



A Survey of Parish Life

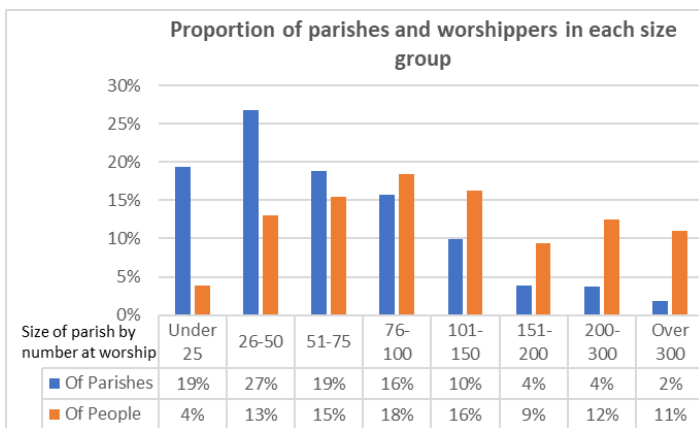
This report has been prepared by the Church Property Trustees as a resource for the wider church

Our Congregations

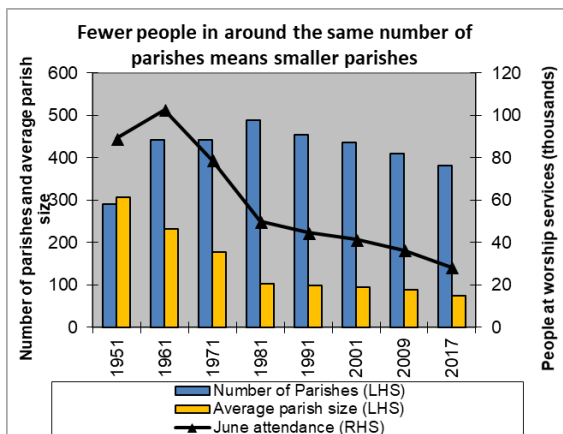
Key findings:

- While we have a lot of small parishes, most people worship with at least 100 others
- Participation is higher at larger parishes and they are also more likely to grow

- ❖ On an average June Sunday in 2017 about 22,800 adults and 5,500 young people and children worship at one of our 382 parishes.



- ❖ Most Presbyterian parishes are small –about half have fewer than 50 at worship, but most people belong to large parishes, and half of us worship with more than 100 others, and almost a quarter with more than 200.
- ❖ The average Union parish is smaller than the average Presbyterian parish, with 52 at worship compared to 82. They also have fewer youth and children (7 per parish on average) than Presbyterian parishes (11 on average).
- ❖ The average size of parishes has been declining since 1951. Then the average parish had 398 people at worship, but now it has 74. This is because the number of parishes has not reduced at the same rate as the number of people at worship.

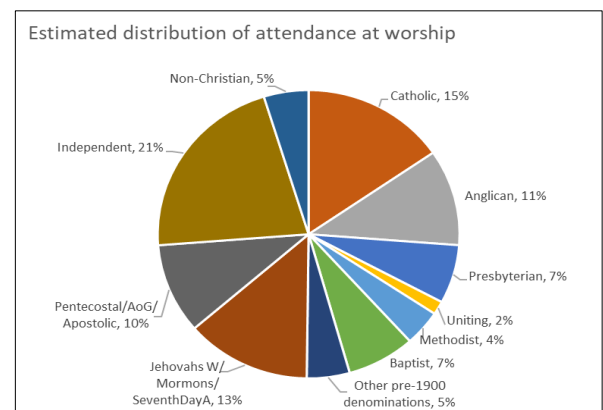


Trends over time

Key findings:

- There has been a long-term trend for a smaller proportion of the population to go to worship.
- Participation is higher at larger parishes
- Parishes of all sizes can be growing or shrinking, and past growth does not protect a parish from declining in the future.

