



GA18 News Saturday 6 October

Assembly says 'No' to euthanasia

Today Assembly strongly affirmed that it does not support provision for euthanasia and medically assisted suicide as proposed in the End of Life Choice Bill.

This decision was taken on the grounds that legally sanctioned provision for doctors to actively end people's lives or assist their suicide is ethically unacceptable and would in the long term be dangerous for public safety especially for those who are seriously ill, depressed, disabled, or very elderly.

Assembly urged Parliament to respect the dignity and value of all human lives, to protect the lives of society's most vulnerable, and not to pass the Bill.

The Doctrine Core Group's comprehensive 16-page report notes that according to the Old Testament, God creates, grants, and determines the length of life, and that the Bill contravenes the foundational biblical principle that people should not kill one another.

"Every human life is intrinsically valuable, irreplaceable, and worth preserving, even during times of intense suffering," says group convenor Rev Dr Stuart Lange.

Speaking in support of the proposals, commissioners pointed to the great work hospices do in palliative care and said that anecdotally less than one percent of those terminally ill could not have their pain relieved. The report also states that the Bill is medically unnecessary because terminally ill patients already have the right to decline surgery or any life-prolonging treatment.

A proposed amendment to delete the Church's reasons for rejecting the Bill was not carried, although commissioners spoke to their disquiet at what they saw as the use of "inflammatory language" such as the word dangerous. They urged the Church in its communications to take a soft approach in order to avoid being seen as "hard and unbending".

Stuart acknowledged the need for "more restrained language" but also told Assembly that "people need to see the depth of our opposition and why we oppose the Bill".

He committed the core group to abridging and softening its report on euthanasia, which he described as "a poor answer to a difficult question" about end-of-life practices. The report will

also be updated to include robust alternative points of view on the debate, and will then be available to parishes for study.

As a result of intense dialogue group discussion yesterday, and rejection of the End of Life Choice Bill, two new proposals emerged and were agreed by Assembly today. They challenge the Church to renew its ministries to aged and vulnerable people within communities, and for the Council of Assembly, presbyteries and Church Councils to explore ways to contribute financially to palliative, hospice and mental health services.

In support of these proposals, a young commissioner spoke to the need for a paradigm shift that embraces older people's gifts and active engagement in the Church. "They're an amazing, phenomenal and life-changing group to hang with," he said.

Moderator designate announced

The Rev Hamish Galloway of Christchurch has been elected Moderator designate of the Church and will take up the role of Moderator in late 2020.

Hamish is senior minister at Hope Presbyterian Church in Christchurch where he has ministered since 2011. Download a copy of the [Moderator designate address](#) and watch the video below:



International guest speaker shares Australian Uniting Church issues

Today's guest speaker Rob Floyd has been attending Assembly all week. Rob is associate general secretary of the United Church of Australia and this morning he shared with commissioners the key issues his church is grappling with and the decisions they've recently made.

Rob has served as associate general secretary since July 2017. He leads a small, multi-disciplinary team responsible for a range of national work including doctrine, worship, justice, standards for theological education and support of culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

As part of the UCA's organisational changes, Rob and his team are developing new ways for people to engage in the work of the church nationally.

Rob initially trained and working as a teacher. He spent seven years living in Indonesia as a mission co-worker, taught at a Christian university, and supported a Christian micro-finance organisation. On his return to Australia, he worked for 11 years in UnitingWorld, the UCA's international partnerships agency, which included a three-year term as the National Director.

Watch the video of Rob's address:



Very Rev Ray Coster speaks on the World Council of Churches

The Very Rev Ray Coster addressed the General Assembly about the World Council of Churches (WCC) 70th anniversary and the work the Council undertakes. Watch the video.



Code of Ethics

Commissioners at General Assembly expressed a desire for the reach of the Code of Ethics to extend to all church volunteers and employees.

This was among the themes reported back from dialogue groups by Rev Hamish Galloway.

Dialogue groups also indicated that providing cultural context was relevant and needs to be considered in the Code. Feedback from dialogue groups strongly commended the work done on the Code and noted that it was important to the life and work of the Church.

Assembly asked Council of Assembly to establish a workgroup to develop ways for ministers, employees and volunteers working in the church to have regular engagement with the Code through things like discussion, training, education, orientation and induction processes, profile on the Church's website, and inclusion in contracts and supervision agreements.

In response to concerns about the financial liabilities faced by church officers under the Health and Safety at Work Act (2015) and the relative liabilities of volunteer workers under the Act, Assembly asked that the matter be referred to the Council of Assembly with a view to raising risk awareness.

