as belonging to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, the witnessing Church of the centuries. They recognise that, in the course of history, the Christian Faith has been interpreted in a variety of ways, declared in confessions and in formularies. They welcome the contribution that each Church will make from the riches of its particular heritage.

They acknowledge also that Christian truth is not to be confined to any one historic or contemporary interpretation and that the Church is always under obligation to study the Faith, to be willing, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to receive new insights, and to proclaim the Faith in words and in deeds relevant to the needs of the age.

They confess that differences of interpretation exist already within each of the communions taking part in the negotiations and they share the conviction that liberty of conscience to interpret the Faith once committed to the Church must be permitted within the fellowship of the Church united.

They claim that the united Church, in dependence upon the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, has the right to formulate, adopt, modify and interpret supplementary doctrinal statements, always in agreement with the word of God received in the Bible and witnessed to by the creeds of the Church. Final decision in all matters of the Faith is the responsibility of the Church.

These Churches, as they prepare to enter union, now declare together the faith they hold in common.

- The Associated Churches of Christ in New Zealand
- The Church of the Province of New Zealand
- The Congregational Union of New Zealand
- The Methodist Church of New Zealand
- The Presbyterian Church of New Zealand,

each, as part of the Church Universal worshipping one God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and holding to the apostolic Faith as expressed in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, with joy reaffirms its belief in the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ, and sets forth the substance of its faith in the following declaration:

1. The Standards of the Church

In creation and in history God reveals Himself to men, but supremely has He spoken in Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life.

The Bible is unique as the inspired record and interpretation of what God has wrought for our creation, preservation, and redemption, above all in His act of self-giving and of self-disclosure in Jesus Christ, anticipated in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New.

The authority of the Bible depends ultimately upon God, and its witness within the Church in every generation is verified to faith by the Holy Spirit as the authentic word of God. It is the responsibility of the believing community, the Church, to interpret the biblical witness.

The books called the Apocrypha witness to the faith and thought of the people of Israel in the centuries immediately preceding the coming of Jesus Christ. Important as a bridge between the Old Testament and the New, they nevertheless are subordinate to the canonical writings of the Old and New Testaments. From biblical times the Church has confessed its faith in its hymns, liturgies, theological systems, confessions, and creeds. The Apostles' and Nicene Creeds are recognised as witnessing to and as safeguarding that Faith which is continuously confirmed by the Holy Spirit in the experience of the Church. Uniting the Church today with the faith of Christians of all ages, and in every place, they are accepted as having an authority above that of the later formulations.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, the Savoy Declaration, the Thirty-nine Articles, the Standard Sermons and Notes on the New Testament of John Wesley, the Declaration and Address of Thomas Campbell, are held in honour as embodying traditions now merged in the united Church. Since they arose to meet special situations in history no finality can attach to them. Nevertheless, in so far as they are consistent with the teaching of the Bible and of the Creeds, they will enrich the united Church's understanding of its faith and mission. It is the right and duty of the united Church to use this historic witness to the Christian Faith, of which this present declaration "The Faith We Affirm Together" is a contemporary expression, for the instruction of its people and the guiding and ordering of its life.

2. God

There is one living and true God.

God is love and makes Himself known as Father, Son and Holy Spirit-One God, the Trinity. God the Father, Creator and Ruler of the universe, has made all things for His glory, and has sent His Son into the world to reconcile the world to Himself, having prepared the way through His people, Israel.

Jesus Christ, the eternal and only-begotten Son of God, born in the fullness of time of the Virgin Mary, is, in the mystery of the Incarnation, truly God and truly Man. In His life and teaching He revealed God's holy will, fatherly love and saving purpose. Though sinless, He died on the Cross for our sins. He was raised from the dead in triumph over sin and death to reign as Lord. He is exalted as our Advocate and Intercessor. He will come again in glory as Judge and Saviour to accomplish the final victory.

God the Holy Spirit is at work in the world and in the lives of men leading men to repentance and to faith in Christ as Saviour, bringing assurance of sonship, producing Christlike character, guiding, empowering and uniting the Church in love and in the service of God and man.

God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – has made all things, has redeemed mankind, and sanctifies His Church.

3. Man

God has created man in His own likeness. He has endowed him with freedom and responsibility with reason and moral judgement, with power to love and need to be loved.

Man is made for fellowship with God as son and with man as brother.

Man, however, defies in pride and disobedience the divine intention for his life. Thus, by sin, he is alienated from God. The result is disorder, frustration, conflict, and spiritual death. All men are guilty before God and fall under His judgement.

4. New Life in Christ

God, who first made known His redemptive purpose for sinful men through His election of Israel, declares through the Gospel of Jesus Christ His love for the world and His desire that all men should be saved. In Jesus Christ He has revealed man's true life and brought into being the new humanity. Men are able neither to reconcile themselves to God nor in their own strength to fulfil the divine purpose for which they were created, but God by His grace calls, justifies, reconciles to Himself and sanctifies those who respond to Jesus Christ in repentance and in faith. This new birth is the work of the Holy Spirit, who initiates and

sustains the new life in the fellowship of the Church by enabling men to believe, and to share in the victory of Christ.