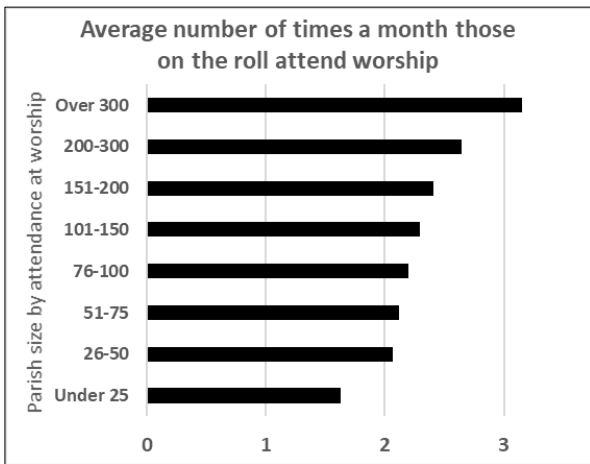
- ❖ There has been a long-term trend for a smaller proportion of the population to go to church. There are three reasons for this trend. First, there is a declining proportion of the population saying they are religious. In the 1951 census only 10% of the population did not give a religious affiliation; by 2013 the proportion was 42%.
- ❖ This trend is found throughout Western European-type countries, and New Zealand sits roughly in the middle. About 25% of our population say they attend church regularly, which is higher than for either Britain (20%) or Australia (21%), about the same as Canada (27%), and lower than the USA (66%). In most countries the proportion of people who say that religion is important in their lives is higher than those who attend church regularly, and this is true for New Zealand, where about one in three New Zealanders say that religion is important in their lives. (R Stark, *The Triumph of Faith*)



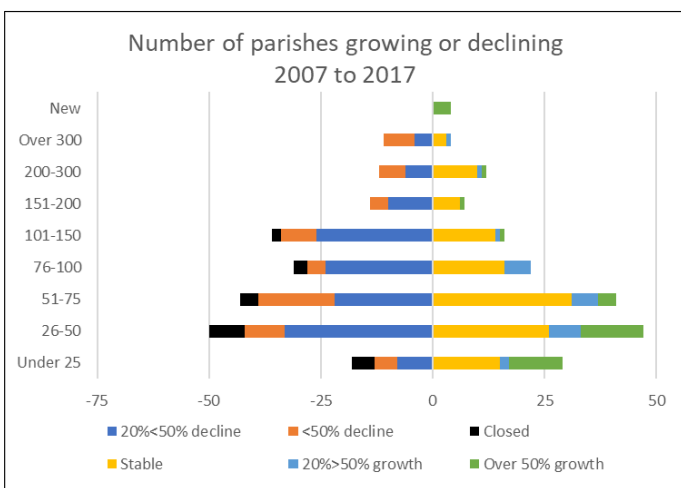
Note: This should be taken as indicative only. Estimates for the Salvation Army and Catholic because their charities return included

- ❖ Secondly, the Presbyterian church has had a declining share of all Christians. In 1961 25% of those who gave a denomination in the census were Presbyterians; by 2013 this had fallen to 17%.

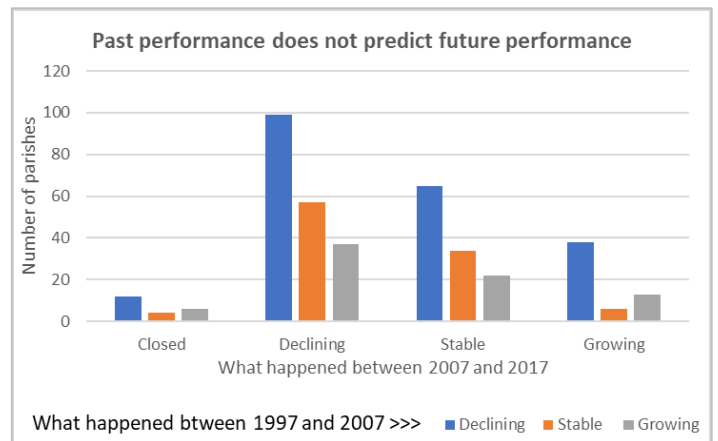
- ❖ It is very difficult to get a clear picture of the religious landscape, but the best estimate is given by the Charities Register (using the average of the number of voluntary hours, paid staff, and giving). This suggests that about 7% of those at worship are at a Presbyterian parish and 1% at a Union parish. On the other hand, about 30% of those at worship on Sunday now go to an independent or Pentecostal church.
- ❖ Finally, the third reason why there are fewer people at worship is that there has been a drop in the number of times people on the church roll actually went to services each month. In 1961 the average person on the roll attended church 6.3 times a month, but by 2017 average attendance was 2.4 times a month.



