



## Thursday 17 November

### Dr Rod Wilson: 2nd keynote address on Lament



The second address to Assembly today by keynote speaker Dr Rod Wilson was on the theme of lament as a positive response to anguish. Rod used George Watt's painting called *Hope*, that depicts a woman on a broken world plucking a broken stringed instrument, to show that we commonly miss seeing the small star of hope when overwhelmed by the state of the world and of the Church in modern society.

He invited Commissioners to see that the common responses to anguish – of anger and silence – disconnect us from each other and from God. Instead, lament is a more connected way to see, feel and express hope. It moves us from an 'either' reaction to the freedom of 'both' as well as 'and'.

### Beneficiary Fund changes agreed

Commissioners agreed to a raft of changes today that will ensure a more equitable and sustainable retirement programme for the Church's ministry leaders going forward.

Under the changes agreed to today, the Beneficiary Fund will continue to exist, although it will undergo significant change including winding up the defined benefits section of the fund. This has the impact of replacing future annuity payments to retired ministers or their spouses with a one-off lump sum, which will be paid in late 2017.

Assembly also agreed to a variety of changes to the ministerial support package including a six percent increase in basic stipend for all ministers, which will be funded by congregations.

Commissioners raised concerns about the burden this may put on parishes, and asked why the increase was so high. Jenny Flett, Beneficiary Fund Workgroup convener, confirmed that the level of stipend increase was unrelated to inflation, and rather was the level required to ensure that the value of the ministers' support package was similar before and after the changes to the Beneficiary Fund. She added that the quantum of the increase was the result of thorough and careful analysis by the actuary and workgroup's advisers.

In response to a question asking what the "theology of the math" behind the recommendations for change was, Jenny described the "theology" as fairness to all, and creating a system that values all involved in ministry in the Church.

Assembly also approved a recommendation to reduce Assembly Assessment to reflect removal of the Beneficiary Fund charge. It is anticipated that new Assembly Assessment levy would be effective from 1 July 2017.

A charitable fund, created from the surplus that remains after all wind-up entitlements have been paid, was also approved by Assembly. In response to questions about how the fund would be used, Jenny advised commissioners that it is envisaged that a consultative group will be established - including representation from ministers and annuitants – to provide input into the design and management of the fund.

A raft of other related changes (detailed below) were also agreed by Assembly.

Before voting, commissioners sought clarification on a number of issues relating to the proposal. The inequity between lump sum payout levels for ministers who joined the Fund before or after 2009 was noted, as well as the inequity of wind-up payments to “frozen” fund members. In response Jenny noted that a review of frozen members’ wind-up payments was planned.

Jenny also highlighted to commissioners that while there was opposition to the proposal from some during the 17 roadshows conducted around the country, the majority of those the workgroup spoke to appeared to be supportive of the changes.

This was reflected on the floor of Assembly with the vast majority of commissioners voting in favour of the proposed changes. Speakers commended Council of Assembly and the workgroup for their leadership in this area.

More information about the changes can be found on the Church’s website: <http://www.presbyterian.org.nz/for-parishes/church-property-trustees/the-beneficiary-fund/resources>

Full summary of what Assembly agreed in relation to the Beneficiary Fund:

- That the defined benefit section of the Beneficiary Fund be wound up, effective 30 June 2017.
- That a new (additional) defined contribution section be established and current members and annuitants be permitted to join this section.
- The scheme be closed to new members until the scheme is reorganised and reopened on 1 July 2017.
- That the surplus in the fund be distributed in accordance with Rule B19.2(g) of the Trust Deed by General Assembly for charitable purposes. Firstly, \$800,000 of the surplus to be retained or returned to the scheme to be held as a general reserve, and secondly the balance of the surplus to be held on trust for charitable purposes, specifically the advancement of religion, in particular for the support of ministers of religion
- That the ministerial support package be replaced with a package for all ministers that includes:
  - A 6 percent increase in basic stipend (congregation-funded)
  - Long service adjustment to stipend based on length of service to remain the same.
  - Church Beneficiary Fund contribution be 5 percent of total stipend (congregation-funded)
  - Beneficiary Fund contribution at a minimum of 5 percent of total stipend including long service adjustment paid by all members (individual minister funded)
  - Housing and other allowances to remain the same
  - Membership of the Fund shall remain compulsory for all national ordained ministers
  - Church Kiwisaver contribution for locally ordained ministers be no less than 5 percent (congregation funded)
- Congregations be encouraged to pay all employees no less than the living wage according to resolution of GA 2012.
- Congregations be encouraged to contribute employer Kiwisaver contributions at no less than five percent.
- Assembly Assessment be reduced to reflect the removal of the Beneficiary Fund charge currently included in the Assembly Assessment.
- The appointment of a corporate trustee to act as trustee of the scheme in place of the Fund’s current trustees, as part of the scheme’s transition to the Financial Markets Conduct Act.
- Council of Assembly be given delegated authority to do all other necessary and incidental things on behalf of the General Assembly to finalise and implement the resolutions, including without limitation approving necessary changes and amendments to the Trust Deed.

## **Ministers may only conduct marriages between a man and woman**

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General Assembly ratified the 2014 General Assembly decision that ministers may only conduct marriages between a man and woman.

The decision means that the rule which was adopted ad interim in 2014 will now formally be adopted into the Book of Order.

Assembly voted by secret ballot vote, and a recount was requested and completed following a query about the count and percentage calculation. The vote was confirmed as motion carried.

Te Aka Puaho abstained from voting, and when asked why, Te Aka Puaho Moderator, Rev Wayne Te Kaawa responded saying “the underlying reason behind why we are standing aside is that we will not be part of anything that marginalises people. We know the pain of being marginalised.”

Those who spoke in favour of the proposal believed that the Church needed to have consistency of practice and belief and said that if the motion wasn’t passed it would undermine the integrity and order of the Church.

Those who were against adopting the rule said that the Church needed to be accepting of all people, and spoke of the diverse communities in which we now live and how the rule would create a barrier to effectively ministering to all.

Following announcement of the voting results, Moderator the Rt Rev Richard Dawson acknowledged that the decision to only allow ministers to conduct marriages between men and women would cause pain to some and asked for commissioners “to be sensitive to those around you”, and Assembly chaplain Rev John Gullick led Assembly in prayer.

## **Moderator’s role to be reviewed**

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A task group will be appointed to review the nature, scope and requirements of the Moderator of General Assembly’s role.

The motion arose from Council of Assembly’s report which noted that the role had changed significantly in recent years and that Council had spent “considerable time concerned with the realities of the Moderator’s role”.

The Leadership Sub-committee had volunteered to undertake the work, however, in response to a question from the floor of Assembly, it was decided that a task group of suitably qualified and experienced people be appointed to undertake the review.

Rev Martin Stewart spoke in favour of the appointment of a special task group saying that the review would benefit from specialised skills that were different from those present within the Leadership Sub-committee.

## **National ministries present to Assembly**

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This afternoon’s session included short presentations by each of the Church’s National Ministries.

Finance Manager Brendan Sweeney introduced his greatest assets in the Financial Services Department – Katrina Graham and Margaret Fawcett – and gave an overview of the significant improvements made in recent years to finance systems.

Global Mission Coordinator Rev Phil King introduced the two couples who have made an outstanding contribution as volunteers in Vanuatu since Cyclone Pam – Don and Shirley Anton, and Gloria and Neville Jones. Two further volunteers will take up positions in early 2017, and Phil urged Commissioners to follow any inner nudge from God to get involved in the work of Global Mission.

Jane Thomsen described the work of the Presbyterian Research Centre. The centre has been digitising its collection over the past two years and is investigating the best way of making images available online. It also holds the largest Asian Christian collection of records in the world.

Press Go’s mission was highlighted by its Catalyst Lisa Wells. Lisa gave an overview of how parishes can be resourced by Press Go, and urged them to get in touch if they are stuck and don’t know where to go next with major projects. [Read more.](#)

Kids Friendly national coach Jill Kayser spoke about inclusiveness – the importance of including children in the full life and worship of the Church, not just as a separate children’s activity. [Read more.](#)

Presbyterian Youth Ministry’s Gordon Fitch and Matt Chamberlain presented an inspirational video that gave a pithy overview of the four ways they are developing a vibrant ministry, based on the strategy of discipleship.

