



Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

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Memo:

From: Wayne Matheson, AES
To: Presbytery Clerks/Executive Officers
Subject: Summons to an Emergency Assembly and Assembly commissioners
Date: 13 April 2021

Greetings from the Assembly Office

The Council of Assembly has instructed the Clerk of the Assembly to summons an Emergency Assembly. [Refer Book of Order 14.31 (1)]

The Emergency Assembly will be held on Wednesday 12 May 2021 commencing at 10am, by electronic means, using Zoom. [Refer Book of Order 14.31 (9)]

The sole purpose of the Emergency Assembly is to discuss amendments to the Book of Order to enable both the General Assembly and Special Assemblies to be conducted electronically in exceptional circumstances.

The primary recommendation before the Emergency Assembly will be:

“That General Assembly agree 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.”

If this is approved, there will be supplementary recommendations to amend the Book of Order accordingly. The Book of Order Advisory Committee advises that the following legislative changes would be required.

(A) That the following be inserted into Book of Order section 14.29 as follows:

“14.29(4) 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.”

(B) In addition, it is suggested that a definition of “electronic “ means be added to the Appendix 1 Definitions as follows :

“Electronic means the medium that best enables the remote participation of all participants in a meeting and includes audio and audio visual communication between participants.”

Please note that that, before the business of an emergency meeting is dealt with, the action of summoning the emergency meeting must be sustained by resolution, and the Emergency Assembly

- (a) must determine whether or not a matter referred to it is an emergency, and
- (b) if it decides that the matter is not an emergency, must refer it to the next General Assembly. [Refer Book of Order 14.31(4)]

Background

1. In March 2020 a decision was made to postpone the General Assembly which had been set for September/October 2020, due to the growing COVID-19 situation and uncertainty of the safety of commissioners; the ability to travel and possible size restrictions imposed by Government COVID Levels for gatherings.
2. This decision was made under BOO 14.29(2).
3. The postponement was for one year.
4. Following various modelling, it was recognised that, with restricted air travel options, the venue set for the Assembly was no longer practical.
5. In November 2020, it was decided that the venue for Assembly would now be Christchurch, at St Andrew's College, during September/October 2021.
6. It was recognised planning was required to investigate holding Assembly by electronic means in exceptional circumstances.
7. As a result of those investigations only two options were viable: holding Assembly in person as we have traditionally done or, in exceptional circumstances, moving the Assembly on-line.
8. It is important to note that any further postponement of Assembly to a future date is not considered an option.
9. Council of Assembly notes the changing COVID Levels; possible travel restrictions due to COVID in some parts of the country; restrictions on the size of gatherings under existing COVID Levels - these start at limiting gatherings to 100 people for example; possible change to COVID Levels with very little notice (as we have seen most recently (15 February announcement at 7pm and restrictions in place less than 5 hours later) during an event.
10. The Council of Assembly believes the Church must have the option and availability to move and/or hold an Assembly electronically as an option. Meeting electronically on-line provide the church with surety on two key elements: that business can be attended to in a timely manner and safety of commissioners.
11. Without that option, we face the very real prospect of further postponements and with that all the uncertainty and lack of ability to attend to key matters before the Church in a timely manner.
12. Council of Assembly notes other churches that we have strong relationships with have moved their Assembly to an on-line platform. This includes (in 2020) – The Church of Scotland; the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan. Most recently – the Uniting Church of Australia has announced that it is holding its Assembly on-line in 2021.

Commissioners to an Emergency Assembly

I refer to Book of Order 14.31:

(5) An Emergency Assembly consists of one commissioner for every 1000 members of regional presbyteries, or part thereof as at 30th June, rounded up to the next even number, two commissioners each from Te Aka Puaho and from the Pacific Presbytery and those associate members associated for the specific purpose of the Emergency Assembly. Each presbytery should send equal numbers of ministers and elders.

(6) The Council of Assembly may appoint not more than 3 members additional to those provided for in subsection (5) as it thinks appropriate in the particular circumstances.

(7) The quorum for an Emergency Assembly is 60% of those eligible to attend.

Using the statistical information for membership as at 30 June - I advise the following:

Northern	5944 plus Co-op Ventures 1146	Total membership 7090
Kaimai	2228 plus Co-op Ventures 1475	Total membership 3703
Central	3872 plus Co-op Ventures 2502	Total membership 6374
Alpine	3251 plus Co-op Ventures 1266	Total membership 4517
Southern	4174 plus Co-op Ventures 379	Total membership 4553

Referring to Book of Order 14.31(5), the commissioners numbers for each Presbytery will be:

Northern	8
Kaimai	4
Central	8
Alpine	6
Southern	6
Te Aka Puaho	2
Pacific	2

Each presbytery should send equal numbers of ministers and elders.

This means there will be 36 voting members – with a 60% quorum being 22.

Each Presbytery should advise the names of its Commissioners to me as Clerk of the Assembly by Wednesday 5 May 2021

Yours sincerely,



Wayne Matheson