



GA18 News Thursday 4 October

Children are our future

Te Aka Puaho encouraged the Church to invest in its children and young people.

“Children are our future. My children and grandchildren are telling me that our congregations are full of old people, and not exciting,” says Marina Rakuraku, Te Aka Puaho Moderator.

“Te Aka Puaho is in a time of transition and we are having a look at ourselves and how we do things,” she says.

Marina highlighted that Ohope Marae hosted the first family youth camp in many years in 2017 and that another one was underway now.

“The 2017 event was very successful. It was a time of coming together for the young of Te Aka Puaho pastorates to plan for their future, to discuss where and what are we doing.

“My wish and my prayer for us is to bring children back. Without our children, there will be no Church.”

As well as the focus on young people, the Maori Synod’s report to Assembly noted structural changes within Te Aka Puaho, including the reinstatement of standing committees, as the Synod re-organises how it goes about its work and ministry.

Marina thanked Assembly for the grant which facilitated a face-lift on Te Maungarongo – the Church’s marae. Te Maungarongo has hosted a Council of Assembly meeting and the Knox Centre for Ministry and Learning interns have also had a live-in at the marae and visited several local pastorates as part of their training.

The report also noted the joy of licensing six new Amorangi ministers since the 2016 General Assembly.

The passing of former Te Aka Puaho Moderator, Mrs Millie Te Kaawa, was acknowledged as a sad time for not only Te Aka Puaho but the wider church.

Te Aka Puaho’s report to Assembly also expressed sadness at the closing of Turakina Maori Girls College which had educated many Te Aka Puaho kaumatua.

International Guest Rev Tui Sopoaga celebrates long connection with Moderator

Assembly guest Rev Tui Sopoaga addressed Assembly today in his role as chairman of the Tokelau Congregation Christian Church of New Zealand and Australia.

The Tokelau church has been independent since 1996. “We decided we were old enough to move out by ourselves,” Rev Tui chuckled.

Tokelau’s population has dwindled to 2,000, with 7,000 Tokelauans now living in New Zealand. Moderator Rt Rev Fakaofa Kaio grew up with Tui’s wife Ane in a small hut that has long since been destroyed in a cyclone.

Ane presented the Moderator with a traditional lei woven by an 82-year-old Tokelauan woman, and the couple were joined on stage by other members of their Wellington congregation to sing a waiata. Watch below.



Assembly encouraged to acknowledge that it's all God's money

PressGo is asking General Assembly to consider setting up a task group to examine the Church’s collective wealth and establish a theology and practice of sharing property and money.

Commissioners will consider the matter more fully in dialogue groups.

Sharon Ross Ensor, acting PressGo chairperson, drew commissioners’ attention to the fact that despite declining membership, the Church’s wealth is increasing.

“The Church has significant material blessings. A recent report from the Church Property Trustees estimates that the Church owns property valued at around \$1.2b.

“We believe that it’s time for a Church-wide conversation about our collective wealth along with developing resources on the theology of sharing, property and money.

“We wonder what transformation would happen if we practice generosity in costly ways, as shown in God’s generosity and abundance to us,” says Sharon.

Jenny Flett, also on the PressGo board, shared a story about “giving forward” that she believed demonstrated a theology of wealth sharing, and invited dialogue groups to tell their own stories of abundance, generosity and transformation as they considered the proposal to establish a task group.

Outgoing Moderator’s address



The Very Rev Richard Dawson gave his outgoing Moderator’s address to Assembly. Watch the video.

Assembly considers ethics

Commissioners today considered the Church’s Code of Ethics in dialogue groups.

Although the updated Code has been ratified and published since March this year, as one of Church’s important documents, it is vital for the safety of those in the Church’s care as well as our leaders, that Assembly considers the Code, says Rev Dr Kerry Enright of the Book of Order Advisory Committee.

“We are accountable to God, but we are also accountable to the communities that we are part of,” says Kerry.

In preparation for dialogue groups, Kerry asked commissioners questions that challenged the Church’s ethical standards: “Is it OK for a male minister to put his arm around a young woman without permission? Can a male elder drive a woman home alone? Is it OK for a minister to share a confidential conversation with his or her spouse?”

“Every day we are making judgements about how to behave ethically,” says Kerry.

Kerry noted how the Australian royal commission into sexual abuse had been a wake-up call for Australian churches and confirmed that the Presbyterian Church has asked to be part of the New Zealand royal commission into historic abuse in state care.

