



## General Assembly 2008

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## About Candour

*Candour* is a monthly magazine about ministry and leadership. For more information, contact:

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The articles in *Candour* reflect the views of individual ministers or contributors writing in a personal capacity. They are not representative of the Church's official position. Please approach the author for permission if you wish to copy an article.

### Contributions

We welcome responses to published articles. If you would like to write a piece replying to any of this month's featured articles, please contact:

Amanda Wells (editor) on (04) 381-8285 or [candour@presbyterian.org.nz](mailto:candour@presbyterian.org.nz)

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Ministers are strongly encouraged to update their Ministers' Information Form every three years so that the information remains current. If you would like to update your Form please email Juliette on [juliette@presbyterian.org.nz](mailto:juliette@presbyterian.org.nz) for a template. Alternatively, you are welcome to send additional information to PO Box 9049, Wellington.

# Another General Assembly

Amanda Wells

After managing communications at last General Assembly, I wasn't keen to experience another. But time mellows your perceptions, as does the acquisition of talented staff to whom you can delegate difficult tasks.

For my team, the most frustrating thing about Assembly is that it gathers many interesting people in one place but chances to actually speak to them are few. For us, Assembly becomes a complex logistical exercise, with stories to write, photos to take and publications to produce. Plus the media to manage. Just completing these tasks in the available time is challenge enough.

Listening intently to business so that you can produce a concise and accurate summation of it is not quite the same thing as taking it in. Business seemed to flow very quickly at this Assembly, so stories kept needing to be written. When I sat down later to write about GA08 for *Spanz*, I realised how difficult it is to provide an overall impression of an event in which you have been intimately involved. Usually I focus on the big picture, but in this case the small details were so multitudinous it was obscured.

For *Spanz*, we randomly interviewed half a dozen people to provide a bigger perspective on GA. When you spend most of your time talking to the business committee and other "insiders", it's refreshing to talk to people experiencing the event in an unfiltered manner. A lot of people said they appreciated the humour of Assembly, which was interesting. Our random survey somehow chose mostly elders, and several commented they didn't feel hugely empowered during the business sessions. I had wondered if people would feel bored sitting through the long days without having anything active to do, but this didn't seem to be the case.

I'm actually finding it hard to write a whole editorial about Assembly. Not because nothing happened, but because we've disseminated this information so far and wide that it seems fruitless to repeat it (check out the GA08 section of [www.presbyterian.org.nz](http://www.presbyterian.org.nz) if you'd like a recap).

Unsurprisingly, this Assembly didn't garner the media interest of 2006. While Press Go somehow attracted interest in the lead-up to GA08, its approval by Assembly failed to get much mention (though perhaps this was

because of the successful firefighting of random "compulsory sale of all small churches" sparks). To people involved in the Presbyterian Church, there were lots of significant decisions of interest at GA08 but many of these would be difficult to explain in a pithy sentence to a passer by, let alone in a way that grabs their interest.

We did get some success with news releases issued in the wake of Ecological task group and Interchurch Bioethics Council decisions. Angela and I were driving up to Silverstream on the Saturday morning trying in vain to hear the Radio NZ 8am bulletin on my malfunctioning car radio – but were later informed the ecological decision had made it to sixth spot. The installation of a new Moderator always gets a little bit of coverage, particularly in the person's home town, and this Assembly was no exception. Overall, the media coverage, if not fulsome, was pleasing, and presented the image of a Church doing its best to take a leadership position both on the issues confronting us and on some societal concerns.

When I do media training, my stock questions tend to be about the decline of the church, as I figure this is something church-related people will be asked about sooner or later. Bizarrely enough, the week before Assembly, a OneNews reporter got in touch saying he was doing a story about the decline of the Church and Christianity in general. This didn't appear to have been specifically prompted by anything Assembly-related, and in fact he was also talking to Pentecostal people about why their churches were growing etc. Well, he said he was. But despite shooting an interview with Martin, so far the story hasn't seen the light of the day. Perhaps one day soon, when little else has happened, it will be brought out to fill up the bulletin...

We can't deny the fact that Church governance does lack immediate and obvious interest to many in our society. Positive stories are relatively easy to place in our community newspaper, but it's much hard to get wider traction. People might say they would like more "good news" stories on the bulletin at six, but would they grab you? News plays on our fears and anxieties much more than anything else, no matter how much we would like to claim otherwise.

This is the last issue of Candour for 2008. The next issue is February 2009 with a deadline of 30 January.

# Nothing alarming at General Assembly

Allister Lane, ordinand, Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership

The experience of General Assembly can be rather exhausting. While all the commissioners sit through business from early in the morning until late in the evening, spare a thought for us ministry students who have to run around with the microphones! By the Sunday morning of Assembly I was lavishing every moment of rest I was able to steal in my gloriously... *adequate* dorm room bed.

My saintly slumber was shattered at 7.30am by a piercing alarm sounding throughout the St Patrick's College complex. My response to this was immediate and swift – on account of having been designated the acting fire warden less than 24 hours earlier. As I sprinted half-dressed toward the fire alarm panel, I noticed that no one was rushing out of the buildings – not one person! The alarm continued to sound for several minutes.

After checking the fire alarm panel I was able to relax; it was not a fire alarm but a security alarm that had been tripped accidentally. But everyone else at Assembly did not know that! The response on the Sunday morning of General Assembly to a sustained public alarm throughout the accommodation and meeting complex was – nothing.