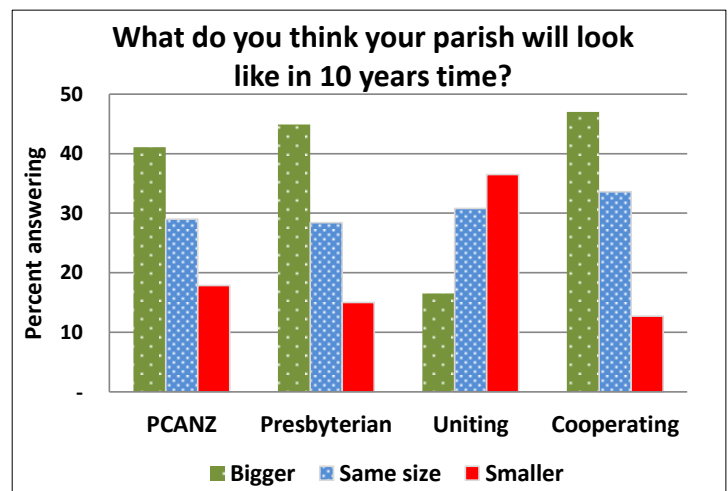
- ❖ Members of the largest parishes go to church about twice as often as members of smaller parishes. One reason may be that larger parishes have more worship events for people to choose from. This means that our growing proportion of smaller parishes may have helped exacerbate the trend towards fewer people at worship.



- ❖ Parishes of all sizes grow and decline. In recent years small and medium sized parishes are as likely to be stable or growing as they are to be declining. This is a different pattern from the early 2000's when larger parishes were more likely to be growing.
- ❖ The past performance of a parish does not predict its future performance. Parishes that were growing between 1997 and 2007 were no more likely to be growing, or less likely to be declining, than parishes that were declining earlier.



- ❖ The 2013 Church Life survey found that members of Presbyterian and co-operating parishes were far more likely to think their parishes would be bigger in 10 years' time than those in Union parishes. This may reflect the fact that Union parishes had significantly older members. Presbyterians also thought their parishes were likely to be a mix of all ages and diverse in terms of ethnicity.



Our Children and Youth

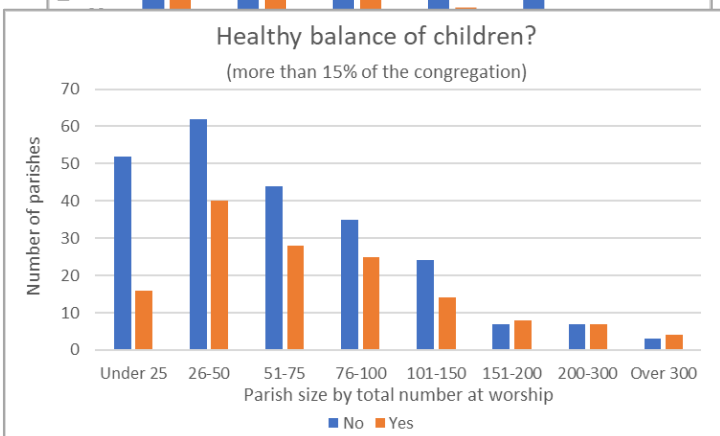
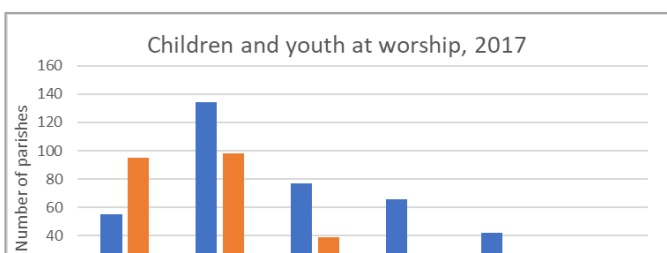
Key findings:

- Most parishes have some children and youth at worship, but many have only a few
- Not all small parishes are “greying” and some have a healthy proportion of children. On the other hand, some middle-sized and large parishes do not.
- Parishes of all sizes are leading people to a faith commitment.

