



Friday 18 November

Church reconfirms position on leadership

General Assembly today declined to uphold a proposal that asked to broaden the field of candidates for ministry and eldership.

The proposal sought removal of Section 9.1(1A) from the Book of Order, which prohibits the Church from accepting for training, licensing, ordination, or induction anyone involved in a sexual relationship outside of faithful marriage between a man and a woman.

Rev Dr Susan Jones spoke in favour of the proposal and highlighted that the rule marginalises those already on the edge of society. She advocated for the Church to engage in extended conversation about interpretation of the Bible on this matter.

Rev Ross Scott who seconded the motion said that while he didn't anticipate that the proposal would pass, he was hopeful that the number of people supportive of diverse leadership would become greater: "The light will be a little brighter," he said. "It will be a message of hope for those in the community."

A number of people spoke of being torn on the matter.

Those who spoke against repealing the rule, said that it would shrink the church and that accepting those outside marriage between a man and woman as church leaders was inconsistent with the supreme word of God.

Voting was conducted by secret ballot and the proposal was lost, failing to reach the 60 percent barrier required for change.

Following the vote, Moderator, the Rt Rev Richard Dawson acknowledged that there were strong feelings with in the Church on this issue and led Assembly in prayer.

Assembly supports full membership of National Dialogue for Christian Unity

Assembly supported, in principal, and subject to engagement with Te Aka Puaho, the Presbyterian Church applying for full membership of the National Dialogue for Christian Unity (NDCU).

The National Dialogue for Christian Unity held its inaugural meeting in February 2016, and the Presbyterian Church has had observer status on the group since then.

Full membership of the group continues the strong Presbyterian tradition of ecumenical involvement both within New Zealand and internationally, said the Southern Presbytery in its proposal.

The group's commitment to facilitating collaboration for justice – a dimension which is less prominent in other New Zealand ecumenical bodies – was another reason they were advocating for the Church to become a full member of this group.

In response to concerns that the purpose and aims of the NDCU were unclear, Rev Dr Kerry Enright who presented the proposal on behalf of Southern Presbytery, responded that foundation documents such as the NDCU constitution were available, and getting involved now gives the Church the opportunity to help shape the their work.

Kerry also mentioned that full membership of the NDCU will assist the Church in commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation as part of the wider body of Christ.

The common theme among those opposed to the proposal was that while they supported Christian unity, ecumenical engagement was already happening at local, regional and national levels through various bodies, and that NDCU membership wasn't necessary.

Small discussion or dialogue groups had the opportunity to consider the proposal.

Overseas guest Rev Dr Cheon Min Heui



This morning's international guest speaker was Rev Dr Cheon Min Heui from Presbyterian Church in Korea (PROK). At a time of mass anti-government protest in South Korea, Rev Min Heui said hope for peace and reconciliation with North Korea was more important than ever. The PROK holds a prayer meeting every Monday and she invited Commissioners to join with them in praying for justice.

Min Heui is Executive Secretary for Partnership and Ecumenical Relations, and she said her Church continues to look for opportunities to expand its programme with global partners such as our Church. She complimented Rev Phil King on his humble leadership, and joked with the Moderator that surely God's inspiration is at work because her sermon for intern's graduation at Knox Church earlier this week centred on the image of 12 stones, which mirrored Right Rev Richard Dawson's five stones prayer intercessions for General Assembly.

Social voice workgroup to be established

General Assembly supported the establishment of a work group to enable the Church's social voice to be heard.

Council of Assembly has been tasked with establishing the group, the membership of which Assembly asked reflect the diversity of the Church, and include policy and other relevant experts.

"This proposal appears to have struck a chord with the General Assembly," said dialogue group facilitator, Rev Barry Ayers in his report back to Assembly.

Fourteen of the sixteen dialogue groups supported the proposal, and as there was such strong backing from Commissioners in these groups, Moderator the Right Rev Richard Dawson declared the motion to be carried.

The words 'to be heard' were added to the original motion to reflect the desire that this should happen, explained Barry in introducing a friendly amendment to the original proposal.

Dialogue group feedback noted the need for a solid base of information and the importance of accompanying the Church's social voice with action.

"Whatever we say should be centred around the Gospel mandate reflecting on our substance of faith and it should not be a political statement," said feedback from one group.

Te Aka Puaho also noted the importance of maintaining their right to speak to any and all issues that affect Maori communities.