In talking to people over breakfast that morning I heard a range of rationale people had applied to this “alarming” situation:

- “That alarm won't be anything important”
- “I can't smell any smoke”
- “Alarms go off by accident all the time”
- “If it's anything serious there will be plenty of time for me to get out alive”
- “Someone else will have it under control”
- (someone who was in the shower) “I'd rather die of smoke inhalation than embarrassment”

What does this lack of response to the alarm say? I do not want to make too much of this, but I wonder if there is anything we can take from this example about being the Church? How is it that we, the Church, relate to the

reality around us? A large part of the business at General Assembly is how we organise ourselves. So how are we doing that in relation to the reality around us?

## Scripts...

A study was done some years ago in the UK to examine the causes of death by fire in public places. Contrary to expectation, it was not panicking crowds that accounted for a lot of the deaths by the complete opposite... *apathy* in the face of obvious cause for alarm. In one tragic example of a fire in a department store, it was discovered

that most of the deaths occurred in the restaurant. The theory developed to explain this phenomenon suggests that, despite the sounding of the alarm, the people in the restaurant

were socially conditioned to not leave the restaurant until they had paid for their meal! Researchers describe this seemingly irrational behaviour as living by our social “scripts”.

These scripts are the socially acceptable patterns of behaviour that we live by day-to-day. They are the learned behaviour that we understand to be acceptable and help us to inhabit the complex world of relationships in public space. The danger of these scripts, researchers have discovered, is that they can lock us into a way of living that is inflexible to changing circumstances.

One of the social experiments the researchers used to test their theory about scripts was to place an actor face down on the pavement of a busy city street and get him to groan intermittently. With cameras set up at a distance the footage clearly shows dozens of people looking at the person lying on the ground close enough to hear him groaning and continuing to walk on by. Curiously, when one person stops to check the person on the ground, the script is suddenly broken and others soon stop and engage with the first person in checking the actor on the ground. In this sense the person who breaks from the script can be seen as a type of prophet.

## Coming back to the General Assembly...

As a church, I wonder to what extent we function ac-

ording to familiar scripts. What might be the patterns of behaviour that enable us to live together responding to God's call to engage in worship and mission? And how might we know when it is appropriate to depart from these patterns and relate to new situations in an authentic manner?

If we do feel strongly that we need to be prepared to act together in new ways, we need to think about how we do that in the unity of Christ. To pick up the theme of the General Assembly: how do we reform ourselves in relation to the changing surroundings? Are we too slow to reform ourselves? As was said a number of times at Assembly: we do not reform for reform's sake; reform is about faithfully pursuing an authentic life in relation to God and each other. If this is indeed the case, what information do we need to inform our reform?

To draw on the example of surviving a fire, we might make some observations as an analogy of how our behaviour as a Church needs to be appropriately informed:

In a fire, we would not walk the way we normally would; we would be better to move closer to the floor where the air is purer.

Similarly, we would not simply ensure that we walk with no regard for the direction in which we move; rather we would make our way as quickly as we can in the direction of an exit.

As a Church, we have a responsibility to not simply react to new situations that emerge, but to draw on our shared resources to inform our behaviour. Our tradition is one that prioritises theological integrity and we are well-equipped for acting wisely. It behoves us to reflect Biblically and theologically on almost every issue we face. Whilst secular business models can offer helpful resources, we need to remain vigilant in avoiding these becoming scripts for us that prevent us from thinking with the mind of Christ.<sup>1</sup> It may mean that it takes more time and energy to make good decisions, but I suspect that it is such commitment to listening together to God's Spirit that continues to bring us together as a General Assembly of the church.

Much of the thinking involved in the decisions made together at the General Assembly I found stunning. The dedication to consider matters carefully was evident in the preparation put in to the various reports brought to the Assembly, the appreciation of the various perspectives represented in the church, and the wisdom offered

into the mix of the discussion and debate.

For me, these were the highlights of the General Assembly decisions that best reflected this authentic attempt to act in a reformed manner: the desire to identify the goals of presbyteries and to co-ordinate these better; the bold decision to access capital funds for new purposes; a move to further encourage our youth to be involved in decision-making; the development and resourcing of music for worship; the courage to make a uniquely Christian ethical response to guide policy in relation to changing medical technology; developing relationships with other Christian denominations in New Zealand and overseas; and to face the difficult global issue of how to respond to the scourge of HIV/AIDS.

As the fire warden I found the Sunday morning passivity at General Assembly alarming, but I was greatly encouraged by the sterling manner in which our Church attempts to respond meaningfully to new situations and challenges. My prayer is for us all as we continue to respond faithfully to the call to join in Christ's ministry together.

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Bruce Fraser, Synod's Mission Advisor, (synod.mission@xtra.co.nz Ph. (03) 477 7362) for more details.

1 1 Cor 2:16

# Maybe the tide is coming in?

Paul Prestidge, St James, New Plymouth

Immediately following Assembly, I drove to Napier to spend the week in a flash waterfront apartment with my kids, while Fiona filled in for the Eastern District Police commander who was overseas. All this at the taxpayers' expense! Arriving back home in New Plymouth, friends greeted me by asking how my holiday went. Surprisingly I found myself responding that the holiday was OK but Assembly was really good.

Of course, it's possible that I've finally been institutionalised to the point where my judgement has lost all objectivity. Or, just maybe, Rhys Pearson's oft repeated metaphor, "the tide is coming in", isn't just seaside retirement enthusiasm. At least I hope that the signs of vitality seen at GA08 are indicative of cultural renewal in our Church.

