

Te Kāhui Whanaungatanga

Report to Council of Assembly

March 2025

1. Introduction

Te Kāhui Whanaungatanga is committed to pursuing how we live into more meaningful relationships within the Church and promoting adaptive solutions rather than rigid structural changes.

Our journey is centred on embracing our identity as a Church that exists as whānau (family), strengthening connections, and being attentive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

This report outlines our progress, key insights, and proposed next steps.

2. Continuing as we started

The workgroup is committed to this approach:

- Pursuing **adaptive solutions** to enhance the Church's culture, rather than implementing *technical* fixes.
- We are not seeking to 'restructure', but lean our weight more into the **authentic expressions** of being Church.
- Upholding the **Five Faces of Mission** as a meaningful framework which we believe can serve us better.
- We believe there is an opportunity to be a Church that lives together more as whanau/family – through intentional **relationship building** (whanaungatanga).
- Continually seeking **the guidance of the Holy Spirit** as we prioritise prayer, discernment, hui, korero, consultation, listening, adapting, and contextualising.
- Having had meaningful time with **Te Aka Puahou** in 2024, we honour our wonderful bicultural partners who journey with us as a workgroup, and as a Church, demonstrating good ways to be – how we can be relational, respectful, contributing safely and honestly.
- Living up to the new name we gratefully received. *Te Kāhui Whanaungatanga* – identifies those who develop a strong relationship through sharing life together and working alongside one another. To put it simply: **Bringing People Together**.

3. Progress on the Journey

As previously reported to the Council of Assembly, we see the importance of **meaningful consultation** with our Church, offering multiple ways for everyone to be part of the discussion and discernment of the way forward.

We have proactively prioritised meaningful consultation across the Church, ensuring open dialogue and diverse participation.

We are satisfied with the consultation so far, with representatives of our workgroup having engaged at least once with:

- Te Aka Puahou
- Northern Presbytery
- Kaimai Presbytery
- Central Presbytery
- Alpine Presbytery
- Southern Presbytery
- Synod of Otago & Southland
- Council of Assembly (at the Te Maungarongo Hui)
- Church Property Trustees

4. What we have experienced...

In these consultation encounters we have strongly sensed God's Spirit at work in our Church, with strategic issues of *relationality* resonating with people's interest and experience.

Notable observations include:

- a. A **shared desire for relational engagement**, rather than structural imposition
- b. Appreciation for experimenting with **other models of being together** (e.g. Council of Assembly Hui). This intentional change of pace and sharing our dreams together is a blessing and very worthwhile for all involved; this big commitment of time and resources is so fruitful.
- c. Positive response to the **metaphor of gorse**, helping us reflect on what has served the Church well, and the change that's happening.

[If you've not heard this previously presented, please see the summary below]*

- d. Just as the biblical metaphor of the Body of Christ reminds us we are who we are, wherever we are, when we are – we have seen how **we all become Te Kāhui Whanaungatanga** wherever we engage on what the direction of our church is. As a workgroup, we are not 'the experts'.
- e. The importance of being ourselves, **the strength and beauty of diversity** of who we are – Asian, Māori, Pacific, young, women, men – different people listening, talking, sharing, journeying together with Jesus.
- f. We continue to see the advantage for everyone by emphasising **people before processes**.

"To go fast, go alone. To go far, go together."

5. Future Directions and Considerations

As we have engaged with various parts of our Church, about who we are and where we find ourselves, we are surprised at what we have NOT heard.

There has been almost no anxiety expressed that our workgroup is not presenting a technical solution. And no objections expressed because of specific challenges we know we are living with (e.g. pressures of leadership, buildings, compliance, diminishing congregations, reduced coverage of the motu, unequal availability of resources, etc)

Emerging Priorities

How do we overcome the sense of disconnection within the Body of Christ?

How can we better connect with effective relationships between parishes, presbyteries and COA/Assembly? Can we encourage each other in the responsibilities we exercise – as a Team of teams? Can we listen to one another...? Can we ask “What do ya reckon...?”

