

Information presented to General Assembly 2010

Contents

Background to proposals 1,2 and 3	2
Background to proposals 4 and 5	31
Background to Proposals 8, 9 and 10	38
Background to Proposal 11	42
Background to Proposal 11	44

Background to proposals 1,2 and 3

Subordinate Standards Task Group: Adding to or replacing our Subordinate Standards

REPORT

Background

The Subordinate Standards Task Group was established by the 1999 Special Assembly and was charged with reviewing the Subordinate Standards of this Church. We have long been working on a Focal Identity Statement as a possible new Subordinate Standard. This has been a long and complex task. We have made interim reports to successive General Assemblies, which have given us strong feedback. Our work has also been shaped in part by consultation with the wider Church, and we are grateful for the excellent comments and suggestions we have received.

The 2008 Assembly

As documented in Appendix 1, the 2008 General Assembly referred our proposals back to the Task Group, commending our hard work thus far, confirming the desirability of a contemporary Confession, and noting that, 'since any modification of the Church's Subordinate Standards is legally required (by the Church's constitution) to be "in agreement with the Word of God and the fundamental doctrines of the Reformed Faith contained in its Subordinate Standards", there is no objection in principle to a contemporary Confession standing alongside the historic standards as an additional Subordinate Standard rather than as a replacement.' It also asked that the proposed Confession and Commentary be strengthened with regard to some fourteen doctrines, requested that the Council of Assembly expand the Task Group's membership, and adopted its resolutions as the Task Groups' new Terms of Reference.

We believe we have fulfilled those directions set by the last General Assembly. The Kupu Whakapono and Commentary have been significantly revised.

The Kupu Whakapono and Commentary

We acknowledge that, as in all attempts to confess the faith once delivered, human words and formulations are inadequate and flawed. But we are very pleased nevertheless now to be commending to Assembly a contemporary Confession and Commentary. We believe these documents express the Christian faith in the words of our own time and place, twenty-first century Aotearoa-New Zealand. We believe that acceptance of the Kupu Whakapono and associated Commentary will achieve the significant step forward of a new contemporary New Zealand affirmation of the worldwide Christian faith, a witness which recognises our unique bi-cultural and multi-cultural setting and emphasises the Church's unity in Christ. The Task Group is unanimous in recommending to General Assembly that it now give these documents the status of Subordinate Standards.

General Assembly's choice: add or replace

On the more difficult issue of whether the new Subordinate Standards should be additional or replacement standards, the Task Group has decided to take no position, and wishes to leave that choice entirely in the hands of General Assembly. All are agreed that, spiritually and doctrinally, the Westminster confessional documents are an

extremely important part of this Church's roots. The question for General Assembly itself to decide is what status those historic standards should now have.

Some still greatly treasure our existing foundational Subordinate Standards as key elements in our confessional identity and integrity, and will want the Church to honour the existing Subordinate Standards by leaving them in place, with the new contemporary standards functioning as additional rather than replacement Standards. For those who wish to retain the historic standards, any acknowledged difficulties in the Westminster Confession (such as the anti-Catholic rhetoric and some theological points) are adequately covered by the provisions of the Declaratory Act (Appendix 2). Also, the Task Group's proposed re-wording of the Formula used in the ordination of ministers and elders, Recommendation 3(d), would make it explicit that this Church allows liberty of conviction on matters which go beyond the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith.

Others remain uncomfortable with aspects of the Westminster Confession, despite the Declaratory Act, and will prefer our Church to take the further step of falling from its historic standards and to have them fully replaced by the Kupu Whakapono and Commentary. At the same time they would want the Church formally to honour the historic standards as authoritative witnesses to our Reformed heritage, and to write that into our Constitution, and Recommendation 4(d) provides for that.

This is a choice that only General Assembly can make.

To facilitate General Assembly's decision-making, we have provided two key resolutions, from which all else will follow. The passing of Recommendation 1 would lead to the Kupu Whakapono and Commentary achieving the status of Subordinate Standards, alongside the existing historic standards.

If Assembly then wishes to take the further step of falling from the existing Subordinate Standards and making the Kupu Whakapono and Commentary the only Subordinate Standards of this Church, it would support Recommendation 2.