Youth Commissioner profile

Each day of General Assembly we profile a presbytery Youth Commissioner.



Lucy Prestidge - GA youth commissioner, The Southern Presbytery

GA youth commissioner Lucy Prestidge says that for many young people raised in Christian families, leaving home is a significant time in forging faith and church commitments - apart from parents' influence.

"This has certainly been true for me, and these last three years at university I'm grateful to have been surrounded by committed Christian friends and faith communities, of all flavours and denominations, who have shown me much of what it means to

follow Christ individually and as a body.

"I've been greatly interested in understanding what distinguishes and what unites us. Therefore, I had two motivations for wanting to be a youth commissioner: I'd like to have a better grasp of what it particularly means to be Presbyterian and what the inner-workings of this Church look like. Despite having been part of it my whole life (and as a PK, no less) I have a lot more to learn!

"Secondly, and more importantly, I believe that no matter what denomination I find myself in, it is my privilege and responsibility as a disciple to be part of the fabric of the Church, and not just a consumer of whatever it might offer me. We all have different threads we can bring to this fabric, and I hope I'm right in thinking that whatever mine are - including, but hopefully not only, my perspective as a young adult - might be put to good use."

Alpine Presbytery knits a community

Alpine Presbytery's new moderator Rev Anne Stewart led today's report from a still-youthful presbytery.

"Five years in, our primary goal," Anne said, "Is to work on our culture – less institution and more about community and family. We're committed to developing a sound and healthy culture based on good relationships."

Currently, 25 percent of Alpine's 59 parishes are technically vacant but some are led by shared ministry teams or resourced by neighbouring parishes.

"People lament to me sometimes that their minister is away assisting neighbouring parishes," Anne told Assembly, "but we do it because someone in the family needs a helping hand. It's just what you do and it's been heartening to hear the Moderator talk this week about family."

Although challenges abound with capacity issues and the rising tide of compliance, the Alpine Mission Fund has received a great act of generosity from its neighbour St Andrew's at Rangī Ruru in Christchurch.

"The \$3 million honours the spirit of generosity, of giving beyond parish borders," says Alpine executive officer Barry Ayers. "This legacy gift means many projects can be supported and initiated to secure our future growth."

Resource minister Darryl Tempero praised the growing team of mission discernment coaches who have already gone into 22 congregations to help them find their way in a changing missional context of rising costs and shrinking membership.

"Churches often realise the challenge but all too often don't have a helpful, robust process to clarify their thinking before deciding what they should do," explains Darryl. "We're also learning from the process."

Moderator Rt Rev Fakaofu Kaio embraced the presbytery team and acknowledged the shared journey of restructuring. He thanked Alpine especially for hosting Assembly with a smile this week, and all that task entails.

Assembly supports a leading role for InterChurch Bioethics Council

Assembly today supported a proposal that presbyteries and national groups be encouraged to invite the InterChurch Bioethics Council (ICBC) and Enquiring Minds (formerly the Bioethics Roadshow) to lead discussion of bioethical issues at regional gatherings.

The council is an ecumenical, cross-cultural body whose mission is to increase church members' knowledge and understanding of spiritual, ethical and cultural issues as they relate to biotechnology, so they can act in an informed manner.

With issues such as euthanasia, legalising marijuana and the impending explosion of artificial intelligence all demanding informed public debate and posing significant ethical dilemmas, the ICBC's work is timely.

The council has made submissions on the End of Life Choice Bill. It is working on new study guides relating to organ donation and transplants, assisted reproductive technology and

legalisation of marijuana for medicinal and recreational use. It has also participated in public meetings such as a euthanasia debate at Christchurch Cathedral in April earlier this year.

Enquiring Minds has engaged thousands of intermediate and secondary students in exploring the impact of these issues and others such as social media responsibility.

To get in touch with the ICBC and access its resources, go to www.interchurchbioethics.org.nz

Keynote address: Very Rev Dr Graham Redding

The Very Rev Dr Graham Redding gave today's keynote speaker address.

Graham has been the Master of Knox College, Dunedin, since 2014. He is a former Moderator of our Church (2008-2010), was Principal of the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership (2007-2014), and is a former parish minister.

Graham has served the Church in a variety of capacities, including the Leadership Policy Group and the Doctrine Core Group.

He has a Doctorate through London University. He is the author of Prayer and the Priesthood of Christ in the Reformed Tradition, published in 2003.

Watch video of his keynote address:



Assembly offers forgiveness for putting ecumenical relationships on the back burner

Assembly offered forgiveness to the Anglican Church for putting ecumenical relationships on the back burner.