So what was so encouraging about GA08? The opening service at St John's for the first time, in my experience, included popular-styled contemporary music, which was high quality and indigenous. Even though the sound system was crap and I could hardly make out Malcolm's communion song, I heard enough to begin to imagine a Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand engaging seriously with the world we now live in. And then to my utter delight, I found that Graham had given the ordinands charge over the Assembly worship. Followed by Malcolm's concert and the announcement about music scholarships – what has happened to Granny Presbyterian?!

The music was great, but so was the preaching and teaching. Graham's passion for the centrality of the Lord's Supper in our worship was stirring and will have persuaded many. Randall Prior's addresses were an exceptionally clear and concise vision of culture, Gospel and church. His second address, which dealt with the distinctive themes of the four Gospels but then captured them all in an integrating definition of the Gospel, was masterful. I warmly recommend listening to (or reading) this presentation, which can be found on [www.presbyterian.org.nz](http://www.presbyterian.org.nz).

Even the business at Assembly had moments of encouragement. Te Aka Puaho's report caught me by (pleasant)

surprise. It's great to sense Gospel confidence growing through Wayne Te Kaawa and the Amorangi ministers. I was even more surprised by how easily Martin Baker got Press Go through Assembly. Perhaps because it's voluntary, we all thought "what the heck, we can always ignore it if we want". I guess it remains to be seen whether there is faith and trust enough in the Presbyterian Church for us to let go of our "rainy day" funds for the sake of mission beyond our direct control. And we've even agreed to reform presbyteries – about time in my view! The failure of the Focal Identity Statement to get 60 percent was disappointing, but perhaps not fatal.

Bringing news of Assembly back to my congregation has usually been a matter finding a form that is least disruptive and, quite honestly, minimalist. I know I'll shock some of you, but half my parish regard Assembly attendance as a necessary evil that the minister or an elder bear on behalf of the parish for the dubious benefit of being

still called Presbyterian; for the other half it remains just some vague Church meeting. This time matters haven't been helped by a brand new session made

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up almost entirely of 30-somethings, of whom half have only been Presbyterians (formally speaking) for a couple of months. Imagine trying to engage them with "what I did at General Assembly". But I'm feeling strangely inclined to give it a go – even a little proud of the Presbyterian Church. Enough to put Malcolm Gordon's CD in the hands of our worship leader first chance I got, and to be thinking positively about how to highlight GA08 this Sunday, rather than tuck it away somewhere discreet.

So perhaps the tide is coming in. Leastways, there's a possibility that new life forms are evolving in the damp but warming mud of yesterday's shoreline. However we judge the tide, our measure needs to be God's future seen in Jesus Christ, rather than looking over our shoulders at past monuments no matter how glorious (Westminster Confession included) or past wreckage no matter how salutary. I reckon we might just be ready to grab those plough handles, face front, and etch out some Kingdom furrows in the places where God has called us. At least I hope so.

# Reflections on GA08

Phyllis Harris, ordinand, Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership

In reflecting on GA08, I was surprised at the number of memorable occasions that remained with me. Coming, with my colleagues, as a student from Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership, this experience of Assembly was totally different from my previous experience, where I was a commissioner. Here we were fully involved under the ever-watchful eye of the Moderator who knows us all by name, not to mention the 500 or so ministers and elders who were observing us closely. It was at times a daunting task... especially when the voting cards appeared. Being fully involved, but without a voice to debate or vote on the things that would affect us in our future within the Church, was an interesting experience that honed the listening and observation skills and confirmed why I never became a stock agent!

From the opening service, where, following the last hymn, newly installed Moderator the Rev Dr Graham Redding said "I sense the veil between heaven and earth was very thin during that hymn," to the closing worship, there was a real sense of God's Spirit moving. Moving as the Assembly wrestled to discern the essentials of faith that provide the bedrock of our Christian tradition from those things that are needing to change to speak and live out the Gospel in a way that can be understood in the cultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand today. Reformed and reforming was an apt catch phrase for GA08.

As the Church seeks to discern God's will and find new ways of being and doing through initiatives like Press Go, Kupu Whakapono, ministers' reviews and the reshaping of presbyteries, it might well find itself in creative chaos from time to time. But then history well informs us that reforming has never been a tidy business. Added to this is the change in the way our ministers are now being trained through the new internship model. As I complete my training, I am aware of the huge transition time that is facing the Church.

This is a transition time that Randall Prior helped to explain through his excellent talks concerning "what future the Church?" In this time of change, his words around

the relevance of the church can help guide us and act as a check to ensure that we are not still trying to catch up with the world, but are in fact acting as a signpost to a whole new way of living found within the Kingdom of God. As he said: "on the commonly mentioned issue of 'relevance', it is a matter of the relevance of the church in relation to God's future rather than the relevance of the church in relation to the world... Theologically, it is the world which is out of date and old-fashioned, because it lives as though God's future in Christ has not come."

