



# A Snapshot of the Northern Presbytery in 2017

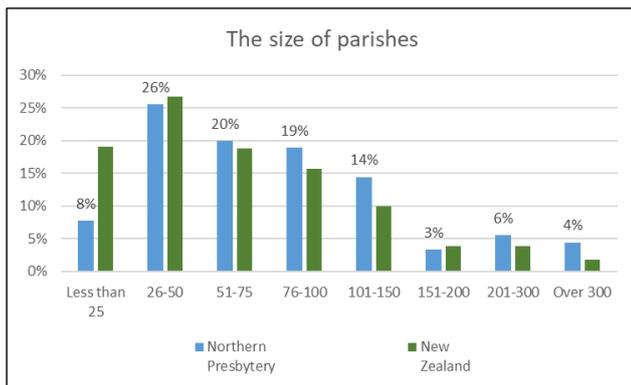
This report has been prepared by the Church Property Trustees as a resource for the wider church

## Our Congregations

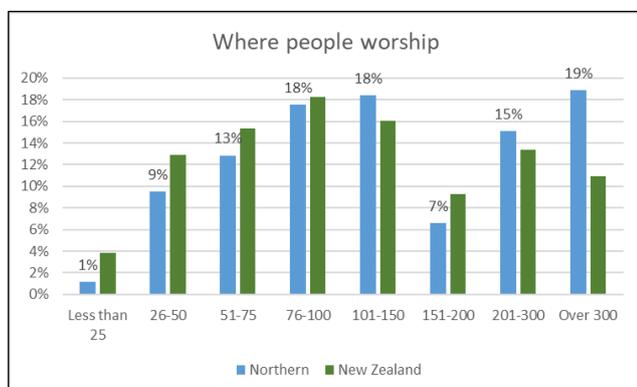
### Key findings:

- Northern Presbytery has a higher proportion of large parishes and fewer very small ones
- Over half of the people worship with over 150 others and a third worship with more than 200
- Larger parishes attract a higher rate of attendance compared to their roll

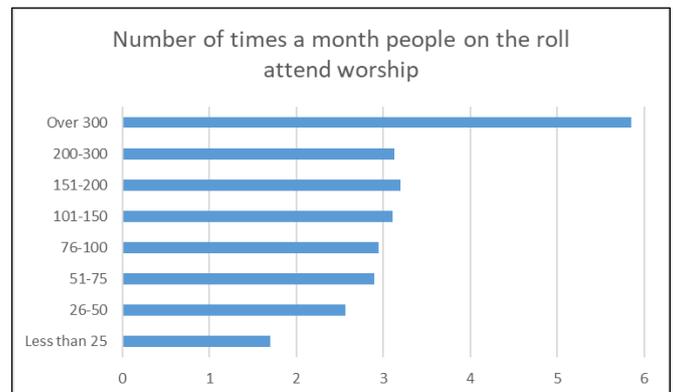
- On an average June Sunday in 2017, there were almost 8,500 people at worship in the Northern Presbytery parishes, including slightly over 1,300 children under 13 and about 600 young people between the ages of 13 and 17. (This snapshot includes all union parishes in the area regardless of their current oversight.)
- Northern Presbytery has relatively few very small parishes, but even so almost half of its parishes have fewer than 75 people at worship. Ten percent of parishes have over 200 people at worship



- But most people worship at the larger parishes, so that over one-third of members attend worship with more than 200 others.



- About 15% worship at Union and Co-operating parishes. On average these parishes are smaller than the Presbyterian ones (62 at worship compared to 103) but there are union parishes of all sizes. On average 15 children are at worship in Presbyterian parishes and 12 in Union ones.
- Larger parishes offer a wider range of programmes for different ages and tastes. This means they are more likely to attract their members to worship. This pattern can be seen in the Northern Presbytery with both lower attendance rates in the smallest congregations and very high attendance in the largest ones.

