

BRINGING CLARITY TO OUR MISSION

APRIL 2014



Presbyterian Church
of Aotearoa New Zealand



The background of the page features a serene landscape with a clear blue sky at the top and a body of water with gentle ripples at the bottom. A white rectangular box is positioned in the upper left, containing the title and a paragraph of text.

Challenges of our Church **OUTLINED**

This document will form part of the Council's report to the General Assembly and will include recommendations regarding how our response to these challenges might be resourced.

Dear presbyteries

Greetings in Christ's name from the Council of Assembly.

We are writing to you because it is our conviction that there are challenges for the present and future life of our Church that require the urgent attention of presbyteries and congregations.

The first part of this document describe the nature of these challenges and the second part offers some analysis and suggestions for how these challenges can be addressed.

This document will form part of the Council's report to the General Assembly and will include recommendations regarding how our response to these challenges might be resourced.

It was adopted by the Council and forms the basis of the implementation of the Council's strategy in relation to the directions for the national Church's focus and priorities.

This document should be read in conjunction with the Council's Strategic Directions document. http://www.presbyterian.org.nz/sites/default/files/small_file_Strategic_Directions-PCANZ.pdf

Responses to this document would be welcomed by the Council. Please contact the Council directly waynem@knoxstc.org.nz and through the presbytery leaders and administrators meeting in June 2014.

Council of Assembly

Part 1: The challenges we face together

Over the last few months we have been looking at information about the Church's life and mission in recent years, and what we discovered has compelled us to share our hopes and concerns for our Church.

We want to not only share this information but also offer encouragement and suggestions for the way ahead.

It is important for us to begin by affirming the ways that God is working in and through our Church. We want to be a Church that celebrates, encourages and welcomes the people of our communities into the mission to which we are called.

Though there is some challenging information here, nothing we say is intended to undermine the hopes and passion of those committed to sharing in God's mission to and in the world through the work of our Church.

We've been here before –new expressions of mission and life and growth are in our history and DNA. Our early European forebears came to New Zealand with such hope and commitment to establish the Church here and worked with both Pakeha and Maori missionaries, telling people the good news, and establishing communities of faith and worship.

Many of our older churches established new congregations in their wider communities and districts. In fact, we do not need to go back further than the New Life movement of the 1950s and 60s to see our Church and its members generously supporting the establishment and mission of new churches in New Zealand's growing urban communities.

More recently, our Pacific land Korean communities have built vital and often large churches whose origins can be found in the faithfulness, generosity and vision of a small number of individuals and families committed to the church's mission and ministry.

We also have some terrific events, such as Connect for our young people, Transformers Camps for young teenagers, Offspring for those seeking ways to plant and grow new forms of the church, and a range of events for some of our specific ethnic groups, all of which attract increasingly large numbers of people. We hope that our new Assembly Week event this year will also be a time of support and encouragement for our Church and its leaders.

What the Council is asking for us now, with hearts of thankfulness and praise, is to build on the past and present stories of hope and blessing, and to work to build and plant a Church for this new era.

Our Church is changing

Trends and changes that we have been aware of for a long time are continuing. If the challenges these trends represent are not addressed now our Church will become greatly diminished in the life of our communities and country.

Membership and church attendance has dropped significantly over the last 10 years, and the number of ministers we can afford to support through our congregations has reduced by almost

a third over this time. At the same time, many of our congregations have experienced a significant reduction in their size. Of our 400 congregations, 150 have fewer than 40 adults at worship on a Sunday. This is a 50 percent increase in the number of small congregations in the past 10 years.

We are also mindful that the Church has received significant material blessing. Over these last 10 years the wealth of our congregations has increased by over 80 percent to now stand at over 130 million dollars (not including the increased value of land held in trust for our congregations). This is money controlled by congregations.

We are also mindful that a very large number of those who come to church, and have been such generous supporters, are now well into their 70s and 80s.

Of course, with all statistics we have to be careful. The idea of "regular" church attendance has changed, which makes measuring those involved more difficult. We have dynamic smaller congregations who fulfil extraordinarily important mission and outreach in their communities, and most attending a Presbyterian church experience worship within the context of a larger congregation. Our largest church may soon have more than 1,000 people attending on Sundays and we have several dynamic Korean congregations who were not even part of our church 20 years ago.