5. The Church

The Church is the People of God, the Body of Christ, the Community of the Holy Spirit through which God continues His reconciling work in the world.

The Church is called to be one because it is one family under one Father, whose purpose is to unite all men in Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Church is called to be holy because it is set apart by God for Himself through the Holy Spirit to be His people in the world.

The Church is called to be catholic because it is for all people, and for all times, holding the Christian Faith in its fullness.

The Church is called to be apostolic because it is sent to preach the Gospel in the world, and to proclaim the Lordship of Christ over the world, receiving its authority from Jesus Christ through His Apostles.

The Church is the community in which believers are nourished in the Christian life, fellowship and hope by means of the proclamation of the Gospel, Holy Baptism, participation in the Lord's Supper, common prayer and other ordinances of the Church. In the Holy Spirit, members of the Church share in the Communion of Saints.

6. Sacraments of the Gospel

The Sacraments of Holy Baptism and of Holy Communion, appointed by Jesus Christ, are, in the power of the Holy Spirit, visible signs and effective means of grace.

The Sacrament of Holy Baptism is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of union with Christ, of forgiveness of sins, of death to sin and of rebirth to eternal life through Him. By this Sacrament we are admitted into the household of faith for the life-long service of Jesus Christ.

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper or of Holy Communion is a sign and seal of the covenant of redemption. It is the Thanksgiving or Eucharist in which the Church remembers with joy the Incarnation, Christ's perfect life on earth, His sufferings, death, resurrection, reign and presence. In this liturgy the Church repeating Christ's word and action shows forth His death until He comes, pleads His sacrifice, proclaims His victory over evil, and in Him shares together in life with God. Partaking in faith we receive Him to our nourishment and growth in grace, presenting ourselves in Him a living sacrifice to God. In response to grace, we renew our covenant and communion with Him and also with those gathered in faith at the Lord's Table and with all God's company in heaven and on earth. Christ thus restores the penitent, assures them of God's steadfast love and draws them closer to Himself and to the whole Church.

7. The Ministry

The Church's ministry derives from Jesus Christ, its risen and exalted Lord, the Head of the Church. Christ's ministry is prophetic, priestly and kingly and by the Holy Spirit is continued through the Church which he sends among men as the servant people of the servant Lord. By virtue of their membership of His Church, His people are called and commissioned to share His ministry in, to and for the world. The Church is thus called to a life of ordered yet varied service in which every member shares.

For the good ordering of this ministry God gives to the Church some to minister in special ways. These are set apart, ordained, and sent as were the Apostles, for a particular ministry within the general ministry of the Church, to build up the Church and to equip all members for their task. This particular ministry exercises the functions of proclamation, service and oversight and is expressed in a form including elements that are episcopal, presbyteral and diaconal.

8. The World and the Church

The world, which was created for the glory of God and which is the object of His love, is the sphere of the Church's mission. God calls men to use all His gifts in accordance with His creative purpose. The Church therefore welcomes all the light that science can throw on the universe and its working.

Human society, however, gives clear evidence of man's alienation from God in its divisions and in man's abuse of God's good gifts. Nevertheless Jesus Christ is Lord over all life, individual, social, national and international, and the Church is His servant people, called in a divided and estranged world to declare the Gospel and to share in His ministry of reconciliation. Its vocation in the world is so to witness to Jesus Christ that all men may come to fullness of life in Him.

9. The Christian Hope

Man is created to glorify God and to share in His divine life. The fulfilment of this purpose is assured by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. For those who are in Christ eternal life begins on earth and continues for ever in the presence of God and in the company of all His people. At a time He Himself appoints God will bring to fulfilment all that He has begun. Christ Himself will be revealed in power and victory and glory. All men will be judged by God in Christ in the light of His perfect knowledge, holiness, and love. The destiny of those who reject Christ remains in the hands of God. The end of history will see the victory of Christ, the overthrow of evil and the triumph of God's love.

An Affirmation of Faith

(Adopted by 1993 General Assembly for use in the church)

[Old Book of Order Appendix C-7]

Christ Jesus,
Child of Mary, God with us,
King and Suffering Servant,
High Priest and Lamb of God,
Teacher and Word,
living, suffering, dying and rising again,
you challenge, redeem and restore us.

Holy Spirit,
Breath of life,
Counsellor and Comforter,
Fire of God,
you inspire, sustain, and purify us.
Forming us in the nature of Christ,
transforming us with your gifts,
you bind us together in one body, your church.

