

## **Council of Assembly**

The following addendum follows on from Appendix 3 of the Council of Assembly's report published in the first mailing of the Whitebook. The page-numbering reflects this.

### **Appendix 3 – Council of Assembly regulations on Congregational Assessment**

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Since this report was published in the General Assembly papers, a number of questions have been raised, which we hope, by answering now, might help in the discussion about these recommendations.

What is the background for bringing these changes?

Our Church is changing quite rapidly. Over the past 10 years the number of congregations (Presbyterian and cooperating ventures with whom we have an association) with fewer than 40 adults at worship has increased from about 100 to around 150 of our total number of approximately 415 congregations. A further 25 percent of our congregations now have between 40 and 80 adults attending each Sunday, with their typical age profile suggesting there will be rapid further decline over the next 10 years.

Most of the numerical growth in our Church over recent times has come about through the work of larger and multi staffed congregations. Though there are always exceptions, the data suggests that while it is very difficult for a congregation who spend most of their resources sustaining full time sole charge ministry, we have virtually no examples of significant growth from congregations without sustained and time-committed leadership. With the rapid decline of the number of stipendiary ministers in our Church (from well over 400 to around 250 in the last 20 years), it seems very likely that our capacity to provide, to all of our congregations, effective ministry by a theologically trained and supported minister is going to continue to diminish.

There are examples of congregations developing positive and constructive responses to their changing circumstances. For example, larger regional congregations are taking responsibility for leadership among former independent congregations on their borders, and small communities of faith choosing to worship in homes or facilities that they do not own. There are of course many smaller congregations who are providing exceptional mission and ministry within their communities.

How will these changes be implemented?

While these new regulations may well create more work for presbyteries and for the Council in the short to medium term, they are intended to provide a direction for institutional reform. These changes, we hope, will strengthen our Church's long term ability to support ministry, mission and effective outreach. A rapidly increasing number of small congregations, coupled with a significant decline in the ability of congregations to fund theologically trained and competent ministers and other leaders, is unlikely to achieve good long term mission outcomes for our Church. There is also a concern that as congregations become smaller they can become more vulnerable in terms of compliance with legislation associate with health and safety and employment, as well as

our own Church regulations. Small congregations can find it harder to sustain the forms of worship and the provision of Biblical teaching important to the reformed tradition.

What about Cooperating Ventures?

These regulations provide for Presbyterian congregations only. Some further discussion needs to take place with our partner Churches on how to address the challenges associated with the burgeoning number of small UCANZ congregations.

What is wrong with the existing regulations?

The existing regulations can require a presbytery to commit significant resources over a sustained period of time to what can end up being a somewhat technical and legalistic process. If a congregation is resistant, there will inevitably be appeals to the General Assembly, resulting in legal processes placing further demands on our resources. The new regulations are simpler to implement, take less time, place the onus on the congregation to indicate how they are fulfilling their mission, and provide for a hearing by a neutral committee whose concern focuses on the fairness of the decisions being made.

The Council will move that these changes be adopted *ad interim*. This means that they will be sent to all presbyteries for their consideration before they become part of the Book of Order, through the special legislative procedure, (formally the barrier Act) but will come to force immediately.

Please note there were some errors in the report with references made to other regulations:

The report referred to the replacement of Book of Order regulation 5.10 (a). This reference should be deleted as there is no 5.10(a). The procedure for calling a congregational meeting is outlined in regulation 5.3 not 5.4