But we face some very troubling realities

- Our wealth is accumulating while our influence and engagement with our communities is declining. We believe this is unacceptable for us as a denomination committed to following Jesus.
- We have many congregations that perpetuate their lives with funding from investments and the generosity of a small number of members, rather than on mission among those who are not present at their services.
- We have far fewer ministers and others with the time and support to dedicate to the activities of regional and national functions.
- The number of very small congregations continues to increase, unabated.
- We spend a vast amount on buildings, an amount that is likely to increase as our communities commit their funds to comply with new building codes.

The Council thinks these matters are becoming increasingly critical for our future life as a Church and need to be addressed with urgent prayer to help us discern God's will for the future. We believe that the time is right for bold action – to take risks, to try new things as our forebears did – as we undertake our journey toward re-imagining mission and Church for today's world.

We believe the following considerations are critical to enable congregations to develop new mission imaginations for today's world, and to build dynamic, enduring communities of faith that are equipped to share the Good News:

1. Complete your own analysis of where things are heading in your presbytery and use this analysis as a basis for prayer, reflection and discernment.
2. Invest in and support our leaders.
3. Prioritise ministry to children and young people.
4. Invest in the future by not spending any more money on buildings that are not meaningfully contributing to the present and future mission of our Church.
5. Address the difficult issues around decline and stewardship – with a focus on shifting resources to support mission and new forms of being the church.
6. Do not amalgamate declining congregations.
7. Invest in growing congregations that are experiencing renewal through mission, regardless of their size.
8. Invest in the buy-in and implementation of a mission-focused strategy that will build strong, enduring communities of faith.
9. Use growing and well-resourced congregations as vehicles for new church plants and absorption of small declining congregations.
10. Commit to intentional outcome focused on local and global mission.

The Council is intending to bring recommendations to the General Assembly focused on shifting resources to enable us to invest in mission and in doing so build resilient and enduring faith communities.

Part 2: Guidelines for the development of a mission-focused growth strategy

There is no substitute for faithful individuals and communities committed to making Jesus Christ known.

So how do we allocate the Church's resources in ways most likely to support the Church's mission?

In a theoretical sense, the Church's organisational capacity to fulfil its mission is perhaps as strong now as it ever has been. This is because our congregations are accumulating significant wealth in investments and cash (as well as the value of their land) despite the fact that, overall, membership and participation rates continue declining quite rapidly. There is a simple prophetic and ethical question here: can we in good conscience watch as the wealth of the church increases while its witness and mission declines?

There are real issues in this scenario for us as an organisation. One risk is simply as smaller groups of people have access to greater financial resources there is a diminished likelihood of those resources being used for the benefit of the Church's or presbytery's mission as a whole.

This scenario is being played out around the country now, for example:

You have sold one of your church buildings because of diminishing membership; you have sold the manse because you know you are never going to be able to fund a minister. Now you have \$400 000 in the bank and you need the \$20,000 pa income this generates to pay for your on-going building costs and supply ministry.

Many of the medium and small congregations in New Zealand are finding themselves somewhere on this conveyor belt of decline. There is no future in this equation.

The only entity which can engage with a congregation and help work to a different future is the **presbytery**.

One important thing to note is that while this scenario (or one like it) is the common experience for an increasing number of our congregations, it is less the experience of those who actually worship in a Presbyterian church. More people are worshipping in larger Presbyterian churches.

It is also important to add that we already have congregations that are re-imagining mission in their context, and are growing and supporting new ways of being the church. These congregations are more than willing to share their experiences with others.

If we are to find a way through with this, the challenge sits with presbyteries.

Presbyteries need to not only develop a strong strategic commitment to growth, but they also need to invest in their own capacity to embody that strategy in the decisions they make.