God of all creation,
made known to us in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit,
your boundless love exposes our rebellion and greed.
A mother who will not abandon her child,
a father who welcomes the prodigal home,
you forgive, accept and embrace us
and call us into loving communion for ever.
In life and death we belong to you,
everlasting God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Statement on the Relation Between the Session and the Minister

[Old Book of Order Appendix D-1]

(For Session read Parish Council where applicable)

The relation of the Session to the minister should not be on the basis of law but rather on that of mutual understanding and trust and a common desire to do everything possible for the furtherance of the Kingdom of God. But as there is sometimes confusion in the Church regarding their respective spheres of authority, it will be helpful for all concerned to define the sphere of each.

(a) Discipline

1. As the minister is not responsible to the Session for the discharge of his or her ministerial functions, but to the Presbytery, the Session has no authority to pass directives concerning the manner in which the minister shall do his or her work, or to discipline the minister but if the minister is neglectful of his or her duties, then the Session by petition may approach the Presbytery.

2. A minister's name should be on the communion roll of his or her congregation, but in view of the above, this does not mean that the minister is under the discipline of the Session.

(b) Public Worship

1. The times and places of public worship are fixed by the Session but the actual conduct of public worship is the sole responsibility of the minister, and the minister may do this in whatsoever manner he or she considers best, but always in accordance with the settled usages and practices of the Church. Should any question arise as to whether worship is being so conducted, the decision is the function of the Presbytery.

2. While the choir in common with other organisations is subject to the oversight of the Session, the selection of hymns and the musical part of the service are under the control of the minister. More general questions such as the introduction of a new hymnary or the robing of the choir should be decided by the Session. In all matters where responsibility rests on the minister, it is wise and courteous for the minister to take the Session into his or her confidence.

(c) Disposal of the Church

The church is solely at the disposal of the minister for all religious purposes. No one may occupy the pulpit or conduct a service in the church without the consent of the minister or the Interim Moderator. This means that where a change of pulpits has been arranged for a service, no resolution of approval by the Session is necessary, the Session is simply advised. This courtesy should not be overlooked. Where other uses of the church are involved, the Session makes the decision.

Ordination and the Eldership
(Adopted by the General Assembly, 1966)

[Old Book of Order Appendix D-2]

(For Session read Parish Council where applicable)

One of the reasons for the preparation of this statement on ordination was the need for a clarification of the meaning of the word when used in reference to the office of elder. As the statement has made clear, in strict technical use, the word 'ordination' is concerned with the Ministry of Word, Sacraments and Pastoral Oversight. However, over a long period, it has been widely used of a number of other offices in the Church. This has sometimes caused confusion. In the case of the office of elder, the difficulties are complicated because the two offices, though distinct, are yet closely associated in many aspects of the life of the Church. It is necessary therefore to make clear the sense in which the word is used in connection with the eldership.

First, it should be clear that the use of the word 'ordination' does not imply that elders are made ministers of the Word and Sacraments. In various ways, in its doctrine, its law and its practice, the understanding of the Church is quite clear, and it is well expressed in the statement approved by the 1963 General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 'the Eldership is a spiritual office in the Church, concerned with the rule and pastoral oversight of the congregation. It is distinct from, though closely associated with, the Ministry of Word and Sacraments'.

However, the use of the word 'ordination' does imply that the Church regards both the ceremony and the office as specially significant, and it is by looking at these that we may best understand the sense in which the word is used.

The ceremony of ordination of elders takes place in the course of a service of public worship. It is preceded by a deliberate process in which certain persons have been approved by the Session (i.e., the minister and elders) and have been elected by the congregation as possessing the gifts fitting them for the office. In the service itself, conducted by the minister, they are solemnly appointed to the office with prayer that the Holy Spirit may enable them to discharge it well. The general conception of the importance of the office in the mind of the Church and in the attitude of those who accept it is such that it is regarded as involving service for life. Elders are therefore ordained once only. If they become members of another congregation, they exercise office only when duly elected and inducted.

The office of the eldership has arisen out of the concern that the Church should be so ordered that the life of the people of God should be marked by holiness as he is holy. It is therefore necessary that there should be processes of oversight (episcopate), so that the life of the Church may be guided and ordered. The office of the elder is concerned with this process of government and pastoral oversight. It will be noted that the statement has outlined three main functions of the ministry, in relation to the Word, the Sacraments and Pastoral Oversight. The office of elder developed in the years following the Reformation as the need was felt for representatives of the people, seniors, Church governors commonly called elders, to be associated with the ministers in the administration of the discipline and life of the Church. For us, the authoritative statement of the nature of the office is that contained in The Form of Church Government prepared by the Westminster Assembly in 1645 which in Paragraph I of our Book of Order is acknowledged as generally setting forth the order of government in the Church.