For this reason I was excited and thankful for the huge amount of work that had been done on the Confession of Faith - Kupu Whakapono. Having done an assignment earlier in the year on the Westminster Confession, I was particularly interested in this debate. As we are a confessing Church, what we confess will shape what we become, so nervousness about change and progressing cautiously is wise. But I was reminded from my learning that it is not the Westminster Confession that makes us a confessing church. We are

confessional "only if and insofar as we continue to probe that sole confession of the Apostles and prophets, which the Westminster fathers called 'the Supreme

Judge ... the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.' Only a continuing exegesis and commentary and preaching can create a confessing church."<sup>1</sup>

The Westminster Confession's relevance lies in the great fundamentals of faith it contains and it will always be needed, along with other confessions as "an important check for theological innovation which may risk going beyond acceptable boundaries."<sup>2</sup> It is encouraging that the Kupu Whakapono is progressing as each generation needs to seek God to appropriate the fundamentals of the

1 Joseph McLelland, "The Presbyterian mystique: does a 40-year-old lecture still speak to us?." Presbyterian Record 130.5 (May 2006): 27(3). General OneFile. Gale. University of Otago Library. 30 Apr. 2008 <http://find.galegroup.com/itx/start.do?prodId=ITOF> Cited April 2008.

2 J. Roxborough, <http://www.roxborough.com/REFORMED/confessions.htm> Cited April 2008.



confessions of our forebears in a language and context that is accessible to all. It is important for each generation to understand, confess and live their faith in God through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit in the age in which they live; this is, after all what the Westminster Assembly did.

There were also many other encouraging signs. The wellness of Te Aka Puaho, the joining of APW with Global Mission Office to work against AIDS in the Pacific, the centenary celebrations of the Presbyterian Church in North India, to name a few. Probably the most memorable for me was the signs of new life through the children, youth and younger adults present. The children's concert was not only a delight, but was a real encouragement in the depth at which these young ones were engaging, while at the same time having fun. I did not get to all the concerts but this depth was also present in the music of Malcolm Gordon and his team of musicians, and in Jordan Redding as he led Assembly singing the poem of former Moderator and missionary to North India James L Gray, "Let me die working." As I looked about Assembly at the many older heads, compared to the fewer younger ones, I was reminded of the huge privilege and responsibility we have in providing a safe and nourishing environment for these precious new and growing shoots, that will enable them to take root deeply, if they are to reach full maturity as disciples of Christ.

Along with the encouraging signs there were also the hardships faced by many in ministry, such as those faced by Turakina Maori Girls College and hospital chaplaincy. The great work that is done in these areas is hindered by the ongoing threat of insufficient finances.

Overall, however, I found GA08 was an encouraging event for many reasons. The leadership and direction of Moderator the Right Rev Dr Graham Redding both through the messages he preached and the wisdom and humour with which he moderated. The graciousness and insight of the outgoing Moderator, the Very Rev Pamela Tankersley, and the humility of the future Moderator, the Rev Peter Cheyne. Business-wise, much was achieved in what must have been a record time. I can still see the stunned face of the Very Rev Garry Marquand as his proposal to reshape presbyteries was agreed to without question or debate. Mostly, however, it was encouraging to come together as a body of people where Christ is the head, seeking to see God's Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. Some of the most enjoyable moments were just being a part of that body, whether it was in worship or the conversations that were had over breakfast or a late night coffee. The humour that flowed throughout the

Assembly. The great debate that allowed all voices to be heard. Praying with others in the prayer room. Observing the incredible gifts that God has blessed this body with, and the growing realisation and desire to see those gifts utilised to the full to reach all humanity with the Gospel of Christ.

The part that will remain with me for a long time, however, was the final worship. The words, the music, "Let me die working, thinking, laughing, loving," the poignant prayers of Millie Te Kaawa, the final doxology, where the whole Assembly led by the Moderator joined and raised their hands in worship of God and in unity with each other. Standing at the back of the hall during this, it can only be described as a moment in time where, through the Holy Spirit, God's love, peace and unity truly flowed. A moment of God's future made visible in the present and I pray that love, peace and unity will become more evident as the hallmark of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand over the years to come.

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# Assembly revisited (then & now)

*Reg Weeks, minister emeritus, Central Otago*

They call me an “Assembly junkie” and maybe I am! If not missing one in over 30 years qualifies as addiction then the cap fits. But a word or two in my defence. In 1974 the Wellington Presbytery inducted me, as one in a team of seven ordained national appointees, to a ministry across the whole Church that lasted 18 years. My attendance was required, and always it felt like the gathering of my “congregation”. The AES was not the CEO but the senior colleague, and each of us was directly accountable to the Assembly for our particular sphere of work.

So for me, going to General Assembly always stirs memories of Assemblies past. Many things have changed, and mostly for the better. But of course memories fade and rather than the milestone decisions it's often the odd, the quirky, and the personal that come to mind. Like the singing – the preponderance of male voices made it sound like a Welsh rugby match, - and still does. To bend a line from that old song - “it's church illusions I recall, I really don't know church at all.”

So to refresh my memory I turned to the “White Book” for 1975 – the reports presented by some 36 committees. These committees were made up of people from all walks of life, from North Cape to the Bluff. Their work was considered by the Commissioners who gathered in Knox Church, Christchurch, under the moderatorship of the Very Rev Dr Ian Breward. He was inducted at the opening service held in St Paul's Trinity Pacific Church, 2.30pm on Thursday, 30th October .

The concluding session began a whole week later at 1.15pm on Wednesday, 5th November. There were no dialogue groups, but there was one seminar discussion. There were no comprehensive motions. No Facilitation group. Just the Clerk of Assembly (AES) and the Business Committee. Every one of the reports was presented and the attached “suggested deliverance” (recommendations) was debated. It was one big talk-fest, and we did not finish half a day early despite the urgent appeals of the Business Committee. I chose 1975 because GA08 is the 25th Assembly since then.