The Very Rev Pamela Tankersley – also a member of the Book of Order Advisory Group – talked about the importance of supervision, and outlined five areas for improving the climate and culture around ethical decisions.

Pamela invited dialogue groups to offer suggestions on other actions that the Church could take to strengthen our ethical approach.

Assembly will hear feedback from dialogue groups tomorrow.

Media coverage



[Listen to Moderator Rt Rev Fakaofu Kaio](#) talk to Radio New Zealand about his background and plans as Moderator of the Presbyterian Church.

Youth Commissioner profile

Each day of General Assembly we profile one or two of our presbytery Youth Commissioners.



Mevia Faletese - GA youth commissioner, Northern Presbytery

Mevia Faletese says she “wanted to serve as a young adult commissioner at GA because I knew that it would be a rewarding experience. A great opportunity to participate and contribute to a national platform that values the ideas and voices of young people”.

However, most importantly for Mevia, by serving “as a young adult commissioner I too can encourage other Pacific Island young adults to become more actively involved within all three courts of the Church”.

“I believe that it’s important for young adults to be involved in the decision-making of the Church because we are an integral part to the life, the growth and the future of the Presbyterian Church. We contribute greatly to the vibrancy of the body and we have so much to give.”

Mevia says that the Presbyterian Church has made a great investment by including the voice of young people and allowing young people to serve as commissioners.



Nadia Risdale - GA youth commissioner, Presbytery Central

Having grown up in the Presbyterian Church, GA youth commissioner Nadia Risdale says she values community formed through Christian faith and built on corporate worship.

“I am grateful for the opportunity I have been given growing up to be part of this through St Albans and Presbytery Central. I wanted to be a youth commissioner for a few reasons.

Through interning at St Albans and studying through Pathways Bible College in 2017, I realised that I want to work in ministry in the future. I think being a commissioner and

seeing some of the ‘behind-the-scenes’ work of the Presbyterian Church will be a valuable experience and a great opportunity to make connections with others. Also, I appreciate the tradition of having youth commissioners at General Assembly. I believe young adults aren’t

just the future Church, but they are the Church of today; so it is important our voices are represented.”

Nadia says that General Assembly is “an opportunity for Christian traditions and beliefs to be reinforced in the context of the Presbyterian Church and taught to a younger generation”.

Keynote Address - Rev Ned Ripley



Due to the Rev Ned Ripley being taken seriously ill on last week, the Moderator Right Rev Fakaofa Kaio read Ned's prep-prepared keynote address for him. He then called for the Assembly to join with him in prayer for Ned and his family.

Rev Ned Ripley was raised in American Samoa, he later trained for ministry in Auckland with the Congregational Church.

From the early 1980s, he was Dean of Maori & Polynesian Studies at the Church's Theological Hall in Dunedin.

Ned was minister of Otara Pacific Islanders Church for 15 years. He retired from ministry in 1989.

He was awarded the Queen's Service Medal for Public Services (QSM) in 1982 and is a Justice of the Peace and an elder.

Ministry Enterprise Fund exemption clause change

Assembly agreed to a proposal from Council of Assembly that addresses an anomaly in the exemption clause for contribution to the Mission Enterprise Fund.

Under previous rules, a parish could only be exempt from contributing 10 percent of the net sale proceeds of a parish property to the Mission Enterprise Fund (MEF) if a manse was being sold to replace a manse, or a worship centre sold to replace a worship centre.

Manse sale proceeds used to fund a new worship centre did not qualify for the exemption, and vice versa.

Assembly agreed to amend the relevant supplementary provision to address the anomaly. Council of Assembly convenor Jenny Flett said that the change was consistent with the spirit and intent for contributions to the Mission Enterprise Fund.

Assembly noted that some parishes have been unfairly disadvantaged by the inequity of the exemption clause.

To address this inequity, Assembly resolved that PressGo could make grants equal to the amount contributed to the MEF to parishes where the Council of Assembly agrees that the parish would have qualified for the Mission Enterprise Fund exemption, as adopted by this General Assembly – if this wording had been implemented by the 2014 General Assembly.

Assembly approved a grant to Whakatu Presbyterian Parish, and invited any other parish that believes it meets the criteria, to apply to the Council of Assembly by 31 May 2019.