If only Recommendation 1 is passed, then Assembly will move to Recommendation 3. If both Recommendation 1 and 2 are passed, then Assembly will move to Recommendation 4. These sets of recommendations follow through on what was decided in relation to the first two recommendations.

Major constitutional changes

For the Presbyterian Church to modify its Subordinate Standards is an extremely serious constitutional matter. Both scenarios (adding or replacing) thus involve an appropriately named Act of Modification, which are amended versions of what was previously drafted by Ian Millard QC in consultation with the Task Group. Both scenarios also involve consequential changes in the wording of the Church's constitution.

A revised Formula

Both alternative sets of resolutions (i.e. Recommendations 3 and 4) include a proposed revision of the Formula, to make it plain that ministers and elders are accountable to the Church with regards to the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith contained in the Word of God and the Subordinate Standards, but are permitted liberty of conviction on matters that fall outside those fundamental doctrines. The revised formula would also

preclude the possibility of anyone attempting to play off the historic standards against the new standards, if the Church decides to retain its existing standards.

A library of confessional documents

Both sets of resolutions also include our longstanding recommendation that there be created an easily accessible library of confessional documents that are important in the Church's heritage of faith. This library of documents is to be published, and also made available on the Church's website. The intention of this measure is to facilitate the Church's familiarity with its creeds and confessions. The library includes confessional documents of several types: (1) ancient creeds shared with much of the Church worldwide (the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds) (2) Confessions from similar Reformed traditions (the Heidelberg Catechism and Second Helvetic Confession) (3) confessional documents reflecting our own Presbyterian family of Churches (the Scots Confession, Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms) (4) new confessional statements expressing our faith from our contemporary context in Aotearoa-New Zealand (the Kupu Whakapono and Commentary).

Thank you

On behalf of the wider Church I wish to record profound thanks to all members of the Task Group, some of them working on this task for many years. Previous members of the Task Group include the Rev. Alister Rae and, until earlier this year, the Rev. Dr. Susan Jones. The current members of the Task Group are Rev. Sally Carter (from 2008), Rev. Dr. Bruce Hamill, Rev. Dr. Stuart Lange (from 2008), Rev. Dr. Murray Rae, Natalie Yule-Yeoman (from 2008) and Rev. Richard Dawson. The outworking of our task has been enriched by the deep faith and gracious spirit of all members of the group. With humility we now offer our work to General Assembly and the wider Church, trusting Assembly to be led by the Holy Spirit as it makes its decisions.

Richard Dawson (Convener)

Appendix 1: Task Group Terms of Reference as established by the 2008 General Assembly

The 2008 Assembly resolved:

That Assembly

- (a) confirms the desirability of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand having a contemporary Confession of Faith
- (b) Commends the hard work of the Focal Identity Statement Task Group towards formulating such a contemporary Confession and commentary
- (c) Notes that since any modification of the Church's Subordinate Standards is legally required (by the Church's constitution) to be "in agreement with the Word of God and the fundamental doctrines of the Reformed Faith contained in its Subordinate Standards " there is no objection in principle to a contemporary Confession standing alongside the historic standards as an additional Subordinate Standard rather than as a replacement
- (d) Refers the proposed Confession and commentary back to the Task Group, asking that it strengthens both of them with regard to essential Reformed doctrine, including: the character and attributes of God; the inspiration and

- authority of Scripture; the sinfulness of humanity and consequent alienation from God; the uniqueness of Christ; the covenants; the sacrifice and saving effect of Christ crucified; the sovereign work of God in bringing about our salvation; justification by faith; new birth by the work of the Holy Spirit; the return of Christ; eternal life; the resurrection of the body; judgment; the Church; evangelism and mission.
- (e) Adopts this set of resolutions as Terms of Reference for the Task Group.
 - (f) Requests the Council of Assembly to expand the membership of the Task Group.
-

Appendix 2: Existing Declaratory Act, relating to the Westminster Confession

Appendix C-1: Declaratory Act 1892-3

(Passed by the Free Church of Scotland 1892, by the Synod of Otago and Southland 1893, and incorporated in the Agreement for Union 1901, Article II.)