From a technical point of view GA08 stands in sharp contrast to the one in '75.

Howard Anderson's mastery of high tech projection, sound, and lighting has added a whole new dimension to the presentation of reports and recommendations. However, it's interesting that GA75 happens to be the first one at which an overhead projector was used, with transparencies prepared by Earl Hingston - the same graphic artist who produced the current symbol for the Post Office and our ‘burning bush’.

At least that “new-fangled contraption” was a step toward the future.

Audio? Well in '75 that was basically just the enhancement provided by the equipment that came with the church. Microphones mounted on the pulpit and lectern – no students rushing hither and yon with hand-held's. But the ever watchful timekeepers were just as vigilant in their duties. If you wished to speak you had to catch the Moderator's attention, then make that long journey up to the front.

There were no blue or orange cards to show the Moderator the mood of the Assembly. Though in terms of who speaks in debate, things haven't changed that much, with a similar few, eager for a say on almost every issue.

And while we're about students for ministry, at GA75 they just weren't there.

However, the report of the Theological Education Committee notes that there were 36 in training at the time, covering the three years of the course. The names include Brian Brandon, Tofu Filemoni, Anna Gilkison, Chris Nichol, Rhys Pearson, the Coster brothers, Richard Lawrence, and Alan Kerr. The prize winners of the year before include John Roxborough, Vivian Coleman and Chris Bedford.

The Stipends Committee reported on the new way of working out stipends that had been introduced a few years before. Sound familiar? The inflation rate at the time led to an increase of just over 16 percent that year, producing a stipend of \$5,400

GA08 decided to review the future regarding Cooperative ventures, even considering a moratorium on forming any new ones. Well, it was at GA75 that the '71 Plan for Union received its first body-blow with the report that the

decision to proceed into union had been lost by the Anglicans. The Joint Commission on Church Union however, was still hopeful that a positive response would be forthcoming the following year. Meanwhile the work of the Joint Negotiating Committee on Church Extension was proceeding apace. 85 Cooperative ventures were operating with another 25 in the pipeline. Most from strength. All new development was cooperative.

The Public Questions committee was very active under the convenership of the Very Rev John Murray (Moderator GA90). In '75, Global Warming was not an issue but the Government review of the Health Service, homosexuality (1st time), and the Security Intelligence Service, all came in for careful scrutiny. However, by far the sharpest debate occurred over the recommendation that Assembly urge the Rugby Union to cancel the proposed 1976 tour of South Africa. It was carried 121/59 – that's 67 per cent.

In contrast to GA08 with 60/40 voting, where many decisions required votes to be counted, at GA75 this was one of only four issues on which a count was requested.

The others were issues about which many commissioners had opposing views.

- 1) That the PCANZ join with other member churches in winding up the Churches Education Commission. (105/104). It was responsible for Bible in Schools.
- 2) That the filling the Chair of Pastoral Theology be handled by the Council of Assembly (121/112). Appointments were normally the preserve of the Assembly.
- 3) That the GA ask the Government to declare a moratorium on the development or use of Nuclear Energy in New Zealand as a source of industrial or domestic energy (102/82). Not a dead issue even yet.

All would have been declared lost today.

And the Council of Assembly? In GA08 many of the reports and over thirty recommendations came under the auspices of the Council, whereas in GA75 there was only one – encouraging presbyteries to reflect on the budget cuts required, and to provide more money for General Assembly enterprises.

GA75 was the Assembly at which the Christian Education Committee with its eight staff members morphed into Parish Development and Mission aiming to employ a staff of at least ten regional consultants to help local churches grow – one of the General Assembly enterprises we can no longer afford. Maybe "Press Go" adopted by

GA08 will be a way into a more creative future.

GA75 had longer speaking times which allowed for many well articulated arguments. Of course not everyone spoke – but they did just what juries do - they listened to the arguments and decided. With dialogue groups the process for GA08 was different, and I believe much more productive. There may not be time for the great speeches, but everyone has a chance to participate, to question, to talk through the issues. The facilitation group effectively collates responses and presents back to the Assembly a balance of views to inform debate and subsequent voting. That half day saved demonstrated the overall effectiveness of the process when there are no issues on which the Assembly is deeply divided. Another change is that proposals now come to presbyteries between Assemblies, giving the opportunity for wide discussion and dialogue with those who will eventually report. This allows the reframing of recommendations to take account of the viewpoints out in the wider church, thus avoiding much time-consuming debate over amendments at Assembly, and also giving presbyteries a much more effective role in the whole process.

And GA08 decided that it's time to look again at how presbyteries are structured. Only time will tell where that process will lead, but its effectiveness will be measured by the degree to which it builds better relationships and encourages more creative gospel engagement with the issues of the day, rather than by growth alone.

GA08 was far more casual and relaxed than GA75, not least because it did its business in the context of a school hall rather than a church. It seems we are getting much better at applying sound business practice to the business of being the Church, but we will be ever the poorer if that focus causes us to overlook that what we are always about is 'worshipful work'.

This was no better symbolised than by the passing on of the Korowai from one Moderator to the next, in the living presence of those who had held that position in the past. Garry (GA04), Bruce (GA98), Marg (GA95), John (GA90), and Kenape (GA86), our kaumatua in the "faith once delivered to the saints". Visitors from other denominations were greatly impressed with this almost sacramental acknowledgement of the tradition and values on which our Church takes its distinctive stand.