❖ Most parishes have some children at worship, but many have only a few. Presbyterian parishes (but not Union/cooperating parishes) were asked to count the number of youth (aged 13-17) at church.

❖ It is often assumed that only large parishes have young people, but there are children found in parishes of all sizes. One statistical “rule of thumb” is that a healthy church has about 15% of its congregation under the age of 13. On this basis there are some healthy small congregations and some unhealthy large ones.

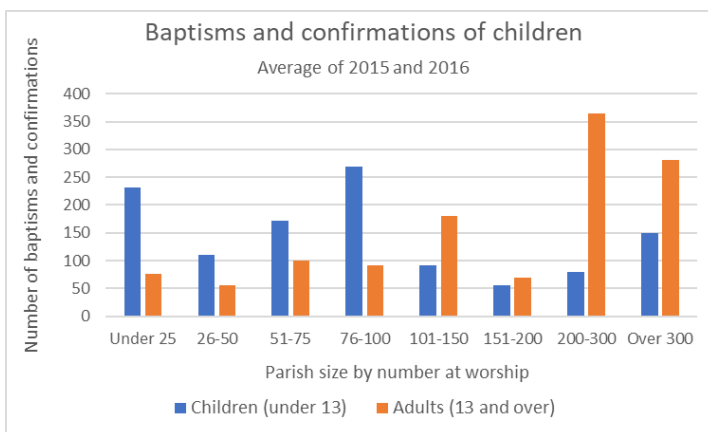
❖ Parishes with over 150 at worship are more likely to have a healthy balance, but almost two-thirds of



parishes with under 75, and a quarter of parishes under

25 meet the 15% criteria. These parishes could be thought of as “family” parishes with a long term future, rather than “greying” parishes that may not.

❖ Adults make their profession of faith in parishes of all sizes, but those with over 300 are much more likely to have significant numbers of adult confirmations, baptisms and dedications. The number of adult confirmations/baptisms varies from year to year, but generally there are around 1,000 and about half are in our ethnic congregations and half in our standard ones.



❖ In 2011 the Church Life survey gave the opportunity for 7,642 Presbyterians, and 1,671 people from Union/Cooperating parishes to give us their views.

❖ The survey showed that we are very committed to our faith and enjoy our church life. Nearly two-thirds read the Bible either every day or a few times a week. This was about the same as Catholics, Anglicans and Brethren, but lower than Baptists. In all denominations, people over 45 are more likely to regularly read their Bible than young people, and particularly than people under 25.

❖ Over 80% of us usually or nearly always find the

About us and our faith

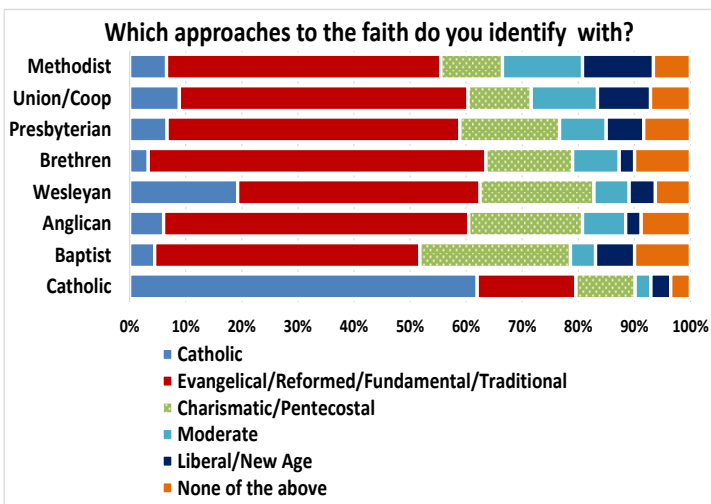
Key findings:

- The Church Life survey showed we are committed to our faith and enjoy our church life
- Traditional, evangelical and charismatic traditions have the largest followings, though none of these is dominant.

presence of God evident in our services. The top three things that we appreciated most are shown in the next table.