Whereas it is expedient to remove difficulties and scruples which have been felt by some in reference to the declaration of belief required from persons who receive license or are admitted to office in this Church, the General Assembly declares as follows:

That, in holding and teaching, according to the Confession, the divine purpose of grace towards those who are saved, and the execution of that purpose in time, this Church most earnestly proclaims, as standing in the forefront of the revelation of Grace, the love of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to sinners of mankind, manifested especially in the Father's gift of the Son to be the Saviour of the world in the coming of the Son to offer Himself a propitiation for sin, and in the striving of the Holy Spirit with men to bring them to repentance.

That this Church also holds that all who hear the Gospel are warranted and required to believe to the saving of their souls, and that in the case of such as do not believe, but perish in their sins, the issue is due to their own rejection of the Gospel call. That this Church does not teach, and does not regard the Confession as teaching, the fore-ordination of men to death irrespective of their own sin.

That it is the duty of those who believe, and one end of their calling by God, to make known the Gospel to all men everywhere for the obedience of faith. And that while the Gospel is the ordinary means of salvation for those to whom it is made known, yet it does not follow, nor is the Confession to be held as teaching, that any who die in infancy are lost, or that God may not extend His mercy for Christ's sake, and by His Holy Spirit, to those who are beyond the reach of those means, as it may seem good to Him, according to the riches of His grace.

That, in holding and teaching, according to the Confession of Faith, the corruption of man's whole nature as fallen, this Church also maintains that there remain tokens of his greatness as created in the image of God; that he possesses a knowledge of God and duty, that he is responsible for compliance with the moral law and with the Gospel; and that, although unable without the aid of the Holy Spirit to return to God, he is yet capable of affections and actions which in themselves are virtuous and praiseworthy.

That this Church disclaims intolerant or persecuting principles, and does not consider her office-bearers, in subscribing the Confession, committed to any principles inconsistent with liberty of conscience and the right of private judgement.

That while diversity of opinion is recognised in this Church on such points in the Confession as do not enter into the substance of the Reformed Faith therein set forth, the Church retains full authority to determine, in any case which may arise, what points fall within this description, and thus to guard against any abuse of this liberty to the detriment of sound doctrine or to the injury of her unity and peace.

Appendix 3 (proposed Act of Modification, relevant to Recommendations 1 and 3)

1 ACT OF MODIFICATION ADDING NEW SUBORDINATE STANDARDS

whereas (by way of background):

A. The existing Constitution of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand in Section A, declares:

1. Standards

The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand is founded on the following basis:

- a) *That the Word of God, contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the supreme rule of faith and duty, and is the supreme standard of this Church.*
- b) *That the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms are the subordinate standards of this Church.*
- c) *The Declaratory Act of the General Assembly of the said Church sets forth, in regard to certain doctrines, what is required from those entering upon office.*
- d) *That the Directory for Worship (1995) and The Westminster Form of Church Government set forth generally the order of worship, discipline and government in this Church.*
- e) *That the Church has the right, in dependence on the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, to formulate, interpret or modify its subordinate standards; always in agreement with the Word of God and the fundamental doctrines of the Reformed Faith contained in the said Confession and other subordinate standards, of which agreement the Church itself shall be the sole judge.*

B. The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand recognises that:

- As a part of the Reformed Church tradition, it is its duty thereby to continually examine and, when necessary, modify its life and confession in response to the work of the Holy Spirit in its midst, always faithful, nevertheless, to the one Word of God made flesh in Jesus Christ and set forth in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.
- Having made provision for this in its own standards it should from time to time undertake a significant review of its confession of faith in order that it should speak clearly to each generation;

- Creeds and Confessions are, at heart, servants of the Gospel. They do not replace the Gospel but assist the Church to confess it; and
 - The act of confession of faith is an ongoing responsibility of the Church if it is to faithfully proclaim in the changing times the unchanging Gospel once delivered to the saints.
- C.** In light of that ongoing responsibility of the Church to proclaim in the changing times the unchanging Gospel, the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand has, in dependence on the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, undertaken a review of its subordinate standards.
- D.** The outcome of that review is the recommendation that the proposed Confession (Kupu Whakapono, Appendix 5) and accompanying Commentary (Appendix 6) become additional subordinate standards of this Church, together with this Church's historic confessional standards, the Westminster Confession of Faith as interpreted by Declaratory Act (Appendix 2) and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms.
- E.** The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand considers such proposed new additional Subordinate Standards of this Church to be in agreement with the Word of God and the fundamental doctrines of the Reformed Faith contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms (as is evidenced by this Church's agreement to them signified by the passing of this resolution and the eventual formal adoption of the proposed new Subordinate Standards).