Findings from a recent and comprehensive study by the Church of England indicate what is probably more or less true for us here as well:

While there is no single recipe, there are common ingredients strongly associated with growth of churches of any size, place or context:

1. Good leadership
2. A clear mission and purpose
3. Willingness to self-reflect and learn continually
4. Willingness to change and adapt according to context
5. Lay as well as clergy involvement and leadership
6. Being intentional about prioritising growth
7. Actively engaging children and teenagers
8. Actively engaging with those who might not usually go to church
9. Good welcoming and follow-up for visitors
10. Commitment to nurturing new and existing Christians

The two factors most closely correlated with decline were:

- Lack of retention of children and young people
- The effect of amalgamations

In the study, there was no correlation between growth and theological tradition or the gender, ethnicity or marital status of the leader.

Context

The Presbyterian Church probably has more church buildings now than it did in the 1960s, when we had three times our current membership. What is now even more concerning is that congregations are turning to their accumulated wealth to fix and strengthen underutilised buildings that were constructed for a very different context than the one faced by the Church today.

In addition, it is only going to get more difficult. Compliance issues around building safety, financial reporting and Charities Commission expectations, for example, are going to demand more time from a diminishing group of volunteers and fewer paid church administrators, leaders, ministers, youth and children's workers.

We do not want to close congregations but we do think that we can do things differently and in a way that will enhance our capacity to fulfil our mission among the people of our communities.

It is our conviction that as difficult as these changes might be, the reality is that unless we make decisions now, simply reacting to change is going to see continuing decline in both participation in, and effectiveness of, our Church's mission.

Key elements in a forward growth strategy:

1. Investment in the leadership we need

Effective leadership that drives mission-oriented congregations, and consequently growth is a combination of specific qualities and skills with the intention to grow (British study). Nationwide there are a diminishing number of ministers as fewer and fewer congregations can fund stipends. However, we are caught in something of a conundrum here. Fewer resources and people available to do basic administrative and managerial tasks often means that ministers are being drawn into functions that do not relate to their calling, training or skill base. Whatever decisions are made, we need to free ministers to use their training and skills for the growth of the church. One simple factor in the success of some of our larger churches is that they have the resources that enable ministers to get on with doing what they have been trained and called to do. We also need to ensure that our ministers are well supported and resourced in their role. The presbytery can play a key role in this by enhancing collegial support by, for example, facilitating retreats and leadership cohorts.

2. Investment in new alternative congregations

A fresh expression of Church seeks to be:

- Missional: to serve those outside church
- Contextual: to listen to people and enter their culture
- Educational: to make discipleship a priority
- Ecclesial: to form church

In order to be classed as a fresh expression of church, a group meets a number of criteria:

1. It is something Christian and communal, new, and further, is not an existing group that has been modified.
2. It seeks to engage with non-church goers.
3. It meets at least once a month.
4. It has (or is seeking to have) a name giving it an identity.
5. There is an intention to be Church (not a bridge to bring people back to “real church”).
6. It is formally recognised by the presbytery.
7. There is some form of leadership recognised within and from outside.
8. The majority of members see it as their major expression of church.
9. There is an intention (where it is appropriate to the context) to become self-financing,
10. It is self-governing and self-reproducing.

3. Church plants – yes Amalgamations – no

In terms of developing mission-oriented faith communities, there are two church planting scenarios which appear to be working in New Zealand (*this is supported by data*).

1. A team of people, which includes a range of leaders, from a larger and growing church, take on the responsibility of growing and developing the mission and ministry of a small or declining congregation. The drive sees a new self-supporting congregation emerge over a three to five year period – which may or may not remain part of the church from where the team came from.
2. Two or more congregations agree to dissolve with their assets used to establish a new entity with a new leadership base.

Amalgamations

As both our own experience and the overseas data indicates, amalgamating congregations that have both been declining (as a survival strategy) and without a renewed sense of mission, a change in the dynamics of the leadership team, and increased resourcing of ministry, is almost never an effective option in terms of supporting mission-focused growth.

What about cooperating ventures?

There are implications in adopting this strategic framework for the Church's relationship with other partner churches who share cooperating ventures. However, all these congregations are fully Presbyterian just as they are fully the denomination of the other partner(s). The presbytery has the same obligations to address issues of mission and ministry in these entities and work through, on a case-by-case basis with church members and partners, the implications of these strategic initiatives.

Some options for your presbytery

Invest in congregations that are experiencing renewal through mission, and are growing.