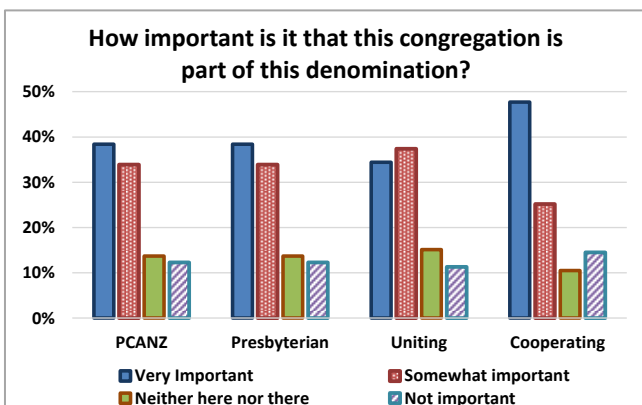
The percentage naming this in their top 3 things they enjoy about their church life	
Worship, music and singing	58%
Sermons and teaching	40%
Holy communion	28%
Practical care for each other	23%
Wider community outreach	22%
Social activities	20%
Ministry for children and youth	15%

❖ The theological traditions that Presbyterians mostly identified with were traditional (23%), evangelical (18%), and charismatic (10%). Liberal was chosen by 6%. About 8% of people did not identify with any of these traditions and these were disproportionately young people.



Source: Analysis by Barry McDonald, Massey University

❖ Most thought it was important to be part of the denomination. Only about 12% thought it was not important at all. This was the same whether we belonged to a Presbyterian or a union parish.



Leadership and resources

Key findings:

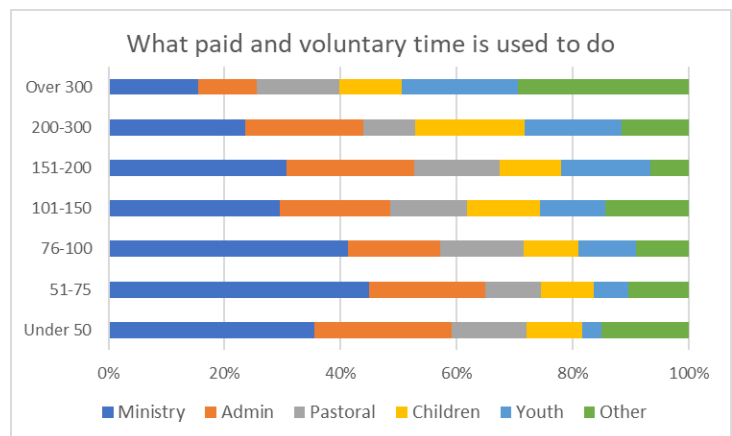
- Larger parishes are able to put more effort into youth, children and pastoral care.
- Presbyterians are not particularly generous givers, though on average they give \$1,350 per adult attender

❖ Parishes have three resources that make a difference to how well they can do their mission – people, financial resources, and property.

People resources

❖ Parishes use both paid and voluntary time. The proportion of paid labour does not vary significantly by parish size, and paid labour is usually between 50 and 60% of the hours.

❖ Larger parishes invest their people resources in different activities than smaller parishes. In small parishes people spend most of their time on ministry, administration and pastoral care. Larger parishes spend a higher proportion of their time on children and



youth. The largest parishes start to do other activities as well.