General Assembly now resolves:

To approve the proposal that the Confession of Faith (Kupu Whakapono) attached as Appendix 5, together with the Commentary attached as Appendix 6, become Subordinate Standards of this Church, in addition to the historic standards the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms

Appendix 4: Proposed Act of Modification, relevant to Recommendations 2 and 4

ACT OF MODIFICATION REPLACING THE EXISTING SUBORDINATE STANDARDS

Whereas (by way of background):

- D.** The existing Constitution of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand in Section A, declares:

1. Standards

The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand is founded on the following basis:

- a) *That the Word of God, contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the supreme rule of faith and duty, and is the supreme standard of this Church.*
- b) *That the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms are the subordinate standards of this Church.*
- c) *The Declaratory Act of the General Assembly of the said Church sets forth, in regard to certain doctrines, what is required from those entering upon office.*
- d) *That the Directory for Worship (1995) and The Westminster Form of Church Government set forth generally the order of worship, discipline and government in this Church.*
- e) *That the Church has the right, in dependence on the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, to formulate, interpret or modify its subordinate standards; always in agreement with the Word of God and the fundamental doctrines of the Reformed Faith contained in the said Confession and other subordinate standards, of which agreement the Church itself shall be the sole judge.*

- E.** The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand recognises that:
- As a part of the Reformed Church tradition, it is its duty thereby to continually examine and, when necessary, modify its life and confession in response to the work of the Holy Spirit in its midst, always faithful, nevertheless, to the one Word of God made flesh in Jesus Christ and set forth in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.
 - Having made provision for this in its own standards it should from time to time undertake a significant review of its confession of faith in order that it should speak clearly to each generation;
 - Creeds and Confessions are, at heart, servants of the Gospel. They do not replace the Gospel but assist the Church to confess it; and
 - The act of confession of faith is an ongoing responsibility of the Church if it is to faithfully proclaim in the changing times the unchanging Gospel once delivered to the saints.
- F.** In light of that ongoing responsibility of the Church to proclaim in the changing times the unchanging Gospel, the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand has, in dependence on the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, undertaken a review of its subordinate standards, including its confession of faith.
- G.** An outcome of that review is the recommendation that the proposed Confession (Kupu Whakapono, Appendix 5) and accompanying Commentary (Appendix 6) become the new subordinate standards of this Church, replacing the Westminster Confession and Larger and Shorter Catechisms.
- H.** The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand considers such proposed new Subordinate Standards of this Church to be in agreement with the Word of God and the fundamental doctrines of the Reformed Faith contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms (as is evidenced by this Church's agreement to them signified by the passing of this resolution and the eventual formal adoption of the proposed new Subordinate Standards).

General Assembly now resolves:

To approve the proposal that the Confession of Faith (Kupu Whakapono) attached as Appendix 5, together with the Commentary attached as Appendix 6, become the new Subordinate Standards of this Church, replacing the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms.

Appendix 5 (Proposed additional Subordinate Standard, the Kupu Whakapono)

KUPU WHAKAPONO (Confession of Faith)

**From this land of Aotearoa New Zealand
we confess that we believe in and belong
to the one true and living God,
who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
love before all love.**

**We believe in God the Father,
sovereign and holy,
Creator and nurturer of all,
Father of Jesus Christ,
sender of the Holy Spirit,
and Judge of all the earth.**

**We believe in God the Son, Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour,
truly human and truly divine,
who lived among us full of grace and truth.
For our sin he was crucified
and by the power of God was raised from death,
forgiving us, setting us free and bringing to birth God's new creation.
Now ascended, he calls us to repentance and faith
and restores us to God and to one another.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
the giver of life at work in all creation,
who inspired the Scriptures and makes Christ known,
who transforms hearts and minds
and gathers us into the community of Christ,
empowering the Church in worship and in mission.**

**We belong to this triune God,
women and men,
young and old,
from many nations,
in Christ *he iwi kotahi tatou*,
witnesses to God's love in word and action,
servants of reconciliation,
and stewards of creation.**

[we are one people]

**As God's people,
we look forward in hope and joy
to the return of Christ,
to the new heaven and earth,
where evil and death will be no more,
justice and peace will flourish,
and we shall forever delight in the glory of God.**