Regardless of their size, research shows that growing congregations tend to exhibit characteristics such as empowering leadership, inspiring worship and gift-oriented ministry among other things – all of which are characteristics needed to build the Church's capacity for mission. Building a growing church's capacity (whatever its current size) is probably going to do more than anything else to strengthen the Church's mission as a whole.

1. Invest in these congregations to enable them to also plant or re-plant congregations in key areas around the presbytery.
2. Invest in a person and/or team who can work towards supporting some new expression of the church's presence and mission in the context of one or more areas of opportunity (this could be done by the presbytery itself or again through one of these congregations).
3. Do not support the amalgamation of any numerically declining congregations unless there is a change in the current leadership team, an agreed renewed mission, and a means to provide resourcing to engage in that mission.
4. Continue a process of dissolving small and declining congregations that do not have a sustainable future, but do so in conjunction with a plan to continue a Presbyterian presence and witness through planting, replanting or alternative congregation's structures.

Key points

1. Shift resources so that we can invest in opportunities for growth.
2. Encourage and resource congregations that have a strong and active commitment to children and young people.
3. Dissolve small declining congregations but do it in a way that maintains some church presence and witness and is supported by a commitment to plant or replant a new congregation in the area.
4. Do not support any further investment in the buildings belonging to smaller, declining congregations.
5. Free ministers to do the job they were trained to do (whatever way you look at it, they are too valuable/expensive an asset to have them doing the photocopying) and actively support and resource them in their leadership role.
6. Only call ministers who are open to change and committed to growing the congregation through worship relevant to its context, teaching, and the leading of mission and the making of disciples.
7. Invest in new expressions of church and mission that might, or might not, fail. Note that the Church of England research, along with evaluation by the Fresh Expressions movement, shows that 10 percent of new expressions of church will fail.
8. Do not see amalgamation as providing a solution unless there has been significant work done around a renewed sense of mission, a willingness by the congregations to engage with this mission and the resourcing made available to enable it to happen.

Help from the national Church

The Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership (KCML) is committed to train and support our Church's leaders. A primary focus of KCML is the training of those called to the ordained ministry. Every year around six to eight people complete their training and are called to serve a congregation. These people are trained to lead worship, conduct the sacraments, build communities of faith, teach, lead mission, and develop disciples.

KCML is also committed to the training and resourcing of local ordained ministers, leadership teams, elders and others who exercise church leadership. KCML provides written resources and its staff are available to run training events and other workshops for those in leadership roles.

Kids Friendly focuses on the development of congregations seeking to minister to children and their families. Kids Friendly provides training, coaching, resources and a network of similar minded congregations supporting one another in this vital mission and ministry work.

Presbyterian Youth Ministry focuses on mission and ministry to teenagers and young adults. Through large annual events like Connect, Going Further, support of the Presbyterian Youth Workers Diploma and by providing resources and training events, PYM has a key role in our Church's commitment to younger people.

Global Mission Coordinator works with presbyteries, congregations and other groups to support and resource our commitment to mission in different parts of the world.

Press Go is a team of people committed to the growth of our Church through working with presbyteries and congregations to develop their capacity for mission. Press Go has a focus on helping presbyteries and congregations both access resources and use these resources to develop new opportunities for growth. The Press Go team uses an extensive network of people with expertise and skills to assist presbyteries and congregations.

Our Finance Team is more than willing to assist presbyteries and congregations to engage with issues around the Charities Commission and compliance with new financial reporting standards. They can also point you to other suppliers of financial services and software options that are specialised in helping congregations and smaller organisations comply with current standards.

Our Communications Manager can provide excellent advice and resources for the development of communications strategy and to help think about the use of social media and other more contemporary modes of communication.

Our Resource Centre provides a new online service that can make available books, journals and other resources that can be helpful.

Our current and former Moderators are also excellent resource people who are willing to continue in their service to the Church by offering their experience, expertise and insights.

Contacts for all our national Church team are here on the Church website.
<http://presbyterian.org.nz/about-us/contact-us/assembly-service-team>

www.presbyterian.org.nz



Presbyterian Church
of Aotearoa New Zealand