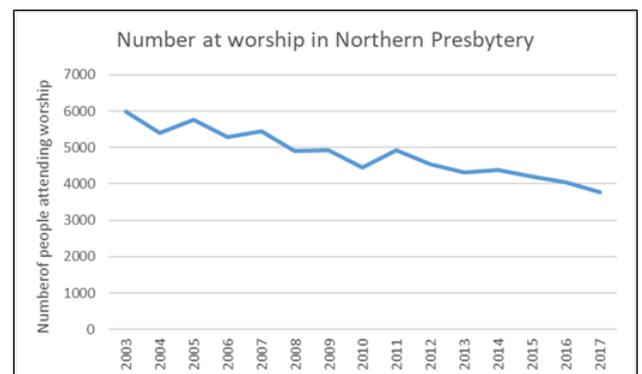


## Change since 2003

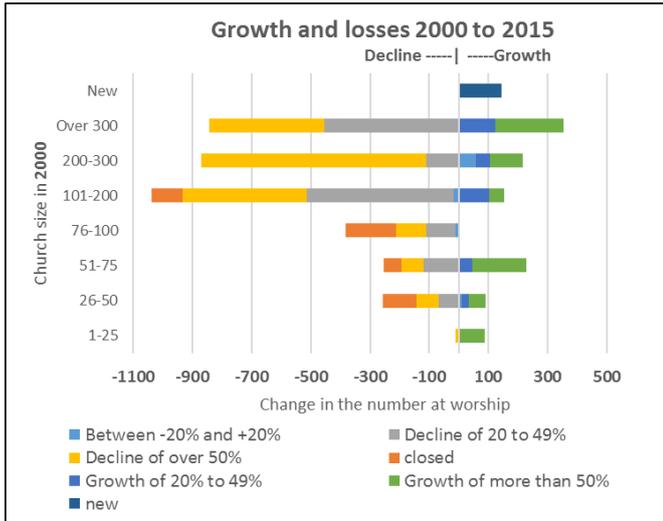
### Key findings:

- Despite the growing population attendance at worship has fallen by over a third since 2003
- Roll changes suggest this pattern is continuing.

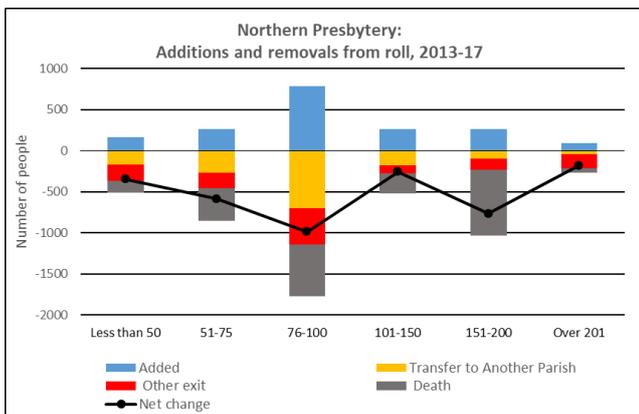
- In the two years since the last report, the number of people at worship has declined by about 1,500. The downward trend in the numbers at worship has been persistent over the 2000s.



- ❖ The fall in attendance has happened despite the growing population in the Northern Presbytery area. Between the 2001 and 2013 censuses, the combined population in the Auckland and Northland regional council areas grew by 21%.
- ❖ The decline in church attendance was not concentrated in any one size of church, but most of the losses occurred in churches with over 75 at worship in 2000. Proportionately the smallest congregations did best in holding their numbers.



- ❖ The decline has been faster in union parishes than in Presbyterian ones. The average attendance at union parishes is now about 50% of what it was in 2003 whereas in Presbyterian parishes it is about 80% of the 2003 attendance. This has meant that union members are a declining proportion of the Presbytery roll, falling from nearly 20% in 2003 to 14% in 2017.
- ❖ The roll changes in the last five years shows that parishes of all sizes are both gaining and losing members. For many parishes the death of members is a significant cause of decline.