Pacific Islands Synod

Pacific Islands Synod Moderator the Rev Karima Fai'ai gave a presentation on the faces and places of the Pasifika parishes, all based in Tamaki Makaurau. He welcomed the newest Pacific island church, Tuvalu, that began worship this year and acknowledged two long-standing ministers who retired, the Revs Tuai and Setefano. The presentation finished with a waiata and a response from the Right Rev Richard Dawson who looked back fondly on his formative time at Theological Hall amongst Pasifika trainees, and how they had taught him to humanise his faith.

Stated supply appointments can now be two years

Assembly agreed today to changes to the rules for short-term ministry appointments.

Southern Presbytery bought the proposal to extend the maximum term for stated supply ministers from one to two years in response to practical challenges they had experienced in the appointment of ministers in their presbytery.

Rev Ian Guy of Southern Presbytery commended the changes to Assembly.

In their report, Southern Presbytery explained the reasons why they were advocating for change: when ministers from overseas denominations fill stated supply roles, the 12-month period limit was, at times, too short for the minister to complete discernment in relation to the reception process. Also, explained the report, the longer time often taken to fill vacancies means that the 12-month maximum limit was making the transition to full-time ministry more difficult.

Assembly also agreed to allow Presbytery to extend the two-year maximum in circumstances where the appointee is part-way through the reception process during the period of stated supply, or where a supply appointee is part-way through the local ordained ministry assessment period.

Support for earthquake affected parishes

Assembly supported sending a pastoral letter of commiseration to parishes affected by the recent earthquakes and storms in North Canterbury, Marlborough and Wellington, and to the Hurunui District Council Mayor. It also supported a separate recommendation to express its solidarity with those affected, to reject the view that such natural disasters are divine punishment, and to affirm its belief in a Christ who suffers with those who suffer.

Liz Whitehead, who presented the recommendation for commiserations on behalf of the Alpine Presbytery, said the Mayor of the Hurunui District, Presbyterian Winton Dalley, was struggling to cope in a shattered town.

Recognising the need for financial support, the Moderator launched an Appeal for parishes in the affected presbyteries.

Responding to concerns that the statement on natural disasters as divine punishment was a reaction against recent media comments by Brian Tamaki, Rev Alistair McBride who presented the recommendation on behalf of Kaimai Presbytery, said that the headlines were scientifically and theologically wrong and that this statement would give the Moderator a chance to speak out on how the Church views the world.

The Moderator was asked to share the statement wider and responded the Church would issue a media release. [Read media release here.](#)

Moderator Designate announced

The new Moderator Designate was announced at this afternoon's Assembly. The Very Rev Andrew Norton will be the first person in the history of the Church to hold the position of Moderator for a second term.

In his incoming address, Andrew said that, long before he was nominated for the first time in 2012, he advocated for a redefining of the role and for an extended term. This has not come about because of any changes made but simply because the Church has elected him.

He said, "Allowing my name to go forward again is not something I have sought nor aspired to...It is not an easy task... and comes at a very high personal cost. I do this because I have hope in our Church."

Andrew believes the Church does not need another theme, but rather a continuity of leadership that helps us face up to the challenges ahead, and gives voice to the hopes, hurts and hungers of people. We have a long way to go, he said, in enfranchising the voices of Te Aka Puaho and of youth, and in making Assembly decisions future facing, missional and visionary.

His prayer for PCANZ is that it be nothing more nor less than all that is contained in God's imagination for us. [Read full address.](#)

Moderator's term

Assembly decided to refer any change to when the Moderator of the General Assembly starts their term to a task group that has been set up at GA2016 to review the Moderator's role.

The proposal brought by Rev Brett Johnstone of Northern Presbytery was for the incoming Moderator to moderate the General Assembly at the end of their term, rather than at the start, as is currently the case. His argument was that the Moderator Designate is currently required to engage in a period of almost full-time planning and creative work in the six months before they are installed.

Secondly, the Very Rev Pamela Tankersley, agreed that it is a better process to keep the Moderator's work flowing towards an Assembly, to the theme's climax.

Although some Commissioners supported Pamela's view, saying it would also give the outgoing Moderator a chance to share their achievements with Assembly, the stronger mood was to allow the task group to add this proposal to their review. A motion to this effect was subsequently put and agreed unanimously.

Third keynote address: hope is the opposite of despair



Amy Winehouse, the singer who died at 27, was the visual accompaniment to keynote speaker Dr Rod Wilson's final address to a packed Assembly. She represents the rock icons for whom covert or overt suicide was a rational choice based on hopelessness, he said, rather than an emotive decision.

"The hope we cling to in the Church does not address the sad face of Amy Winehouse. How did so many disembodied concepts emerge from the central tenet of 'the word made flesh'," Rod challenged Assembly.