Appendix 6 (Proposed additional Subordinate Standard, the Commentary)

Commentary on the Confession of Faith

Introduction

1. This Confession of Faith and the accompanying Commentary seeks to bear witness to the apostolic faith of the Christian Church, and to express our confidence that the same God who is made known to us in Jesus Christ is present through Word and Spirit in our own place and time. This confession expresses some distinctives of our context, as the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The confession will have value only as it binds us together in the one body of Christ, as it nourishes the Church in mission, and as it renews confidence in and commitment to the saving grace of God in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
2. Confessing the faith is how the Church 'binds itself to the Gospel... in astonished, fearful and grateful acknowledgement that the Gospel is the one word by which to live and die'.¹ Creeds and confessions are, at heart, servants of the Gospel. They do not replace the Gospel but assist the Church to confess it. In different times and places, the Church can find new words to declare the Gospel it has received. Furthermore, creeds and confessions are not, in and of themselves, the fullness of the Church's act of confession. There is always an inadequacy about our human confession of the mystery of God. For this reason, the Church offers its witness to the Gospel and its confession of faith with deep humility. We acknowledge that the clarity and the truth of our confession depends not on our own wisdom but on the continuing guidance and testimony of God's Spirit.
3. The Church's relationship to any particular confession must therefore be conditional. Trusting in the grace of God to lead us forward into new understandings of the truth, the Church accepts that the confessions it produces from time to time will always be limited in scope and in clarity and that there is always a need to review such formulas and ask whether what was written by previous generations still remains adequate to confess the faith. Revisions of the Church's confessional formulae need not imply rejection of previous confessions but are a recognition that the new times and places require new expressions of the faith handed down to us. The question might be put this way: 'do these new words of *ours* enable us to say *the same thing*?'

¹ 'Confession and Confessions' by John Webster in *Nicene Christianity: The Future for a New Ecumenism*, Ed. Christopher R Seitz. (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press 2001) p.119.

4. Formulating the faith in our own words is important for the mission of the Church, because we are accepting responsibility for the declaration of the Gospel in our own context, using the speech of those around us – those to whom God has sent us. To express the Gospel in our own language is an act of mission. Acts 2 records how, on the day of Pentecost, the Church itself was born as the Gospel was declared by the power of the Holy Spirit in languages that all could understand.
5. Confessing the faith is a continuing responsibility of the Church, as it seeks faithfully to proclaim in changing times and contexts the unchanging Gospel once delivered to the saints. That Gospel sustains and nurtures the whole Church of Jesus Christ throughout the world. This Confession of Faith signals that we stand within and are nourished by that same tradition. The most important beliefs we confess are those that are shared with all Christians throughout history and across whatever differences there may be in culture and context. We gratefully acknowledge the confessional heritage in which we belong. That heritage begins with Scripture itself, the supreme standard of our faith and the pre-eminent witness to God's grace, and is continued through a range of creeds and confessional documents that have nurtured and sustained the Church down through the ages. Among these, we acknowledge especially the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. These ecumenical Creeds continue to be authoritative for us in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and their place in our life helps bind us to the worldwide Church.
6. In addition to the early church creeds, important documents of our Reformed heritage have contributed to the renewal of the Church and to the clarity of its faith. These include the Scots Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Second Helvetic Confession and, especially for the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Westminster Shorter Catechism and the Westminster Larger Catechism. The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand is a diverse church in which people from many parts of the world now stand together in faith and belong. We acknowledge too, therefore, the enrichment of our church by traditions of faith, worship and mission that have been developed in Asia and the Pacific.
7. As indicated above, the whole truth of God is greater than can ever be encapsulated in any creed or confession. It has been a mark of God's grace, nevertheless, that the Word of God has been entrusted to such earthen vessels. Through them, and by the sustaining and life-giving power of the Holy Spirit, God has seen fit to preserve the Gospel among God's people. As promised in Scripture, the Spirit continues to give new light and purpose to the Church's proclamation of Christ and makes eloquent the stumbling witness of faith. It is in this confidence that the present Confession of Faith is made.
- 8. From this land of Aotearoa New Zealand,**
9. We make this Confession of Faith from within the land of Aotearoa, New Zealand. In doing so we acknowledge both the distinctives and the limitations of our context, and affirm that the Good News of Jesus Christ extends the reach of God's grace and truth to all places and times. No human beings can fully

comprehend or express the truth of God, but we are grateful for the diverse witness of the Church through the ages, and acknowledge that all genuinely Christian confessions contribute to our understanding of God.