The proposal attracted a couple of questions of clarification from commissioners, one of which sought clarity about the definition of worship centre. Jenny confirmed that it was her understanding that “worship centre”, as expressed in the amended clause, included a hall.

Changes to BOO align new presbytery structure

Assembly today accepted recommended changes to the Book of Order.

The Book of Order Advisory Committee presented changes that provide for the different ways that the Church’s now very large regional presbyteries need to function including:

- the appointment of a presbytery council, with full powers of presbytery, other than for budget considerations and voting on matters referred under the special legislation procedure.
- the introduction of deputy presbytery moderators
- provision for decisions to be reviewed by the presbytery council, which allows for contentious matters to be re-considered before they get to the appeal stage
- provision for presbyteries to conduct their business by electronic communications.

“These changes give consistency and clarity to what is already working in practice,” says Convenor Pamela Tankersley.

The process for dissolving a congregation now references the fact that minister’s entitlements persist for six months from the date of dissolution, which resolves any ambiguity.

Assembly agreed that a delegate of the convenor of the ministry settlement board could moderate a congregational meeting called to elect members to the ministry settlement board. Under previous regulations, only the convenor could fulfil this duty.

Changes subject to the special legislative procedure were also approved and will be sent to relevant Church courts for consideration.

Important documents get overhaul

Comprehensive changes to chapter 15 of the Book of Order, which deals with discipline, will be brought to the 2020 General Assembly.

This is a major body of work, said Pamela Tankersley, convenor of the Book of Order Advisory Committee (BOAC), and the changes will take into account recommendations from the 2016 task group which examined the Church’s disciplinary processes, as well as current procedures in the Church, compliance with secular law and current practices in other churches and voluntary institutions.

“We hope to incorporate in the revised chapter learnings from Maori and other cultures within the Church, particularly on restorative justice and mediation processes,” says Pamela.

The BOAC chose not to take further action on the use of social media during Assembly, largely because any regulations would be unenforceable. Instead, the committee felt commissioners should commit as a matter of principle to “keeping Assembly matters within Assembly,” Pamela reported.

The BOAC also updated the development of a comprehensive Child Safety policy. The new policy will be submitted to the Council of Assembly for approval as a Supplementary Provision as soon as it is available.

Updates to the Conditions of Service Manual and the Code of Ethics, which were issued in March 2018, were ratified by General Assembly. The manual was long overdue for an overhaul, and it now reflects current employment legislation, along with content more sensibly arranged for easy use by congregations.

The Church's revised Code of Ethics is now a stand-alone supplementary provision rather than being part of the Conditions of Service Manual.

In addition to ratifying these important documents, Assembly also approved a raft of technical changes to the Book of Order to make it more consistent.

Northern Presbytery hits the refresh button

The Northern Presbytery embraces over 100 churches. Casting its net far and wide, the presbytery has recognised the need to rethink its structure and how it operates.

Assembly heard today more detail on what that has meant in 2018. Five regions have been established to develop and implement ministry and mission, while the Presbytery Council takes on a governance role.

Youth director Gary Maunga reported that a review of youth ministry work confirmed the value of the current youth coordinator role.

"We've also formed a youth forum with reps from each parish who organise events and contribute to the twice-yearly full presbytery meetings," Gary says.

Moderator Steve Millward greeted Assembly in the multiple languages of his congregation members and explained how he sees his role as a connector, sharing the Good News and inspiring people to come together as agents of change. "We hope Northern Presbytery can say in future that God is able to do more than we could possibly imagine," he says.

Emma Keown explained that the presbytery has engaged two senior ministers to review how it can best support Asian congregations. They are also reviewing the three Presbytery campsites for optimal use in ministry and mission.

"We also have a big goal to review all of our congregations over the next two years," she adds, "and have appointed a part-time parish reviewer to help us with this audacious task."

Moderator's role in mission clarified

Today Assembly agreed that the Moderator has five key areas of activity:

- Moderating General Assembly
- Undertaking ceremonial and celebration activities like representing the Church at national and international ecumenical and cultural events
- Mission
- Being a pastoral presence around the Church
- Contributing to policy formation.

When it comes to mission, Assembly agreed that the Moderator's core tasks are firstly to listen and share the missional direction of the Presbyterian Church with members of the Church, and secondly, to engage directly with Presbytery leadership to inspire and encourage mission at all levels of the Church.