### Markers of congregational health

*There are three key markers of congregational health*

- **A good balance of age-groups.** The key metric for this is the number of children as a proportion of the congregation
- **The commitment level of members of the congregation.** The key metric for this is giving per adult attending
- **The leadership resource.** The key metric for this is the number of hours per parish

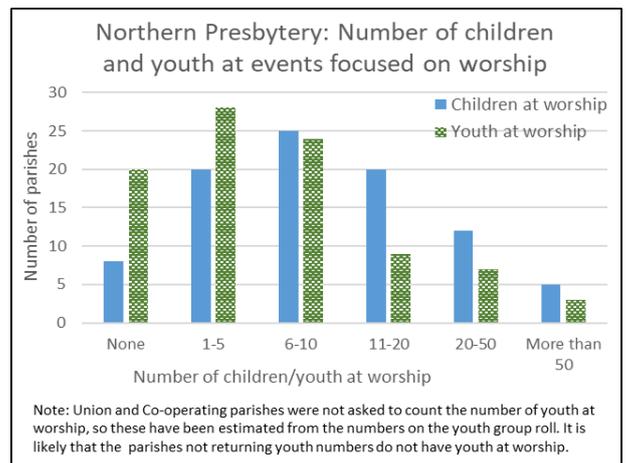
These metrics are “canary signs”. Like the collapse of the canary in the coal mine their behaviour do not cause what is happening, rather they show that it is.

### Our Children and Youth

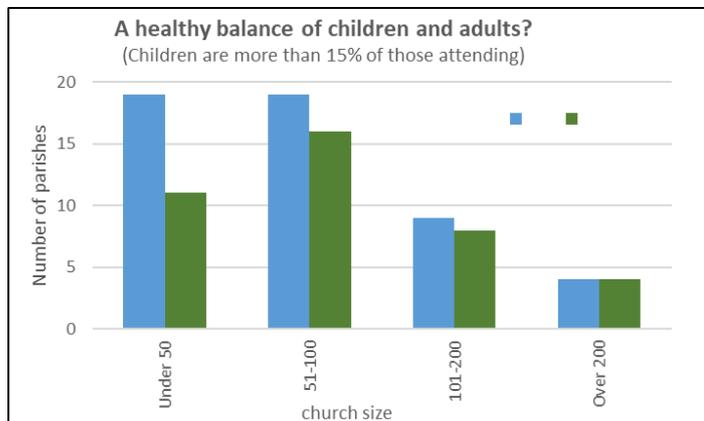
*Key findings:*

- Most parishes have some children and youth at worship, but there are fewer large youth groups than children’s programmes
- 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.

- ❖ If children are present at worship, it is likely that their parents will be also. If there are reasonable number of children, then there is also likely to be enough youth for an active youth programme (since young people tend to like to be in groups.) This makes children at worship an indicator of the likely age profile of the congregation as a whole.
- ❖ Most Northern Presbytery parishes have some children at worship, but about a quarter of the parishes had five or less, which is generally too few for good group dynamics. There were fewer large youth groups than children’s programmes. There are a large number of parishes that did not answer this question.



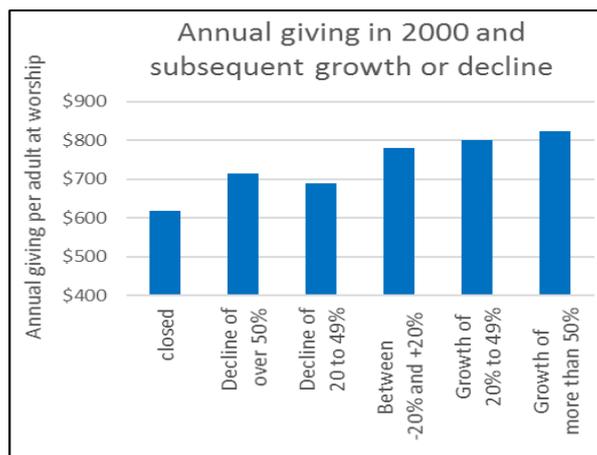
- ❖ A healthy balance of children and adults can be found in parishes of all sizes, but parishes with less than 50 are more likely than not to have an unhealthy balance. About half of the larger parishes also fail to reach the required proportion of children, including some of the largest parishes.



- ❖ There were over 500 adult confirmations or baptisms in 2017. While the ethnic parishes had the highest rate of these, over 70 parishes had at least one.