The Church's Asian Ministry Coordinator Rev Kyoung Gyun Han proudly asked the 10 Asian Commissioners and delegates to come on stage and introduced them one by one to Assembly. His strategy to strengthen the Church has 3Cs: connecting people; creating space and hospitality; and contributing to the life of the Church. [See more.](#)

Rev Dr Steve Taylor, Principal of Knox College for Ministry and Leadership (KCML), gave a breakdown of investors in KCML and outlined its new strategic plan, which includes establishing seven new mission seedlings in 20 churches by 2020.

## Assembly Serves the City

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While General Assembly is a business-focused event, today Commissioners made the Church's presence in Dunedin more visible in action.

Commissioners were of service in the community helping with several projects. They included painting a mural at Bayfield High School, spring cleaning Green Island Community Hall, and white ribbon installations at Knox and First churches in the central city.

"The Church's primary value is serving others," says Right Rev Richard Dawson. "While we're here to do our own business, that's unbalanced. We need to express that value."

The Moderator donned gumboots and his Highlanders hat to participate at Bayfield. Around 40 Commissioners and Youth Commissioners braved a cold southerly to pick up paint brushes to create the mural at Bayfield, on the back wall of the school hall.

The design of the mural is being tied into the GA theme of Hope, and to the school's values of Respect, Integrity Service and Excellence (RISE).

"We chose a silhouette of a bird in flight to symbolise our connection to wildlife on the Otago Peninsula, to the land and sea," says Principal Judith Forbes, who is also an elder of St Stephen's Leith Valley Parish.

Large squares of plywood were painted by Commissioners in blue and green. They will then be built into a wooden frame to attach to the wall. After today school students will carry on and complete the project. [Download images.](#)

## Focus on Prayer at Assembly

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Moderator Right Rev Richard Dawson is encouraging Assembly to be conscious of its roots as a spiritual event by returning to prayer. Assembly, he says, was always meant to be an exercise in discerning the will of God, which involves the Holy Spirit and prayer.

A prayer vigil was held in the week prior to Assembly throughout the country by individuals, parishes and presbyteries and synods. Parishes and presbyteries are encouraged to say special prayers for their Assembly representatives.

At Assembly a quiet prayer room is available and Assembly chaplains Rev John Gullick and Bunty Bunce are available to pray with anyone.

"We have strayed somewhat from this perception of our intention in gathering together and need to return to prayer to see GA deliver the kind of results such a big effort deserves," he says.

Richard created "Five Smooth Stones of Prayer" cards which were distributed to parishes, presbyteries and synods prior to Assembly.

"In asking God to forgive us, we acknowledge that some of the problems we face are of our own making, both within and without the Church," explains Richard. "Prayer enables God to work in greater ways through us, so that all we do both in public and behind closed doors is imbued with love." [Read more.](#)

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## In brief

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- Thursday morning's guest at GA2016 was Pastor Allan Nafuki, General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu, who is also chair of the Vanuatu Council of Churches. He was introduced by Global Mission Coordinator Phil King. Allan thanked Assembly for all the support offered to Vanuatu in the wake of Cyclone Pam and acknowledged in particular the long-term volunteers on the ground there and Moderator Rt Rev Richard Dawson's presence at the recent re-opening of Onesua College on Efate. The Presbyterian Church is the largest of Vanuatu's Christian churches, with 70,000 members.
- The Council of Assembly has delegated approval to issue or amend supplementary provisions between assemblies, and the supplementary provision amendments presented by Council were agreed by General Assembly, subject to one change: sub-clause 12 of the nominating committee terms of reference was referred to the Book of Order committee for consideration.
- General Assembly approved a range of changes to the supplementary provisions to give effect to new governance arrangements for Salmond and Knox College.
- Assembly affirmed the importance of ongoing support for tertiary chaplaincy in Aotearoa New Zealand