The request for forgiveness was made by Anglican Archbishop Most Reverend Philip Richardson in his address to Assembly on Friday.

“Ecumenical partnerships have been on the back burner for too long,” said Archbishop Richardson. “I ask the Presbyterian Church’s forgiveness for our failures as partners in faith.”

Assembly received the request for forgiveness with humility and acknowledged that the Presbyterian Church was also in need of forgiveness for our part in that neglect.

Following the archbishop’s address, the Church’s Moderator Rt Rev Fakaofu Kaio led Assembly in prayer which offered forgiveness.

Today Assembly formally acknowledged the Moderator’s assurance of forgiveness that he made on behalf of Assembly in that prayer.

Rev Dr Selwyn Yeoman and the Very Rev Richard Dawson brought the proposal that asked Assembly to formally acknowledge the archbishop’s comments.

In his time as Moderator of the General Assembly Richard noted that he observed that the Church’s ecumenical relationships were not in great repair.

“I believe that offering forgiveness is a primary spiritual dynamic and it is appropriate that we accept this gracious offer of forgiveness from the archbishop and also record our offering of forgiveness,” said Richard.

After asking a few questions of clarification, commissioners voted in favour of acknowledging the Archbishop’s offer of forgiveness for putting ecumenical relationships on the back burner, and Assembly also sought forgiveness for its role in this.

New name and membership rules for Pacific Presbytery

Assembly approved changes to Book of Order membership regulations to improve the ability of individuals and groups to participate in the life of the Pacific Presbytery (formerly the Pacific Island Synod).

A review group set up by the Council of Assembly found that the early establishment of the Synod had been problematic. One of the main issues was that Book of Order membership regulations put up unintended barriers to participate in the life of the Presbytery and didn’t account for the many layers of membership that are lived reality of Pasifika peoples explained Margie Apa of the review group.

In commending the changes to Assembly, Margie said that the changes support the original aspirations that General Assembly had in mind when it established the Synod five years ago.

“The wording of the existing regulations had unintended consequences and restricted us in how we could do our life together,” said Margie.

Under new membership rules agreed to today, individuals or fellowship groups may join the Pacific Presbytery as associate members – even if their parish has voted not to join. This means that those within multicultural congregations now have an easy pathway to participate in the life of the Pacific Presbytery if they wish.

In response to questions of clarification it was confirmed that if someone chose to be associated with the Pacific Presbytery, they would remain under the oversight of their home presbytery and levies continue to be paid to the home presbytery.

Pacific Presbytery clerk Winston Timaloa, clerk of the Pacific Presbytery said that the changes provided people with choices.

“It opens other channels of working together. This makes it possible to participate in your home presbytery and in the Pacific Presbytery as well, if this is what you want.”

Before voting took place, commissioners sought clarification on what “associate” meant, and it was clarified that the Presbytery only has oversight of ministers who have chosen to be part of it, not all Pacific ministers.

Following the vote, Moderator the Rt Rev Fakaofu Kaio, described the Pacific Presbytery as the youngest member of the Church family and said: “As in all families, we need to look after each other. What we decided today will help the Presbytery play a bigger part in the Church family”.

General Assembly also affirmed a change of name for the Synod, which will from now on be known as Pacific Presbytery.

“We were given the status of presbytery five years ago, and the change honours the past and helps build a pathway for the future,” said Winston.

When asked why the name change was needed Winston advised that the new name better signalled their decision-making capability.

Refreshing the roots of doctrine

Assembly today agreed to commend the ongoing commemoration and study of the 500th anniversary marking the start of the Reformation.

In proposing the recommendation, the Doctrine Core Group said that a focus on the Reformation at this time of celebrating Luther’s posting of his 95 Theses critiquing indulgences encourages understanding of the faith and helps build good relationships with other Christian churches.

“We don’t need to look further afield. There are commemorative events taking place here in New Zealand which offer an opportunity for churches to refresh and develop our understanding of our historic roots, to explore our faith and consider how we relate Christian faith to our own, very different context,” explains convenor Rev Dr Stuart Lange.

In the spirit of relationship building, Assembly was also asked to agree with re-interpreting the Reformed Faith’s attitude to the Catholic Church’s beliefs and practices.

“Peace doesn’t just happen,” says Amber Parry, who proposed two recommendations today. “Peace has to be created over and over again.”

Assembly approved that statements within the Westminster Confession of Faith relating to monastic vows, the Pope, inter-denominational marriage and the Catholic Mass are to be seen in their historical context, not in the light of today’s much better respect and stronger relationships between the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and the Catholic Church.