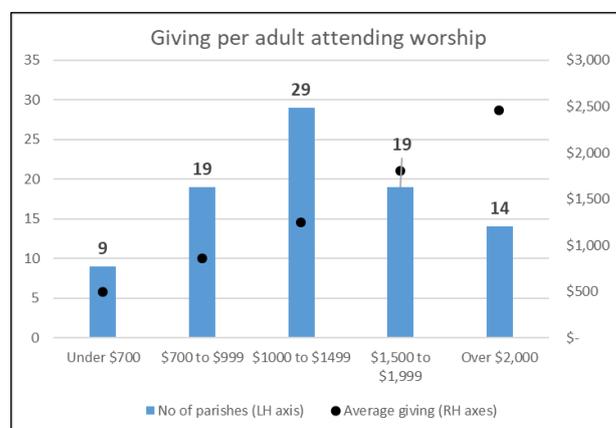
- ❖ The survey showed that Northern Presbytery is very similar to the overall Presbyterian church in terms of which theological tradition that people identified with. The most common traditions were the traditional (21%), evangelical (18%), and charismatic (9%). Liberal was chosen by 7%. About 8% of people did not identify with any of these traditions, and these were disproportionately young people.

- ❖ As has been found elsewhere, there was a clear pattern that parish growth was associated with higher giving in the past.



- ❖ Giving is an indicator of commitment, and low levels of giving is often sign that the congregation is not enthusiastic about their faith journey. However, very high levels of giving, if it is not associated with some short-term project, can be a sign that the congregation is under stress and trying to maintain a level of activity that is unrealistic. Healthy congregations tend, therefore, to cluster around the average giving level.

- ❖ In 2017 each adult attending worship in the Northern Presbytery gave on average about \$1,350 per year, but there are some parishes that have either much higher or much lower giving levels.



- ❖ Parishes in the Northern Presbytery had a combined income of \$18.5 million in 2017 year. They also had net assets of \$234 million. Most of these assets were land

### Faith commitment

#### Key findings:

- The Church Life survey showed people in the Northern Presbytery are committed to our faith and enjoy our church life
- Giving has been found to be a sign of commitment to a congregation, and about 20 parishes had extreme levels of giving that could be concerning

- ❖ 1,911 people in Presbyterian parishes in the Northern Presbytery filled in the 2011 Church life survey. The survey was completed by a reasonably representative sample of parishes from the non-ethnic parishes, but it did not have good coverage of the ethnic ones or of union parishes

- ❖ Two important results from the survey are the proportion of people who read their Bible regularly and undertake personal devotions. This is because people who do these two things are far more likely to say that their faith has grown over the last few years.

- ❖ The survey showed that nearly two-thirds of the people read the Bible or had a personal devotion time either every day or a few times a week. This was about the same as the average Presbyterian, and also Catholics, Anglicans and Brethren, but it is lower than Baptists.

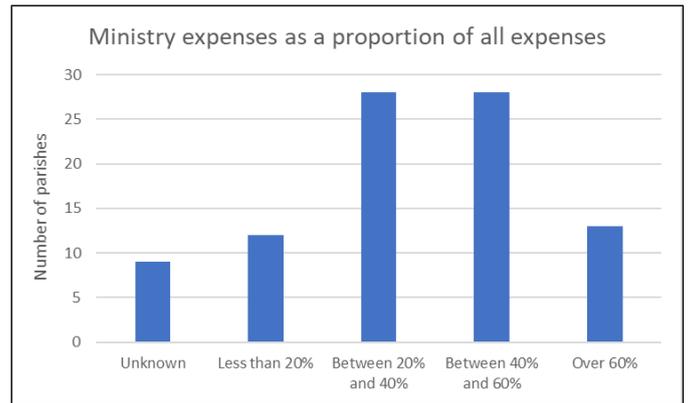
- ❖ In all denominations, people over 45 are more likely to regularly read their Bible and have personal devotions than young people, and Bible reading is particularly low amongst people under 25.

and buildings, but \$33 million was held in cash and investments.