'Other Church Governors. As there were in the Jewish church elders of the people joined with the priests and Levites in the government of the church; so Christ, who hath instituted government, and governors ecclesiastical in the church, hath furnished some in his church,

besides ministers of the word, with gifts for government, and with commission to execute the same when called thereunto, who are to join with the minister in the government of the church. Which officers reformed churches commonly called Elders.'

It is important to note that there were various reasons for the development of this office. There were the reasons of a practical nature, the need for assistance in administration, for exercise of discipline and pastoral care in the Church, for more effective influence in the life of the community. There were also reasons of a theological nature. One of the most important of these was a recovery through the New Testament of an enriched awareness of the Church as the whole people of God, the 'laos'. Though it concerned individuals, some as leaders and all as members, it concerned a community with a corporate life.

There grew the conviction that the nature of its life should make clear its real character as a community, a conviction which emphasised the importance of the group or council. This involved that, in matters concerning discipline and administration, the processes by which decisions were made should themselves manifest the nature of the Church and her life. From its earliest years, the Christian Church had found the council a structure pattern which clearly reflected the life of the Church as a community, as involving common consultation, deliberation and decision. For example, in the account of the first Council in Jerusalem preserved to us in Acts, Chapter 15, we have an early instance of the distinctive Christian exercise of authority, the Church meeting in council under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and expressing itself: 'It is the decision of the Holy Spirit, and our decision'. This government by council was seen to be so deeply characteristic of the nature of the Church as to form a basic understanding or principle by which ecclesiastical practice must be tested. Awareness of this produced a deep concern that the processes of Church government should be by councils, with common consultation, deliberation and decision, and with the responsible participation of representatives coming together so that the whole fellowship is involved. It is with regard to this sort of pattern of structure, as related to councils and synods, that the word 'conciliar' or 'synodical' are used. It has been well said by Dr R. S. Loudon:

'This conciliar government of the Church is not just a chance element, but expressive of the guidance of the Holy Spirit within the Body which has only one King and Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. Accordingly no Church order can be regarded as apostolic which lacks a large synodical element in its government. A true understanding of the corporate life of the church requires its synodical government to be representative of the whole people of God, the whole body of the Christian Fellowship. It must never be allowed to become ministerial deliberation and leadership alone. It is at this point that the real significance of the eldership emerges as an office ensuring the participation of the representative church member in the conciliar government of the Church through its various courts.' (The True Face of the Kirk, p 40)

Further guidance to the sense in which the word is used may be gained from surveying the various responsibilities of the office. It should be recognised that the office does not exist in other Presbyterian churches precisely as it does in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. However, the general responsibilities may be grouped as follows:

(a) Personal and Pastoral

The elder has responsibility for seeking to further the influence of the Gospel amongst the people of the parish. 'To each elder there is normally assigned a district for the oversight of which the minister is responsible. The elder should assist the minister in the care of the sick, the aged and the needy, and in encouraging those outside to respond to the Gospel and to enter the fellowship of the Church.' (Church of Scotland, Statement 1963)

(b) Rule and Administration

The elder has responsibility for sharing the work of the Session which is concerned with the oversight of all aspects of the life of the congregation. This is the primary setting of his or her office, the life of the congregation in which the elder is a member, whose people the elder knows and with whose work the elder will be actively concerned in varying ways.

Though elders are spoken of as representatives of the people, it should be noted that their obligation is not simply to give effect to the opinion of the people. They are to 'bear rule', i.e.,

to decide after deliberation, according to their own wisdom and conviction, under the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit.

(c) Participation in Higher Courts

Some elders are appointed to serve in Presbytery and Assemblies from time to time. The appointment of persons to discharge this sort of function is obviously something which goes very deep in the life of the Church, and this conviction finds expression in the use of the word 'ordination'.

It has been suggested that it might assist clearer use of the word ordination if it were restricted to its properly strict technical sense in relation to the ministry of the Word and Sacraments. But provided it is clearly borne in mind that the use of the word does not imply that elders are made ministers of the Word and Sacraments, it seems reasonable that the word should be used as expressing convictions outlined above.

This is well summarised in the words of Principal Burleigh:

'Their office is in a broad sense spiritual and pastoral, distinct from but closely associated with the ministry of Word and Sacraments, and to it they are solemnly set apart with a ceremony not unfittingly termed 'ordination' – (Relations between Anglican and Presbyterian Church p 34)

Statement on Ordination

(Approved by the General Assembly, 1937)

[Old Book of Order Appendix D-3]

1. Ordination

It cannot be too strongly emphasised that ordination is not the conferring of a personal status or privilege, but the setting apart of men and women to perform certain functions within the Church to the glory of God. Various kinds of ordination are practised by the Church, differing in meaning in accordance with the different functions in view. Here we are particularly concerned with (a) the ordination of elders by the Kirk Session; (b) The ordination of ministers by the Presbytery, with the laying on of hands by those already ordained to the ministry. Elders are set apart to exercise spiritual oversight and discipline; ministers, in addition to these functions, to preach the Word and to celebrate the Sacraments. This difference in function constitutes a difference in meaning which is marked by a difference in the external rite.