Clarification of the Moderator's role in mission came as a result of a comprehensive review of the Moderator's role and function undertaken by a task group established by General Assembly 2016.

A 2004 report to General Assembly was the starting point for the task group, who also consulted extensively with the wider church in coming up with the recommendations presented to this Assembly.

The task group's report to Assembly says that the area of mission leadership was problematic because "confusion reigns about who the primary agents of mission are within the Church,".

To clarify issues around role and function of the Moderator and his or her role in mission, the work group went back to what it is to be "Presbyterian" in terms of the Church's theology of leadership.

As well as agreeing to proposals about the Moderator's tasks, Assembly also agreed to recommendations about the Moderator's term, stipend and expenses and the process for electing the Moderator [see story below].

More diversity sought in Moderator nominations

A new process for calling and electing the Church's Moderator was among changes to the Moderator's role agreed to today by Assembly.

The Moderator Review task group, established by the 2016 General Assembly, brought a series of recommendations that clarify the Moderator's tasks [see previous story on tasks] the moderatorial election process, the Moderator's stipend and expenses and other matters.

In changes agreed to today, parishes will now be able to nominate up to four people who must reflect lay and ordained, male and female, and the multi-cultural diversity of the Church.

Parishes may nominate suitable candidates from anywhere in the country and nominees do not necessarily need to come from their presbytery area. Presbyteries are now required to seek nominee permission before putting forward names.

The step of shortlisting candidates before stage one voting has been removed (it was needed when there were 23 presbyteries, but is no longer necessary).

While the proposal eventually lost, an amendment from the floor of Assembly which sought to stipulate that presbyteries must nominate a man and a woman in the final round of nominations attracted much debate.

Those opposed to the amendment indicated that it would prohibit presbyteries from nominating two women, and that such a stipulation failed to acknowledge the skill set of candidates.

Those who supported the amendment indicated that the existing provisions encouraging diversity are not working, and pointed to the fact that the Church has only had four female moderators as evidence.

In making the recommendations to Assembly, Peter Dunn of the Moderator Review Task Group, acknowledged that legislation is a blunt instrument that will not necessarily bring change, but that what the task group presented were “aspirational recommendations”.

Assembly agreed that Moderators may only serve a single term, and each term could be up to full time for a period of two years.

In response to concerns that the incoming Moderator or their parish bears an undue financial burden in the lead-up to their installation, Assembly agreed to fund the incoming Moderator for a period of six months before he or she starts their term. They will be supported by the Presbyterian Church on a .33FTE benchmarked to the stipend structure.

For their term, a stipend-based remuneration will be negotiated with the Moderator, so that neither he or she, their congregation, or their employer will be financially disadvantaged during their term.

Assembly also agreed that allowance be made for the Moderator’s spouse or other support person to accompany them when travelling.

Celebrating women in ministry

Moderator Rt Rev Fakaofu was presented with a copy of a research report into women in ministry.

Women of the Burning Bush: Still Burning 25 Years On is a study of women in ministry within the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. The research, led by Dr Vivienne Adair, follows research commissioned by the Very Rev Margaret Reid Martin in 1990.

Rev Sharon Ross Ensor, who was part of the research oversight group, indicated that the overall impression from the research was that the Church’s women ministers are a group who are committed and passionate about ministry path that they are on. Sharon said that one of the main differences between this research and that of 25 years ago is that women are accepted as competent ministers and more women are satisfied with their accomplishments.

“We acknowledge those women of courage, tenacity and vision who have gone before us,” says Sharon.

“It is clear that this report is not something to be filed away as a snapshot in time,” says Sharon. “We want it to be a platform for further dialogue and conversation.”

In accepting the report,

In Brief:

- The memorial minutes of 19 ministers who have passed away since last Assembly were placed in the records of General Assembly 2018.
- General Assembly acknowledged the anniversaries of ordination. The Moderator conveyed warm congratulations and the greetings of Assembly to those who would pass this milestone before the next General Assembly.

- Assembly received the audited accounts for the year ending 30 June 2018. The Council of Assembly was authorised to sign the audited accounts on behalf of General Assembly.
- A range of technical corrections to the Book of Order were approved by General Assembly.
- Assembly ratified Supplementary Provisions that have been adopted by Council of Assembly since the last Assembly

Devotions

Rev Dr Kerry Enright lead devotions this morning at Assembly. [Download the Litany here](#)