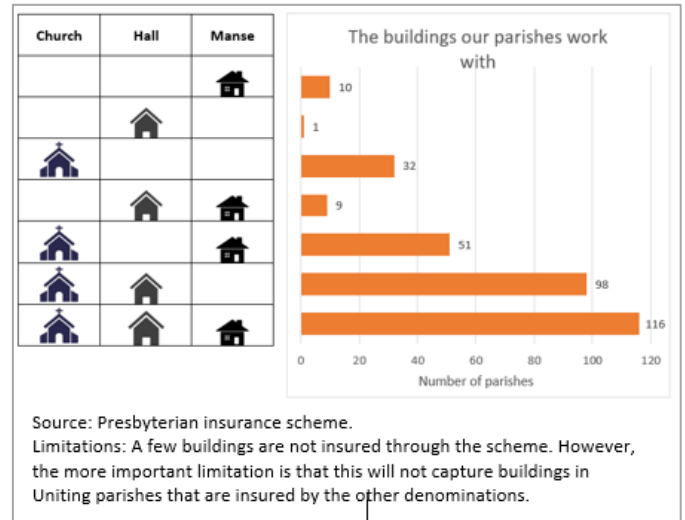
Financial Resources

❖ Compared to some of the other denominations, Presbyterians do not give a particularly high proportion of their income. The denominations with high levels of giving tend to stress tithing.

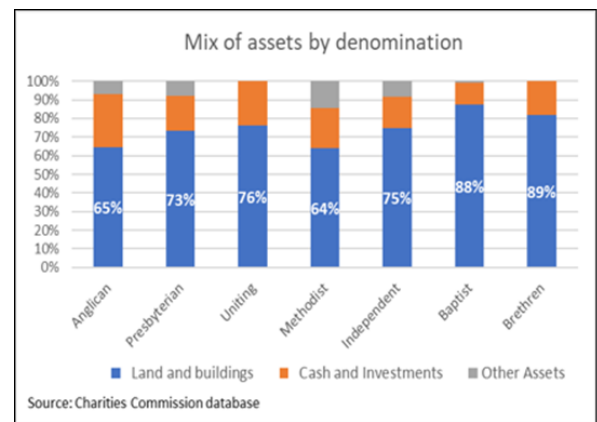
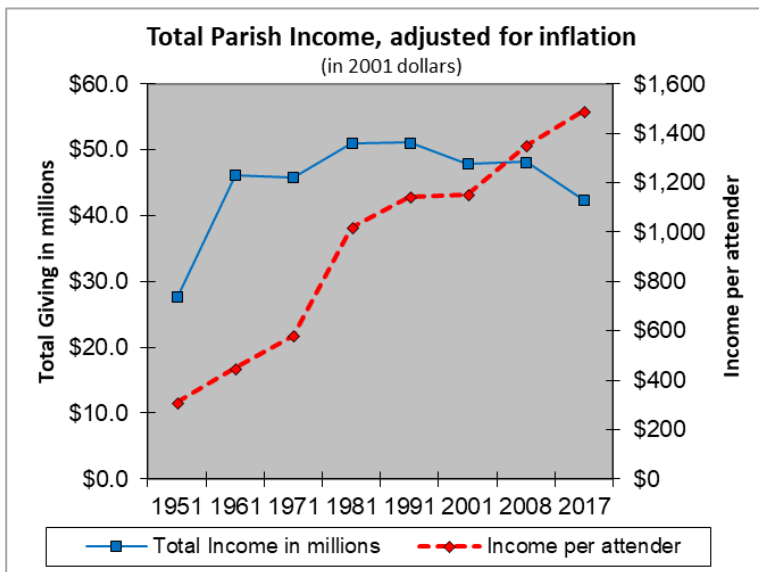
❖ Offerings average about \$1,350 per year in offerings for each adult attending worship, and does not vary

significantly by parish size, but small parishes receive far more of the income from other sources.

- ❖ Research suggests that giving and attendance rates are the two best indicators of how happy a congregation is. Very low giving can indicate that people are not happy, but so can very high giving, because the congregation is stressing to maintain its mission (unless it is for a short-term goal). If the “good” level is between \$1,000 and \$2,000 per adult attending worship, then about half of our parishes have the right level. In a third, the giving is low, and in the remaining 20% it looks too high.
- ❖ Offerings provide about half of the income of our parishes, with the rest coming from investment income, property rentals, and other income. Since 1951 the total income (after inflation) per person at worship has risen significantly, and until recently, this has offset the decline caused by the loss of members. However, in the last few years this has no longer been the case and the total income available for mission has declined in real dollar terms.