The ordination of a licentiate, on being appointed as an assistant minister or locum tenens and that of a home missionary, for all of which there is precedent in the practice of the Scottish Church, is identical with the ordination of a minister. It is ordination by the Presbytery with the laying on of hands by those already ordained to the ministry, and it declares the person ordained to be a fit and proper person to preach the Word and to celebrate the Sacraments, and it empowers him or her to do so. This being the case, there can be no question of the reordination of an ordained home missionary, either upon his translation to a Home Mission Station within the bounds of another Presbytery or yet upon his being raised to the full status of the ministry, or of an ordained assistant or locum tenens upon being inducted as a minister into a fully sanctioned charge. Ordination to the ministry is performed once only.

2. Induction or Appointment

It is most important to note that ordination does not mean an unrestricted right and power to teach the Word and to celebrate the Sacraments for it is the practice of the Church not to ordain until the Church is at the same time prepared to induct the ordinand into a settled charge or to appoint him or her to some more or less clearly defined sphere of work. Induction or appointment is a distinct and separate act which accompanies ordination and at

the same time limits the sphere within which the powers conferred by ordination may be exercised.

While the ordination of minister, assistant, locum tenens, and home missionary is identical, their status is different in virtue of the different restrictions placed upon each in the exercise of his or her functions. A minister is restricted by the bounds of his or her parish, and may not without permission exercise ministerial functions outside them. A home missionary is specially restricted, not merely to his parish, but also with respect to the nature of the appointment he is eligible to receive and to the tenure of his appointment – i.e. is restricted by the Home Mission regulations. An assistant or locum tenens is also specially restricted by the terms of his or her appointment.

While an ordained home missionary may petition the General Assembly to remove the special restrictions placed upon him, and while the Assembly clearly has power to do so, it is not under any obligation to do so, for no ordained home missionary may claim as a right the full status of the ministry merely in virtue of his or her ordination.

3. Seat on Church Courts

The status with respect to the Church Courts of ministers holding these various types of appointment does not depend merely upon ordination, but upon the nature of the appointments held. No minister has a right to a seat in the Church Courts merely in virtue of his or her ordination. So far as ministers are concerned, a seat in Presbytery is normally reserved for those who have an episcopal or moderatorial status. Thus ordained home missionaries licentiates ordained and inducted to a Home Mission Station, ministers holding Home Mission appointments, assistant ministers, and locum tenentes should have no seat in Presbytery except in so far as, being also elders, they may represent the Sessions to which they belong. While it is competent for a Moderator to ask any ordained person of these classes to preside over meetings of the Kirk Session, he or she is under no obligation to do so, and he or she remains responsible to the Presbytery.

Note: The reference to Home Mission appointments is no longer relevant. Also locum tenentes in certain circumstances have full seats See Regulation 124(b) and Appendix E-7.

Ordination and the Ministry of Word and Sacraments

(Adopted by the General Assembly, 1966)

[Old Book of Order Appendix D-4]

(A) If we are to find an answer to the question, ‘What happens at ordination?’ we shall not do so by concentrating on what may or may not take place at the moment when a minister is being ordained, but rather by attempting to clarify the nature of the ‘ministry’ to which the ordinand is admitted by this act. For that is what the act of ordination is – admission to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments in the Christian Church.

The terms ‘ministry’ and ‘ordination’ have come to be somewhat technical terms in Church usage: but it is worth keeping in mind the fact that neither word is originally or exclusively ecclesiastical in its range of meaning. ‘Minister’ and ‘ministry’ can be used to refer to a post in secular government and its sphere of responsibility, while ‘destiny’ or ‘fate’ can be said to ‘ordain’ this or that state of affairs. Without attempting an exhaustive study of these words, we may say that the primary meaning of ‘minister’ is ‘one who serves, in the sense both of one who carries out the will of another, and of one who gives aid and care to another’. ‘Ordain’ means to establish, confirm, commission, usually in some solemn, definitive and immutable way, as by decree. These more general meanings influence Christian usage, with, of course, decisively important nuances.