He talked of his personal research of going into Christian bookshops on his travels to see what answers today's books offer to the world's problems. The tools, techniques and programmes are, he feels, disconnected from the Church's rich heritage of rigorous hope. They do not offer genuine answers to the post-truth generation we now find ourselves in.

Truth centred in Christ has become secondary to subjective understanding, all that matters is desire, and there is a widespread belief that data will provide sufficient evidence for us to handle the future, Rod said. The need for hope may be greater than it has ever been.

Biblical hope, he says, provides confidence in the unseen, a holy optimism not rooted in the cult of personality but in God. "The Bible shows that technique alone always fails and an outsider must be brought in who has no credentials other than being grounded in hope."

Rod contrasted hope with its opposite, despair. "When we despair we do crazy, inhumane and ruthless things in the world. The biblical tradition of hope," he said, "stands as an alternative that requires a certain risky imagination."

Status quo for earthquake-prone building policy

A proposal to ask the Church Property Trustees (CPT) to align their earthquake-prone building policy with current legislative standards failed to find favour with General Assembly.

The effect of today's decision is that the minimum standard for compliance for CPT-overseen properties will remain at 67 percent of the new building standard.

In bringing the proposal to Assembly, Cunny Atchison indicated Northern Presbytery's view that it is inappropriate for the CPT to be applying requirements which go beyond the requirements of recently enacted law. (Government legislation sets the minimum standard of compliance at 34 percent of the new building standard, and CPT policy sets a higher standard, requiring church buildings to be maintained to 67 percent.)

Northern Presbytery was seeking a more collaborative approach between the CPT and parishes, in working through issues related to earthquake-prone buildings.

Before voting took place, deputy chair of the CPT, Margaret Galt, had the opportunity to address Assembly to outline the rationale for leaving the standard at 67 percent following General Assembly 2014's request to review the policy.

Margaret advised that the existing policy has flexibility to require a lower level of compliance, and that parishes are already applying and receiving exemptions to upgrade their buildings to less than the 67 percent threshold.

She also advised that CPT consider “property to be a servant of mission” and that they opted for a policy with a minimum compliance standard of 67 percent (after also considering 34 percent and 100 percent compliance levels) after careful consideration of professional advice and consulting other denominations on their policies.

Margaret noted that it is likely that the timeframe component of the existing earthquake-prone policy would be reviewed, and this will be welcomed by the many commissioners who spoke of the challenges posed by the “unrealistic timeframes” expressed in the policy.

She also drew Assembly’s attention to the fact that building standards vary from region to region in recognition of the different levels of earthquake risk across New Zealand.

Rev Martin Stewart spoke of experience in the wake of the Christchurch earthquakes and said, “I commend the Church Property Trustees for holding us to a higher standard of safety than the Government had the courage to do,” in reference to the lower standard of compliance in legislation.

A common theme among those who supported a change in policy was concern about the unrealistic timeframes that required a large amount of expensive work to be completed in a short space of time.

While there was strong support from the floor of Assembly for a change in policy the proposal narrowly failed to receive the 60 percent majority required to bring about change.

Church adopts Say Yes Statement

The Presbyterian Church voted today to “say yes” to government policies that promote greater social equality, through the adoption of the Say Yes Statement.

The Statement endorsed by Assembly builds on the Church’s existing commitment to deliver better outcomes for New Zealand children and families, says Very Rev Andrew Norton.

In speaking to the recommendation, Andrew said feedback was clear that a voice on social justice is needed.

“The issues facing New Zealand have to be owned by all of us. They demand we do not turn a blind eye.”

The Say Yes Statement is a series of declarations on social justice matters including inequality, housing, family violence and more. [Read the full Say Yes Statement](#) which was drafted by PresCare, the joint initiative between Presbyterian Support and the Church.

New Zealand needs to have a clear and positive voice, and the statements are a good place to begin, said those who spoke in favour of the Say Yes Statement.

An amendment from the floor was approved which adjusted one clause of the original Say Yes Statement to move away from a focus on tax cuts, and instead focus more generally on advocating at the 2017 General Election and beyond for policies that deliver social equality.

Fifteen out of 16 dialogue groups supported the proposal. Dialogue groups asked for amendments to three of the statements, primarily adding new statements on climate justice and that each parish should develop an action plan to implement the Statement.

As well as endorsing the Say Yes Statement, Assembly also asked that the Statement be commended to our partner churches. Feedback from dialogue groups showed 12 in favour and three against. The motion was carried.

The Say Yes Statement has come about as a result of the PresCare [“Justice and Action” booklet](#) that was published in 2015, and included in Commissioner information packs. The booklet focuses on the plight of children and families living in poverty, and offered resources to support parishes to become agents of change in their communities.