Christ centred, community facing; Reformed, reforming?  
Yea and amen!

# GA08: Enjoyable and positive

Jon Parkes, St David's Richmond, Nelson-Marlborough

It was good. I enjoyed GA08 and had inner feelings of disappointment when on the Sunday evening it was announced GA08 was finished – I liked the being in community. I enjoyed the networking, listening to the debate – both sides of the arguments – the ideas being bounced around, the new ways of looking at issues, different perspectives. I enjoyed being able to sit with colleagues, share stories, talk shop and still vote any which way and be accepted.

I appreciated seeing the current and past moderators working together, their pastoral care of things, their showing off of burning bush wares. When the youth representatives presented a notice of motion and it was agreed, it was good to hear the “well done” words of encouragement from the Moderator – it was very positive and that is really how GA08 was – very positive.

I enjoyed the modern music being written and performed by the younger people in our Church – it is culturally relevant and theologically astute. The closing song based on the words of a missionary was deep. I hope the words and music are available for all to sing and think over<sup>1</sup>. Personally I found some of the formal worship a tad formal for me – hence the song “Break the Bread” during the opening Holy Communion at last helped me to connect to the worship. I enjoyed the preaching and teaching at GA08. I need time to absorb the Moderator's sermons as they were good, and I agree with comments that the teaching on Holy Communion was some of the best they had heard. I found it very timely and will mull over it. One reason I attended GA08 was to hear the keynote speaker – having met Randall Prior in Vanuatu I was keen to hear him address us in our Kiwi context. I enjoyed his clear thinking put so succinctly – no words were wasted – he gave a lot to think about.

I enjoyed the living in community (which is possibly the hidden thing I miss the most after living two years in community at Talua Ministry Training Centre in Vanuatu). At GA08 I enjoyed having a bed, I enjoyed sleep-

<sup>1</sup> Editor's note: the words and music are available on [www.presbyterian.org.nz](http://www.presbyterian.org.nz) and will also be published in the December *Spanz* magazine.

ing in the dorms, hearing snoring, the mixing with people from different cultures (be it two older white elders in the dorm comparing GAs or chatting with brothers from PI churches or whoever).

I enjoyed being able to fly to GA in a plane instead of traveling 40 hours on a barge – like for last year's PCV GA. I enjoyed the familiar food, that there were showers (including hot water), toilets that flush, light switches, roofs that didn't leak (both accommodation and in the assembly hall). For me – to come together from our silos,

to gather and be able to network, and to fellowship in community were the best parts of GA08.

Yep – we made some decisions that will take some figuring out – but all in all – GA08 was good for the soul.

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## I enjoyed being able to fly to GA in a plane instead of traveling 40 hours on a barge

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### *Ministry vacancy*

#### **Whakatane Presbyterian Parish**

Situated in the beautiful Eastern Bay, the Whakatane Parish is seeking an ordained minister to lead us as we move forward and develop our vision to reach out to our community.

We have exciting new opportunities for mission with our new children's ministry and a desire to introduce people to Jesus.

We appreciate a mix of both traditional and contemporary worship, sound preaching and exploration of the gospel.

If this sounds like you, please direct your enquiries to the Convener,

Rev Iain Dickson  
134D Cameron Road,  
Te Puke.  
Phone (07) 573-834  
Email [iaindickson@slingshot.co.nz](mailto:iaindickson@slingshot.co.nz)

# People you meet during Assembly while not at Assembly

Mark Farmer, St Columba's Mahurangi, North Shore

Since 2001, our Mahurangi Parish in Warkworth has been involved in short-term mission trips to Uganda.

Through a parachurch network of Christian men to which I belong, I asked a friend who lives in the Capital if he could seek out a billet for me near to St Patrick's Silverstream from amongst his Wellington associates.

He secured a place five minutes walk from the venue at which I experienced wonderful hospitality. I was placed in the Grandad flat in the basement and enjoyed everything that goes with it.

The lady of the house is a delightful Irish woman whose older sister is a nun and a qualified doctor. The order to which she belongs is called the Fransiscan Sisters for Africa.

She decided not to leave her patients and remained at her hospital post in Kampala throughout the regimes of Amin and Obote, sometimes at huge risk to her personal safety. She was there when the terrible scourge of AIDS hit the country and was one of the key people to lead and advise on the Government-led policies that so drastically reduced the incidence of that disease and gained a level of success achieved in no other country to date on that continent.

In the fullness of time she handed over leadership in that hospital to Ugandan staff and, not convinced that her work was finished, she set up a mobile clinic in one of the slum areas of the city. This is the very same district of that city where the church that has hosted our Uganda trips is located. She is to be the keynote speaker in Nelson over Labour weekend at the inaugural All for Life Conference 2008. What an opportunity for those close to the venue to be exposed to such a ministry.

What a privilege to be connected in such a way: a Presbyterian minister in a Presby/Catholic home connecting with a medical order of the Catholic Church who minister in a slum area of an East African city 12,000 in the same dis-

trict where we begin and conclude our nationwide itinerary and distribute the three Bs through the Church of God in Uganda (a small Pentecostal denomination, not to be confused with the Church of Uganda, who are also quite lovely). Did someone once say "God works in mysterious ways"?

What a privilege to be connected in such a way

How wonderful to belong to this amazing worldwide family.

Oh, and Assembly was pretty good too.