(B) The Bible is, in large part, the literature of a people who understand themselves to be chosen by God to serve His purpose for mankind. The very existence of Israel and the Church as a whole is the result of God’s gracious election in which His merciful love for lost

mankind is made manifest. Israel is elect as God's beloved people, but at the same time commissioned as the vehicle of that love to all people, and the Church inherits this situation in the new form given to it by the appearance of Jesus Christ. Israel and the Church are 'ordained' as communities, to serve the will of God in relation to all mankind. But already within Israel, certain individuals and groups participate in the nation's election in special ways. The Prophets are the spokesmen of God, both calling and recalling Israel to her proper role; the Priests are the teaching guardians of the religious heritage, responsible for the cultus, through which God's forgiving relation to His people is mediated; the Kings dispense justice (Solomon) and are the shepherds and guardians (David) of the nation's life. Kings and Priests are solemnly anointed or otherwise set apart for their role; the great Prophets are regularly portrayed as directly claimed by God (Is. 6: 1-8; Jer. 1: 4-10). Similarly the New Testament sees the Church as a whole to be God's chosen vessel (e.g. I Pet. 2: 9-10); but at the same time it recognises particular forms of ministry within the body (e.g., I Cor. 12: 27-29). It can hardly be said however, that the New Testament presents us with a single and simple 'pattern of the ministry'. One of the results of historical-critical study is a clearer view of the fluid situation with regard to the ministry in the early Church. In the Pauline letters, for example, we find reflected a spontaneous, multiform, 'charismatic' ministry. The Pastoral epistles reflect a more or less clearly defined institution; and other parts of the New Testament exhibit still other approaches to the ministry.

This fluid situation can be understood and turned to good account when we recognise that for the New Testament the Primary Minister is Jesus Christ the Lord Himself. He is the Prophet, Priest and King, Who, as the One crucified and risen once for all, is effectively present in the power of the Spirit. This primacy and priority of His original and ever present ministry can hardly be over-emphasised. Against this background we may go on to suggest that the Pastorals emphasise, perhaps in face of a chaos of connecting claims to 'spiritual gifts', the value of wholesome order – Christ makes Himself known through His ministers duly called and acknowledged within the Church; in the 'charismatic' ministries the freedom and varied fruits of His presence are reflected; in the Johannine literature it is His inalienable authority and His power which are defended.

These various elements in the New Testament set up a creative tension in the life of the subsequent Church, and prevent us from 'reading off', as from a blueprint, any particular form of the ministry. We are able, however, to make two important affirmations:

First, a ministry has ever been, and is, Christ's gift to the Church. Though in the New Testament the ministry takes an almost bewildering variety of forms, and though the New Testament itself contains elements which sharply warn against a ministry which would substitute itself for Christ, the continued provision of a ministry in the Church is clearly in accordance with the nature of the Church as we see it in the New Testament.

Secondly, however, the role of the ministry in the Church is to serve Christ alone. He provides the Church with a 'special ministry' in order to safeguard, in a particular and necessary way, His own sovereignty over the Church's life. By means of this distinction within the Church between the 'special ministry' on the one hand and the whole ministering fellowship on the other, the reality of Christ's Headship over the Church is attested.

In the act of ordination, i.e., in recognising and perpetuating the ministry, the Church is acknowledging that she cannot be the Church at all unless she is addressed, cleansed, guarded and ruled by Him Who alone is her Head, her Lord, the Source of her life. She is confessing her submission to, and dependence upon One to Whom she is always responsible, and without Whom she is but a counterfeit Church. She is acknowledging that Christ has never left Himself without witnesses in her history, and is accepting that same gift for today. And in ordaining to the ministry in His name, she prays for those ordained that, by the Holy Spirit, they may like the Apostles, 'be with Him' (Mk. 3: 14), and speak to nourish and discipline her in His name.

(C) Thus while there is a sense in which we may usefully speak of the 'ordination' of all the members of God's people in Baptism to the Church's evangelical and pastoral task, this

must not be confused with the peculiar nature of ordination to the ministry. The welcome rediscovery of the 'ministry of the laity' vital as it is for the renewal of the Church, should not be allowed to obscure the situation. If today the distinction between the 'membership' and the 'ministry' is unclear, this is due not only to a dramatic 'upgrading' of the lay person's role but also to a failure on the part of the ministry to attend to its essential and unique responsibility in relation to the Church's life and witness in the world. The Church and the world need lay people fully conscious of their commission as Christ's witnesses; but these same lay people need the ordained ministry if they are adequately to be nourished and disciplined in the discharge of that commission.

(D) What, then, is the peculiar task laid on the ministry, and recognised in the act of ordination? In the Reformed Churches this has been characteristically defined in terms of the Word of God. Ordinands have been admitted to the Ministry of the Word, the Sacraments and Pastoral Oversight (the last includes 'discipline' or 'rule'). The fact that the 'Word' is placed first is no accident, for it is an indication of the specially Reformed understanding of what is vital to the continued life of God's people. The ministry is by no means an expression of democratic Church leadership; it is not a sacramental priesthood; it is not an autocratically governing hierarchy. The ministry is appointed to bear Christ's forgiveness and reconciliation and His government and discipline, all of which are valid only insofar as they are based and rooted in the Word of the Gospel. It is in the Gospel that Jesus Christ effectively discloses Himself as Truth, Reconciliation, and the Author of ordered human freedom. The ministry is ordained to make this Gospel its primary pre-occupation for the sake of the Church and her mission. The ministry is commissioned to be responsible for the genuineness of the Gospel in its contemporary form, for its effectiveness in the life of the Church and the World, and for the 'style of life' which it elicits from those addressed by it.