There may be interest to have a ‘restructure’ as the solution to help presbyteries better connect with the Council of Assembly, for example. As previously mentioned, our workgroup is committed to *adaptive* solutions rather than *technical* solutions. In wanting to identify a clear way forward, we are aware of the temptation for our workgroup to recommend demonstrable initiatives (*restructuring* would be one example). Yet, we maintain the commitment to seek how we can **bring one another together through relationship building**.

At the same time, we do need to articulate what we are discerning and give this some shape.

We will keep working at *describing* (not prescribing) the journey of the PCANZ.

A healthy and reasonable question is ‘What are the concrete outcomes?’ We want to be able to make recommendations for shared discernment of a clear way forward that will serve the Church.

6. Next steps

We are planning to bring a report to the General Assembly this year, and we see that this work will continue beyond GA25.

Please keep the people of our workgroup *Te Kāhui Whanaungatanga* in your prayers, that God will continue to guide us as we serve.

Rev Allister Lane

Convenor, *Te Kāhui Whanaungatanga*



TE KĀHUI WHANAUNGATANGA

BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

OUR NAME

Given by Te Aka Puahou

Meaning: being formed and led forward as whanau.

Strong relationships are developed by sharing life together -
playing, praying, working, belonging together.

THE SYMBOL OF GORSE

Gorse is an exotic weed and an incubator for native seeds.
First introduced by our pioneering European ancestors, gorse flourished in the full sun and rapidly became rampant. What began as a boundary marker and windbreak is now a costly weed to control.
In 1987, Dr Hugh Wilson (a botanist and the son of a Presbyterian minister) began a small ecological restoration project on 109 hectares of gorse infested, marginal hill country on Banks Peninsula.
37 years later, the Hinewai Reserve has become 1250 hectares of flourishing native bush which stops just short of the sea through the work of Dr Wilson and the Maurice White Native Forest Trust.

Dr Wilson and those he worked with were wise, though unconventional -
‘fools and dreamers’ some said.
Rather than battling against the gorse - burning or bulldozing it - they left it well alone.
“It is an ecologically well-known fact that gorse is a pioneer succession plant” (Wilson)
Interestingly, the dense gorse gives self-sown native seeds a place to germinate and grow.
The little ones are sheltered from harsh sun, strong winds and protected from possums and other pests. As they grow they shade the gorse, slow its growth and eventually replace it.

Something is dying.
Something is rising.
What if we, the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand,
more intentionally incubated and nurtured indigenous forms of the life of faith?
What if our pioneering work was the stuff of fools and dreamers?
What if we remembered the contribution of our Presbyterian forebears -
imported boundaries makers,
ways of being together - but relinquished the rules
and ways of the past that no longer serve as they were originally intended?
Poipoia te kākano, kia puāwai
Nurture the seed and it will bloom.

WE HAVE NOTICED

- Our Church faces many challenges.
- > Some excellent solutions approved by the General Assembly a decade ago were not widely adopted.
 - > Our Presbyteries were consolidated in 2012.
 - > This reshaped how we work together.
 - > Our church has a strong history of innovation, collaboration and creativity.

To reflect on our national structures,
To lead a process of discernment focussing on the strategic direction for the Church.



WE ARE WONDERING

- Perhaps the top-down management approach we have inherited is less appropriate?
- > Could we use our creative energy to create whanaungatanga? To listen, learn and celebrate together.

» DISCERNMENT

What: a wide-spread discernment process focused on reforming the culture of our Church.

How: Visit every Presbytery in person to listen.

Why: God is already speaking in the diverse voices of our church.

- For our mahi tahi (work together) to be effective, 'technical solutions' are insufficient. We need 'adaptive solutions' that engage with who we are together.
- > Fostering healthy relationships is essential for a workable strategic direction.
 - > God brings diverse peoples together.

- Can we express our strategic direction in unconventional yet deeply contextual ways?
- > How can we create space for us all to find our place and participate?
How can Presbyteries be empowered to develop nimble strategies for their spaces?
 - > Would the hard stuff be easier if we came together with God and one another?

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