



Presbyterian Church
of Aotearoa New Zealand

*Council of Assembly
c/o General Assembly Office
Core Logic House, 275 Cuba Street
PO Box 9049, Wellington 6141
www.presbyterian.org.nz
Phone (04) 801-6000*

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GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2021

Warm greetings from the Council of Assembly. We hope this letter finds you well and staying safe in your bubbles.

As we are all well aware, Covid-19 has once again caused disruption to our lives, this time with the Delta variant. With our General Assembly 2021 due to commence in Christchurch in four weeks, many have been wondering what the next few weeks will hold for us.

As you will also be aware, in May 2021 an Emergency Assembly agreed that, “In exceptional circumstances where it is impractical to hold a General Assembly which participants can attend in person, the Council of Assembly may determine that a General Assembly be held by electronic means”.

We are writing to inform you that Council of Assembly have considered our current environment and, having determined that the threshold for exceptional circumstances has been met, Council has taken the decision to hold General Assembly 2021 online.

We know that this news is significant for our Commissioners and all those who planned to be involved in the General Assembly. We also know that every General Assembly influences the entire life of our Church. This decision has not been taken lightly. We are fully aware of all the hard work and planning that has already gone into the preparations for the Assembly to be held in-person in Christchurch. We acknowledge the impact that this decision will have on the Local Arrangements Committee and all the parties who have been engaged in making preparations for the event. We acknowledge the disruption this will cause for both the outgoing and incoming Moderators, and we are aware of the additional work streams that will be created for the Assembly Business Work Group along with the incoming Moderator and Clerk of Assembly in terms of arranging an online event to replace what has already been planned over a long period of time. We also acknowledge the impact this has on Commissioners and all those others who were planning to attend the Assembly and made preparations to do so.

However, Council of Assembly also acknowledge the unprecedented times we live in and the challenges that an in-person Assembly would face. Amongst several factors, we recognise:

- For Assembly to be held in-person the whole country must be at Level 1.

- The indication given by the Prime Minister at last Friday's press conference was for the Auckland region to anticipate a further two weeks in Level 4, meaning that the Alert Level would need to reduce from Level 4 to Level 1 within a period of two weeks in order for Assembly to go ahead – and this time frame would provide very little time to either prepare to meet in-person or to move to an online platform.
- The vaccination roll-out is gathering pace, however not every Commissioner will have had the opportunity to receive one or both doses of the vaccine by the time of the Assembly, and many of our Commissioners are from population groups that have currently experienced lower vaccination rates than other groups. We have a duty of care for all of our Commissioners.

Please be aware that prior to this decision by Council, consultation was undertaken that included the Council Convenor and Deputy along with the Moderator Designate, Assembly Coordinator, Local Arrangements Convenor, the Assembly Business Work Group Convenor and Deputy; the Book of Order Advisory Committee Convenor and a member of the BOAC, and the Assembly Executive Secretary/Clerk of Assembly.

In making this decision, Council wish to clarify that it is now up to the Assembly Business Work Group, in consultation with the Clerk of Assembly and the incoming Moderator, to plan and order the business and other activities of the online Assembly – and to bring a recommendation to the Assembly (as is always the case) of what the agenda for the Assembly will be.

Covid-19 in our community

We'd like to take this opportunity to remind you to please consult the appropriate government websites for the latest information regarding the response to the Delta outbreak of Covid-19 - <https://covid19.govt.nz> contains the latest updates around Covid-19 Alert Levels and other information. Look for updated information around what the different Alert Levels entail, and especially those that pertain to gatherings of faith-based communities.

The government has recently signalled stricter requirements around contact tracing information to be collected by public venues. Please ensure that you have adequate systems in place, and if outside groups use your facilities, make sure that they are aware of the requirements and that they too have adequate measures in place to record those who attend their events/activities. All parish activities, groups and meetings of whatever size, should keep clear records of those who have been in attendance.

Information about financial support available for businesses, which some churches may also qualify for (including wage subsidies), is here <https://www.business.govt.nz/covid-19/financial-support-for-businesses/>. The Church website also contains helpful information for churches <https://www.presbyterian.org.nz/for-parishes/coronavirus-information>.

These are challenging times, and we ask you to uphold the nation and our Church in prayer at this time. And in particular, please pray for all those who are sick from Covid-19 and their families and friends, our essential workers, and for a smooth transition to an online Assembly, and for all those involved in putting the event together and those who will attend.

Yours in the peace of the Lord Jesus

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Richard McLean'.

Richard McLean
Convenor
Council of Assembly

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Anne Edgar'.

Anne Edgar
Deputy Convenor
Council of Assembly