(E) In the light of the foregoing, we are in a position to indicate the outlines of an answer to our question, 'What happens in ordination?'

(i) In ordination the Church herself acknowledges that Christ, the Head of the Church, ordains that there shall be a ministry to speak, act and govern in His name. She confesses her need of the ministry, knowing that she does not live from her own resources, but from Him, 'clothed in His Gospel'.

(ii) By the act of ordination the Church recognises that Christ has called the ordinand to be His minister. Before a person is ordained to the ministry, the Church tests his or her call:

(a) By a period of probation and training;

(b) By waiting for his or her call to be confirmed by a call from the Church to exercise his or her ministry in a particular sphere.

A person is ordained once only; the ministry to which he or she is ordained is not one which the minister can take up or leave according to his or her interests or preferences but is for the whole of his or her life, although the minister may be legitimately discharged from the functions of the ministry for good and serious reasons.

(iii) The ordinand is admitted by the laying on of hands to a fellowship continuous with that of the Apostles. The ordinand's attention, and that of the Church which ordains him or her, is directed to the necessity of 'continuing in the Apostles' fellowship and teaching, the breaking of bread and the prayers' (Acts 2: 42). It is the same Gospel, the same fellowship, the same faith that the ministry is committed to maintain. Those who are already ministers admit a person to the ministry when the Church is satisfied that God has called him or her and that he or she can be entrusted with the Gospel.

(iv) The Church ordains in the setting of a solemn act of worship. The whole occasion reaches its climax in the prayer of ordination in which the grace of the Holy Spirit is sought in these or other suitable words of like meaning: Send down the Holy Spirit upon this Thy servant whom we, in Thy name, and in obedience to Thy most blessed will, do now, by the

laying on of our hands, ordain and appoint to the office of the Holy Ministry in Thy Church, committing unto him (or her) authority to dispense Thy Word and Sacraments, and to bear rule in Thy flock’.

(v) The ordinand is added to the ministry, i.e. he or she becomes a member of a fellowship which together is responsible for the guardianship of the Gospel. The ministry is not a mere collection of more or less gifted individuals, but a group with shared responsibilities.

(vi) The Word, the Sacraments, and Pastoral Oversight: The minister of the Word, Sacraments and Pastoral Oversight is engaged on a task of such a character that he or she is marked by it. The minister is no longer his or her own, but bound to the service of Christ and the Church. The minister is a person of God, of whom much is expected by his or her fellow members and so he or she must conduct him/herself. The study of God’s Word, a disciplined life of prayer and pursuit of the theological learning of the minister’s time, as well as unaffected Christian example, must be the minister’s evident concern.

(a) The peculiar responsibility which the ordinand now is focused in the task of the interpretation of Holy Scripture, of bringing the Christian message to contemporary expression. This is no light task, but a full-time and lifetime preoccupation. It involves understanding the Bible, attending to the history of its interpretation in the Church, and openness to the contemporary world, always in dependence on the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit, so that the Gospel can be tellingly expressed there.

(b) The ordinand is given the responsibility of administering the sacraments which are inseparably related to the Gospel and its communication, and therefore to the ministry of the Word. The sacraments are signs and pledges of the effectiveness of the Christian message – Baptism of Christ’s power through the Gospel to establish the Church and individuals as members of it, the Lord’s Supper of His power to maintain and fulfil that life.

(c) The ordinand is admitted to a fellowship which exercises pastoral oversight. The authority involved in such oversight is not a possession of the ministry, for it is solely the authority of the Gospel itself and of Christ Who thus discloses Himself. It may not be arrogated by any individual or group. But it is, for this very reason, real authority by virtue of which the ministry exercises rule and discipline within the Church. The ministry is responsible for the Church’s ‘style of life’ in the world, whether it is appropriate to the Gospel. Such authority rests upon continuing reference to Christ Himself, as He makes Himself known in the dialogue with Holy Scripture.

(vii) The ordinand is admitted to a fellowship responsible for the guardianship of the Gospel – a guardianship which must express itself in freshness and adaptability as the Church is led by Christ to do new things. The minister has not only the task of protecting the Church and the Gospel from error, but also, and particularly, the task of initiating creative trends in the Church’s witness.

(viii) The ordinand is admitted to the ministry which stands, as part of the whole Church under the authority and judgement of the very message which it is the ministry’s task to guard and communicate. It is Jesus Christ, not the ministry, Who is the Head of the Church. Just as it is important that there should be clear signs within the Church of the independence of the ministry, so there should also be clear signs of the unity of the ministry with the Church. That the ministry has its place within the Church is signified by the decision to ordain belonging to the elders and ministers together in Presbytery. That the ministry is also a gift of Christ to the Church is signified by the consequent admission to the ministry through the laying on of hands of those already ordained to the ministry.

ix) In ordination it is the Church's intention to admit the ordinand to the ministry of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church; but in fact a person is authorised to minister within the bounds of a particular communion. While the Church is divided, ordination lays a special responsibility upon the ministry to 'cherish a spirit of kinship to all the followers of the Lord'.