- ❖ While property is almost three-quarters of the church’s assets, the Presbyterian Church is not out of line with other denominations. In particular, the independent churches, which until recently were light on property, have in recent years been investing heavily, often in large and expensive central city premises, so that they now have a similar level of property.



Property resources

- ❖ Most of our mission activities happen in a building. Most parishes are based around three core buildings – a worship centre, a hall/complex which is more community focused, and a manse for the minister. However, fewer than half of our parishes now have all three of these buildings and the manse is the most common building missing.

- ❖ While those attending church know and appreciate the parish’s activities, a recent survey of the population found that two-thirds either did not know or only knew slightly what the local church was like. This suggests that the real visibility of the church in the community is low despite often having high profile buildings. (*Faith and Belief in New Zealand, 2018*)

Some information on the sources of these statistics. Parishes are grouped by the total number at worship (including youth and children). Unless otherwise indicated these statistics are taken either from the Presbyterian Church’s June 2017 annual statistics (or the latest year for those parishes without 2017 data) and the Church Life Survey in early 2011.

How to use your parish's June statistics to assist your leadership

Your June statistics, combined with the information in this short report, can be a guide to how your parish is going compared to other similar parishes. Ask someone to do the basic calculations below and then as a Session/Parish council consider what the numbers may tell you.

The preparation:

Get your latest June statistics – if you don't have them to hand you can download them from the national [Presbyterian church website](#). Write the following key statistics in here

The number of adults at worship		The number of additions to the roll**	
The number of youth at worship**		The number removed from the roll**	
The number of children at worship		The total amount of offerings	
Add these together to get the total number at worship		The total amount spent on Ministers (including accommodation)	
The total number of people on the roll (both members and associates)		The total spending	
Finally, you will need the population living near your church. The easiest way to get this is to go to www.mashblock.co.nz and put the address of your worship centre. Then click on Area Unit at the top. It will then show a map and the number of people living in the area. You want the population that is naturally centred on your location and this will probably mean adding together a number of neighbouring area units. When you have the number put it here.			
** These are only available for Presbyterian parishes, not union or cooperating			

If your parish took part in the Church Life Survey, you will also find it has useful information.

How well are you meeting the needs of your members?

There are two key metrics which have been shown to indicate the strength of your member's commitment

1. Divide the number of people on the roll by the number of adults at worship. _____. This gives the average number of times a month they come to worship. **How does this compare with the graph on page 1? What might make them come more often?**
2. Divide the total offerings by the number of adults at worship. _____. Compare this with \$1,350. **If it is a lot lower, is this an indication of a lack of commitment? If it is a lot higher, is it because your circumstances are putting a strain on your members.**

The Church Life survey reports 3, 4 and 5 may give you a fuller picture of what your members think of your parish

How well is your parish placed to meet the needs of the future?

There are two key metrics for looking at how well your parish is going.

1. Divide the number of children attending worship by the total number at worship. _____. Parishes that grow generally have over 15%. Compare your results with those on page 3. **What conclusions do you draw?**
2. Subtract the number of removals from the roll from the number of additions _____. **How do you compare to the graph on page 2? What is the key issue?** You may want to also look at the kind of removals you have.
3. Divide the amount spent on Ministers by the total spending. _____. **Parishes that spend over 50% tend to not have enough for other leadership.** You may like to consider how you compare to the leadership distribution on page 4.

Report 2 of the church life survey lets you compare the ratio of new to old members to the figures quoted on page 2.

How well are you meeting your community's spiritual needs?

Multiply your population figure with the factor below, which is the approximate rate of attendance in each area. Compare this with your total Sunday attendance figure. Over the country as a whole the Presbyterian Church gets this proportion of the population to worship. _____ **Are you reaching your population? If not, which groups are missing from your fellowship?**

Factor: Northland and West Coast, 0.003; Otago and Southland, 0.015; Rest of NZ 0.007

Consider your neighbouring churches of all denominations. **Do you think any of them meeting your community's spiritual needs better? If so, what can you learn from them?**