## Ministry opportunity

**T**heologically diverse, journeying together,

**A**ctive in the local community

**W**e come from many backgrounds and

**A**re looking for a minister to journey with

**U**s in outreach with

**N**ew approaches to today's world

**I**n worship, in service to our communities.

**O**ur priorities are families with children

**N**ot forgetting pastoral care of all ages.

Contact Tawa Union Church  
Nominator Rev Perema Leasi  
12 Drivers Cres, Porirua  
Ph: 04-2376469

## Minister Wanted

*for attractive South Island seaside town*

- Are you Christ Centred?
- Are you longing to engage with the community?
- Are you a teacher/equipper/facilitator?

**St Paul's Presbyterian Church in Kaikoura** is seeking a skilled person for full-time ministry with an intentional shared focus, between ministering to the parish and serving the community.

### **Please send expressions of interest to:**

Rev Ken Williams  
Settlement Board Convenor  
1 Riley Crescent  
Blenheim  
ph: 03 5785567 email: ken.williams@xtra.co.nz

**Applications close 28 February 2009**

## Windsor Community Church [Presbyterian] Invercargill

### Associate Minister

Associate Pastor will have responsibilities for regular preaching in both contemporary and traditional services; developing small group and family ministries; as chaplain to vibrant Girl's and Boy's Brigade Companies.

Preference will be given to applicants who have the potential to become the Senior Pastor in 2011.

Expressions of Interest should be addressed to Convenor Windsor Ministry Settlement Board, Rev Ian Crawford: 2crawfziandl@kol.co.nz by **30th November 2008**.

## House to Home

The next booklet in our series of social issues resources deals with issues surrounding the **provision of housing**.

It's divided into three studies, covering aspirations, affordability and affirmative actions. It contains a theology of house and home.

Whether you own your own home, are renting, looking to buy or considering downsizing, there's something in here to think about.

Your church received eight copies of the booklet in mid October.

More copies can be ordered from Angela Singer: [angela@presbyterian.org.nz](mailto:angela@presbyterian.org.nz) or (04) 381-8284





The Maclaurin Chapel  
The University of Auckland

## Studentsoul minister

The Richard Maclaurin Goodfellow Foundation Trust is looking for an ordained minister passionate about ministry with tertiary students who can adapt and plant the successful 'studentsoul' model to an Auckland context in partnership with the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand.

The successful candidate will have a background in local and regional youth ministry, skills in communication, leadership development, and networking, and a willingness to 'think outside the square'.

The successful candidate will be able to work ecumenically in an interfaith environment, develop strong relationships with the Maclaurin Chaplain, host congregation(s) and existing student groups, and work as appropriate in the university environment.

This is a full time position for a fixed term of five years.

**Applications close November 15.**

For further information or an application pack please contact:

Rev Mary-Jane Konings  
seeu@paradise.net.nz  
03 473 9419  
027 655 9219

## Summer School: Christianity & Science

In January of each year, the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Otago and the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership offer a week-long block course. We want to let you know what we have planned for January 2009.

From **Monday 26 January** (starting at 1pm) to **Friday 30 January** (ending at 1pm) at St Columba, Botany Downs, Auckland, Professor Ted Davis will teach a paper entitled, "**Christianity and Science: Historical and Contemporary Interactions**".

As in previous years, the paper is available as a University paper (visit the University of Otago website), or for "audit" through the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership. The fee for auditing the paper is \$600. Presbyterian ministers and ordinands may apply to the Knox Centre for a \$300 study grant.

Enquiries about auditing the paper, including applications for study grants, should be directed to the Registrar at the Knox Centre: registrar@knoxcentre.ac.nz; phone (03) 473-0783.

**KNOX CENTRE**  
**FOR MINISTRY**  
**& LEADERSHIP**





## Review

*A Word in Season - Reflections on Spirituality, Faith and Ethics* by Richard Randerson, published by Matai House, 13 Matai Road, Hataitai, Wellington, \$19.50 [incl P & P]

Reviewed by John Murray

Richard Randerson might justly be called “a man for all seasons” - during his lifetime of ministry he has been an inner city vicar, a bishop, a political protester, an industrial chaplain, an Anglican social justice officer, a Royal Commissioner on genetic modification, a member of the Government’s team on inter-faith dialogue and the retiring Dean of Auckland’s Anglican cathedral - not to mention being a husband, father and grandfather too!

He writes, out of these experiences, this collection of 30 short addresses, sermons and studies. The book is a study book - each section punctuated with questions for group work. It’s a kind of manual for puzzled Christians finding their way in the secular 21st century. The contents are neatly divided into six groupings that cover spirituality from St Francis to Matthew Fox, in the Bible, in Easter and the Trinity, in the world and in his own Anglican Communion.

This is a comfortable book based on the best of liberal Christian tradition - both denying and affirming. Randerson’s approach is warmly pastoral, having a care for the growing faith of the study group. If he expresses an opposing comment, such as “over many years, I have come to the view that a homosexual relationship that bears the marks of love .... is acceptable in the eyes of God”, he balances it with the need to journey together with all believers and wait till others come to the same belief.

When he gives the graduation address at Auckland Unitec, he speaks broadly of the virtues, integrity, compassion, leadership, courage, kaitiakitanga and taha wairua.

With regard to Christian teaching, aka creeds and doctrines, Randerson sets aside “miracles” as the marks of Jesus’ messiahship - including the physical resurrection - while at the same time asserting that “there is always new life [its details a mystery]... such hope has an assurance, more than just a pious wish.” In this way, he holds fast to traditional beliefs - including the Trinity “at the heart of life” - while “making sense of the Bible in the 21st century”.