“Everyone would agree that those fiery clauses represent a very different time and place,” says Stuart.

The 'Important Note' on the Church's website will be replaced with the following:

NOTE: The historic Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) is one of the subordinate standards of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, along with the contemporary Kupu Whakapono (2010).

Study book rejected

Today Assembly decided that it would not request presbyteries to facilitate the purchase, distribution and study of the book *Changing our Minds* by Prof David Gushee. The recommendation had sought that the book be available in all local parishes and that parishes to be urged to take up its study, and, wherever possible, combine with a neighbouring parish with differing viewpoints.

In presenting the proposal to Assembly, the Rev Dr Susan Jones said she had a deep respect for evangelical Christians who want to pay careful attention to Scripture and who seek to protect the quality of intimate human relationships. She indicated that she shared these concerns.

Susan pointed out that the Presbyterian Church is now different from society, different from the Church of Scotland and different from the Uniting Church of Australia, on considering matters that affect LGBTQ in churches and the community.

"One third of people walked out of Assembly a few years ago over how we discussed this issue. And in the intervening years, we haven't come up with a better method. This proposal provides us with a different way of looking at this issue," Susan said.

There was some debate on the proposal, with a number of commissioners seeking to speak for or against.

Two commissioners told how church rejection of homosexual young people is the cause of youth suicide. Another asked Assembly to remember that "we are all equal within God's eyes...Jesus loves sinners too".

It was suggested that as the book is biased, a more balanced approach could be taken via a second book with alternative scriptural interpretation being recommended for study also.

The Rev Dr Emma Keown said that the Presbyterian Church has been studying and debating issues of sexuality for 27 years. She said that since 1991 the Church has not wavered in its "decision that marriage is between a man and woman".

The Rev Dr Susan Jones responded that there was no claim made that the book was unbiased, "it is the story of one evangelical facing these issues in his life". She also said there was nothing to prevent churches studying other books alongside the book.

Church to get a Te Reo Commissioner

Assembly agreed to appoint a Te Reo Maori Commissioner to promote and extend the use of the Maori language within the Church.

"A commissioner is a practical way to build our Te Reo capacity," said Rev Andrew Harrex from Southern Presbytery which brought the proposal to Assembly.

“This will be a great gift to all of us who are keen to develop our Te Reo skills, but are a bit scared or perhaps don’t know where to start,” said Andrew.

Marina Rakuraku, Moderator of Te Aka Puaho, seconded the motion and indicated that the commissioner would ideally be a people person and have knowledge of the geography of Aotearoa and all of its tribes.

The commissioner would be an encourager, and could source resources to be shared and used, said Andrew, who also noted that providing pathways to increase use of Te Reo within the Church recognised our bicultural partnership with Te Aka Puaho.

Commissioners warmly welcomed the proposal saying that they would appreciate additional resources to support Te Reo use during their worship.

In response to questions of clarification about how the role would be funded, Andrew responded that the commissioner didn’t necessarily have to be a paid position, and that it would be up to Council of Assembly and Te Aka Puaho to scope and appoint someone to the role.

Reduce, reuse and recycle

The Presbyterian Church has made a commitment to reduce its impact on the environment, and acknowledged the important role we play as Christians in caring for creation.

Assembly asked that all church councils, church schools and social service agencies connected with the Church implement three achievable and measureable acts of waste reduction and recycling.

Assembly endorsed three key actions to be sent to all parishes which included eliminating the use of disposable, single use items like Styrofoam cups and plastic straws, cups, and cutlery, and adopting the use of environmentally-friendly cleaning products, soaps and dishwashing liquids. Making recycling bins readily available was also supported by Assembly.

Assembly also agreed that progress toward implementation of the actions be reported in congregations’ annual reports to presbytery.

Brett Reid and Nadia Ridsdale, who presented the proposal on behalf of Presbytery Central, said that the Church needs to express its mission of care for creation.

“These are small and simple changes. Together we can make a difference. We hope that our changes will have a ripple effect and influence individuals and others in our community,” said Brett.

Nadia noted that they had engaged with Ecostore, who was willing to offer parishes special rates to purchase environmentally sustainable alternatives.

Some commissioners questioned the prescriptive nature of the recommendations saying that they didn’t adapt to the life of each congregation. Others sought clarity about the net environmental impact of supposedly sustainable things like removing away from single-use items. In response to questions of clarification, Nadia confirmed that the measures were not compulsory for congregations, but were desirable.

Most commissioners spoke strongly in favour of the need for congregations to be active stewards of creation and commended Presbytery Central for bringing the proposal.