- ❖ Most parishes have under \$30,000 of assets for each person at worship, but a small number of parishes have more. The six parishes with the highest ratio of assets to those at worship have over \$100,000 for each person.

	Number of parishes	Number at worship	Value of assets (\$million)	Average value per worshipper
Under \$10,000	22	2893	\$8.81	\$3,044
\$10-29,999	22	2356	\$49.04	\$20,816
\$30-49,999	28	2170	\$87.24	\$40,203
\$50-99,999	12	775	\$51.91	\$66,979
Over \$100,000	6	263	\$36.56	\$139,013

- ❖ As parish size increases so does the proportion of leadership hours that is paid rather than voluntary. Paid labour is 50% of the labour in the smallest parishes but 70% in the largest ones.
- ❖ There is a wide variability in the proportion of total expenditure committed to ordained ministry. Overseas research has identified that when parishes spend much more than 50% there is inadequate funds for other running costs, particularly, other kinds of ministry. At the same time, it is also a concern when very little is being spent on ordained ministry as these parishes tend to not show signs of growth.



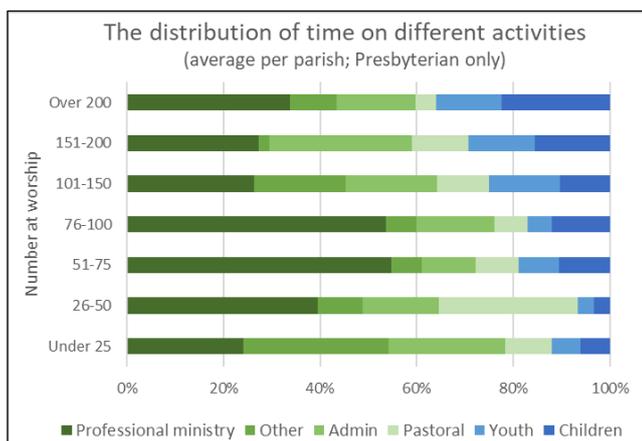
**Leadership**  
**Key findings:**

- As parish size increases so do the number of leadership hours available, particularly paid hours
- Larger parishes use their extra hours differently; they put more resource into children, youth and other activities

- ❖ As parish size increase, so do the number of leadership hours available. But, more importantly, there is a change in what these hours are used for. This analysis uses the information on both paid and unpaid hours as both are valuable resources. (It is confined to Presbyterian churches as union parishes were not asked these questions.)

- ❖ In the 2011 Church Life Survey, about 55% of those surveyed felt that their parish enabled them to use their gifts and skills to a great or some extent, but about 20% felt that they are only able to contribute their gifts and skills to a small extent and 13% felt they could not contribute at all, so there may be potential for more voluntary work.

- ❖ In small parishes, leadership resources are primarily used for adult-facing ministry, administration and pastoral care. As parishes get to middle-sized, they devote more to the leadership of children’s work and in the largest parishes, an increasing proportion of the available time is spent on youth. provide significantly more leadership for their youth work.



- ❖ Northern Presbytery contains a wider range of ethnic churches than most other Presbyteries, reflecting the diversity in the population. In 2017, 25% of the Northern Presbytery worshipped in an ethnically titled congregation, up from 17% in 2003. Over this time period, the number of worshippers in Asian congregations has increased from 900 to 1200 but those in Pacific congregations has fallen from 1000 to 900. (Congregations that moved to the Pacific Synod are not included in either year.)

**Some information on the source of these statistics.**

These statistics are taken either from the Presbyterian Church’s June annual statistics (using the nearest year if necessary) and the combined report of the Northern Presbytery’s parishes that took part in the Church Life Survey in early 2011.

This report was prepared by Dr M N Galt, March 2019.

## 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](http://www.presbyterian.org.nz). 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 <a href="http://www.mashblock.co.nz">www.mashblock.co.nz</a> 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 adults at worship by the number of people on the roll. **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 life.

### 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 20%. 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 Ministry including accommodation by the total spending. \_\_\_\_\_. **Parishes that spend significantly 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?**