A year or two ago, Richard Randerson was headlined as the “Agnostic Dean”. He had written a critique of Professor Richard Dawkins’ *The God Delusion*. Randerson

said “I used the word ‘agnostic’ meaning that you cannot prove, by science, the existence of such an entity, one way or another“. He asks the question “what [are] different images of the one God?” I wonder what he means by referring to God as “such an entity”?

Randerson has a clear and calm passion for social justice, peace and the environment. And he would add for politics too. In his “Should the Church get involved in politics?” he gives three principles and 18 (!) criteria to guide us, maybe too late for 2008 but for the next time! This is a very pertinent list of items to be faced and he suggests that we should ask “what is right?” rather than “who is right?” But I would also want to ask to what extent should a Church - as a Church - be actively engaged in political lobbying?

This is a useful study book. Randerson is a gentle teacher and pastor rather than a prophetic voice. His faith in change for a better world [and for a better Church] is very patient. He waits for his own Anglican world-wide Communion to fully accept women in ministry [as they do in New Zealand] and for us all to fully accept homosexual members and clergy. One day it will happen? I cannot help wondering what if Jesus had been so patient with his own religion, where we would be today? Maybe that’s another question that should be added.

### Could you be a Kids Friendly coach?

Kids Friendly is looking for an additional coach to work with Jill Kayser to encourage and equip churches in their ministry to children and families.

This part-time (20 hours) position will enable Kids Friendly to work with more churches and ensure the long term sustainability of Kids Friendly. We are looking for a passionate and experienced children’s minister who would love to inspire and equip our churches to be truly Kids Friendly.

If this sounds like you, contact [kidsfriendlyjill@sthelierschurch.org.nz](mailto:kidsfriendlyjill@sthelierschurch.org.nz) for a copy of the position description.

**Applications close 18 November.**

The role will commence in January 2009.





### Who are we ?

At our General Assembly, we were given the opportunity to purchase items of clothing that had the symbol of the burning bush embroidered upon them. Even though I am in a minority here, I am not entirely sure that I like the present graphic rendition. It just seems a bit stark. I think I like one of the older ones (and there have been several) with the stars of the Southern Cross, and the cross of St Andrews and the more representative imagery of the burning bush. Perhaps like me, you also have seen in various Presbyterian Churches the burning bush symbol engraved, emblazoned, carved, crocheted, painted, appliquéd, and represented in stained glass windows. Often, underneath the symbol, are the words “*nec tamen consumebatur*” (“yet it was not consumed”) The words and the image come straight from the Exodus story of Moses’ famous encounter.

It seems that the first distinct evidence of the burning bush being used as a symbol for the Reformed or Presbyterian Church is in 1583 when at the 12th National Synod of the French Reformed Church (the Huguenots) it was resolved that a seal should be made for the use of the National Synod. On the seal was a burning bush and round the circle the words “*Flagror non Consumor*” (“burning but not consumed”).

Of course, the Huguenots in France and the Presbyterians in Scotland had some very significant connections. But it isn’t until 1691 that we find the burning bush printed in the title-page of the Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. I would have thought, knowing how the Presbyterian Church works, that they would have had hours of arguments, papers written and special committees set up to make this decision. But apparently not. The credit of bringing the emblem into general use belongs to one George Mossman, an Edinburgh printer appointed by the Assembly to do its work. He thought it a fitting symbol and simply placed it there on a page. It just seemed the right thing to do.

In 1583, 11 years before the burning bush symbol appeared in France, history records what was probably the worst single massacre of Protestants in history. This is the killing fields’ story in our Reformed heritage. On August 24, 1572, the day before St Bartholomew’s Day, royal forces hunted down and executed over 3000 Huguenots in Paris. Within three days, armies had hunted down and executed over 10,000 more Protestants. This event and the persecution and killings that followed may well have been the single most bloody and systematic extermina-

tion of non-combatants in European history until World War II. It is a fascinating time in the history of the Reformed Church and well worth further reading.

So what forms our sense of identity? Reformed Protestants talk about the centrality of Scripture, an emphasis on the sovereignty of God, a type of predestination, and a particular ordering of church life, as all being aspects of this identity. Perhaps for most of us, identity is conveyed not so much in doctrines, but in stories and traditions, and in a sense of belonging and participation. Sometimes it is easier to say what we are not, rather what we are. It is no wonder that we need to find symbols to embody such complexity.

We have received a great deal of positive feedback about our General Assembly. However, some young, and not so young, people who attended for the first time have spoken to me about confusion with its processes and ordering, and their feeling that among many there was an inside knowledge of Assembly and a collective memory from which they felt excluded.

The meaning and value of the symbols we choose to represent us change over time in ways that are difficult to predict. This time after a General Assembly allows us a special moment to not only reflect on the decisions that were made, but how they were made and how those processes express our priorities and identity as a Church. “*Ecclesia Reformata, Semper Reformanda*” (“The church reformed and always to be reformed”) is the famous Presbyterian rallying cry (I do not know why such words are always in Latin) and picks up the GA08 theme of Reformed and Reforming. The sharp edge of this challenge is that it is about both taking up and relinquishment. What do we need to affirm and strengthen and what do we need to let go for the sake of being God’s faithful Church at this time?

Thank you once again for your prayers and words of encouragement.