Assembly agreed to a subsequent recommendation to expand the list of other environmentally-friendly changes in the Presbytery Central's report to Assembly. Brett clarified that these were extra things that parishes could consider doing and weren't part of the core list of actions to be sent to parishes.

The list of additional activities added several transport related actions that parishes could take to reduce their environmental footprint:

- Reduce transport related atmospheric carbon inputs by encouraging participation in local congregations and sharing together in the revitalisation of congregations.
- Promotion of cycling by the public provision of cycle stands
- Use church land (or make it available to community groups) for community gardens and/or restoration plantings.

Southern Presbytery a global Church

Southern Presbytery is now eight years old and, like other presbyteries, is undertaking its most thorough review since being established, in the face of declining numbers and increased workload.

Of a population of 323,000, there are 5,000 Presbyterians in the presbytery boundaries. There are 73 parishes and 47 ministers, which means a number of churches are without a settled ministry. The presbytery's only source of income is levies on parishes so that places limits on the ability to fund all its activities.

Despite these challenges, the presbytery is being invigorated by multicultural members. Queenstown in particular has a global community, with 70 Brazilians adding South American enthusiasm to worship. The combined St Pauls (Oamaru) Maheno Otepopo Church is now 40 percent Pasifika.

Te Anau's minister Craig Allan has found himself unexpectedly engaging in the Jesus in fellow Southland blokes who volunteer alongside him as fire fighters.

On a more formal basis, moderators of Southern Presbytery and the Synod of Otago and Southland called the presbytery team to a week of prayer focusing on significant reform of the relationship between these two bodies.

Kaimai Presbytery takes to the streets

Kaimai's primary challenge is geographical distance. The presbytery extends along both sides of the Kaimai ranges to Lake Taupo and Taumaranui in the south. The half-yearly presbytery gatherings are the main means of drawing people together physically. Ministers also meet for lunch once a week and Rev Mark Maney from Mt Maunganui says these meals are good for nourishing the spirit as well as the body, and time well spent.

The presbytery's strategic planning is a work in progress, with searching questions being asked about resources, leadership and parish health. Hard decisions are having to be made about limited finances. Despite that, some congregations are forging ahead with building renovations and extensions, while others are finding creative ways to do multicultural ministry in the streets. Rev Chris Barnard spoke about the community gardens project in Taneatua,

which now provides vegetables for every household in one street, and more streets clamouring to join. The project is flourishing, with chickens, calves and piglets, sheds and chicken runs.

Looking outwards, the presbytery has raised funds for the rebuild of damaged buildings on Tanna Island in Vanuatu.

Presbytery Central shares its legacy

Executive secretary Peter McKenzie spoke to Assembly on behalf of Presbytery Central. Wearing a kilt, he talked about his recent time in Caithness in the Scottish Highlands and how it has informed both his perspective on the Church's Scottish legacy and the two commitments he returned with. Presbyteries need to have the advantages of scale, and rural communities desperately need resourcing. We shouldn't base our Churches on city life, he says.

Presbytery central employs 10 staff. One of its newer employees is a mission catalyst whose role is to dream big and "stir the pot", working with local churches to define their plans for mission and ministry. Children and families' ministry is being supported by three part-time enablers to encourage a wider generational influence. The executive secretary role has also been strengthened to provide administration support because, as Peter says, "we are called by God to Administry".

Staff are paid from legacy funds that were wisely invested from properties bequeathed and sold over time. One property the presbytery decided not to sell when it closed was St Martin's in Porirua. This year, the newly renovated buildings were passed onto Wellington Cook Island Church in a heartfelt celebration. As part of being responsible property owners, the strengthening of other earthquake prone buildings still dominates the discussions of many local churches.

Young adult commissioners at Assembly

Assembly agreed to replace the term youth commissioner with young adult commissioner in the Book of Order regulations relating to Assembly commissioners.

In commending the proposal to Assembly, Caleb Griffith, said the term youth commissioner was confusing and people often incorrectly assumed that commissioners worked with youth, represented the views of youth or were youth themselves.

He also highlighted that in the church environment, "youth" typically referred to someone between the ages of 12 and 24, and few young adult commissioners meet that criteria.

"We are university graduates, parents, and business owners. We don't consider ourselves 'youth'," said Caleb.

Young adult commissioners are aged between 18-30, and it was suggested by one person during question time, that this could be expanded to include 16 and 17-year-olds.

Another asked what term was used by the World Council of Churches to describe their youth commissioners. Caleb responded that they felt the term "young adult" suited our context.

The proposal attracted minimal debate, and Assembly readily agreed to the change in terminology for young adult Assembly representatives.