Ministers' Participation in Ordinations and of Elders in the Nomination and Election of Elders

(Adopted by the General Assembly, 1984)

[Old Book of Order Appendix D-5]

The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand recognises the equal right of both men and women for ordination to the offices of the Eldership and Ministry of Word and Sacraments. The Assembly recognises liberty of opinion on such points of doctrine as do not enter into the substance of the Reformed Faith. This is provided for through the provisions of the Declaratory Act, which Act applies to subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith.

The Assembly recognises that every person has the right of personal opinion on a variety of issues including the ordination of women to the offices of Eldership and Ministry of Word and Sacrament.

Notwithstanding this right, the Presbyterian Church by virtue of its act of ordination requires Ministers of Word and Sacraments to ordain Elders by the authority of the Session/Parish Council, and Ministers of Word and Sacraments by authority of Presbytery, without discrimination of any kind. The Assembly accordingly declares that Ministers of Word and Sacraments are bound to carry out the requirements implicit in the Formula including ordinations and the subsequent recognition of those ministries.

Likewise in giving authority to the Session or Parish Council to make its own nominations to the congregation for election as elders (see also Regulation 64) and to exercise judgement on any objections to those elected (see also Regulation 70-71) the Assembly declares that *by virtue of their ordination to the eldership, elders are required to make such nominations without unjust discrimination and to disallow any objections based on the gender or ethnic origins of those elected.*

Interpretative Statement on Act of Modification

(App B-4)

[Old Book of Order Appendix D-7]

The following statement was adopted by the 1993 General Assembly as a guide to understanding the scope and intent of the Act of Modification (see also Appendix B-4), which remains the primary and definitive legislation.

1. Assembly affirms that provision for elders to lead Communion is in part analogous to the Church's acceptance of lay preaching, in the sense that both are service on occasion by selected lay persons in roles normally the function of those ordained as ministers of Word and Sacrament, but always at their request and under their oversight.

2. Assembly affirms that its provision for elders to lead Communion is not just for rare, remote, and altogether unusual parishes, or limited to cases of extreme necessity.

3. Assembly confirms however that elder administration of communion is not as of right, but – for the sake of order, and for the sake of the harmony of the Church is at the discretion of Presbytery.

4. Assembly urges Sessions to make requests for provision for elder administration of communion responsibly, and with reasons given.

In considering a request from a Session for permission to nominate, Presbytery shall have full discretion in the matter, but must consider the good order of the Church (meaning where Presbytery has informed grounds for fearing that in a particular parish elder administration of Communion would lead to disorder or disunity, it may decline permission to nominate), and may have regard to the following considerations:

(a) Provision for elder administration where a Session believes it would help ensure regular or more frequent celebration of Communion. Such parishes may include those with ministerial vacancies, or with multiple preaching places, or without ready access to retired or non-parish ordained ministers with some living pastoral link with the congregation.

(b) Circumstances or priorities within the life and mission of the congregation and its ordained ministry where a Session believes the parish's effectiveness in mission would be enhanced by provision for elder administration on occasion such considerations may for example include the desire to relieve pressure on the ordained ministry in a parish where numerous bedside communions are required, or in some cases the authorisation of a lay parish assistant if an elder.

(c) Any other relevant factors, at the discretion of Presbytery.

5. The Act of Modification and Regulation 85 remain the primary and definitive legislation.

6. Presbyteries and Sessions should also note the supporting regulations 'The Selection, Training, and Authorisation of Elders to Administer the sacrament of Holy Communion, and the roles of Presbytery and Session'.

Provision of the Sacrament of Baptism

(Adopted by General Assembly 1995)

[Old Book of Order Appendix D-7]

1. The General Assembly affirms that Ministers of Word and Sacrament of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, being bound by the Formula, are obliged to provide for the baptism of people both as children and on personal confession of faith and the Assembly reaffirms the responsibility of Sessions/Parish Councils and Presbyteries/Union District Councils to ensure that baptism is properly provided for in every congregation.
2. The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand affirms the one baptism of Christ in the Church, and includes within its membership and ordained ministry, persons whose convictions are that infant baptism is in harmony with the mind of Christ, and those whose convictions are that baptism can only be appropriately administered on personal confession of faith. The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand honours both convictions, and both forms of baptism are understood to be used by God in the upbuilding of faith. Both forms are to be available in the life of every congregation of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. No one

practice or mode of baptism will be enforced on either ministers or people contrary to their conscience.