10. we confess that we believe in and belong to the one true and living God,

11. The Scriptures assert that there is only one God who exists (Is. 44:6), who is alone worthy of worship and obedience (Exod. 20:3). The one true and living God is revealed in Christ and the Scriptures. We acknowledge with respect the sincerity of many who believe in other gods and ideologies, and should relate to everyone with justice and mercy, but may confess no other God than the triune God revealed in Christ.

12. Faith in the living God is more than simply belief that God exists. It means fellowship with God, and therefore community with all others who belong to God through Christ. Our belonging to God began when we were created in the image of God, but is restored and fulfilled through the salvation that comes to us in Christ, who gathers us as his Church.

13. ...who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

14. The revelation of God in the Christian Scriptures is inescapably trinitarian. The only true God is one God, who is Father, Son and Spirit, who exists in an eternal communion of divine love. The triune being of God is one of the great revelations of the New Testament, which builds upon and fulfils God's self-disclosure in the Old Testament. No true confession of the Christian faith can fail to confess the Trinity and remain faithful to the revelation of God in Christ and the Scriptures.

15. The relationships within the Trinity are summed up in the biblical confession that 'God is love' (1 John 4:8). The way orthodox Christianity names the three "persons" within the Trinity expresses the Trinity's deeply relational nature. The names 'Father' and 'Son' indicate the profound inter-relatedness within the Trinity. In everyday human language, 'Father' means a male parent. But in relation to the Trinity, the name "Father" has nothing to do with human biology (God is spirit, John 4:24) and does not refer to the gendered characteristics of human fathers. Jesus taught that the Father's care for us greatly exceeds that of human fathers (Luke 11:11-13) thus indicating that the Fatherhood of God lies beyond the realms of human parenthood and gender. There are occasions in Scripture in which feminine analogies highlight particular aspects of the character of God (Is. 49:15-16; Matt. 23:37; Is. 42:14; Hos. 11:3-4). Scripture also contains references to God that are non-gendered and non-personal (Ps. 28:1; Ps. 46:1). While the naming of God in Scripture and creeds as Father, Son and Spirit, identifies the God of Jesus Christ, the diversity of the Scriptural witness is such that no single name or formula fully describes the mystery which is God.

16. Love before all love.

17. The primary characteristic of God is love (1 John 4:7-10). God's love precedes all other loves, is the source of love, and surpasses all other love. In the drama of creation and redemption, God graciously opened his life to embrace that which is other than God. God did so in love, not for his own sake but for ours. We were

created for fellowship with God, to enjoy and benefit from creation, and to love and serve one another. God's love makes human love possible, both for God and for others. Through God's overflowing grace we can be forgiven and set free. In Christ we enter into the eternal communion of God's love, called to worship and enjoy God forever.

18. We believe in God the Father...

19. Jesus addressed the God of Israel as 'my Father'. The term 'Father', consistently used by Scripture, refers to the one from whom all things flow and in whom all things have their origin. The Father does not live in isolation, but lives in and through profound communion with the Spirit and the Son. From that communion of love, creation is brought into being and is given life through the Father's Word and Spirit. Desiring that the creature should have fullness of life, the Father sends the Son and pours out the Spirit on all flesh, to enliven, redeem and reconcile the creature who has strayed far from the Father's love. It is through the Son and Spirit that the creative and redemptive work of the Father is done. As all things have their origin from the Father, so will all things be returned to him in the final consummation of God's purposes (1 Cor. 15:20-28).

20. ...sovereign and holy,

21. God is sovereign, the everlasting King of the universe. God's rule is benevolent, merciful, and just (Ps.145: 8-19). God upholds and sustains the world, and there is nothing that can defeat God's purposes. Before the world was created, God had in his love chosen us in Christ (Eph.1: 4-5; Rom. 8: 29-30), and called us to live for him. Nevertheless God allows his creatures to make choices. Ultimately, however, all God's purposes will be achieved in and through Christ.

22. To confess God as holy is to confess the incomparable otherness, splendour and majesty of God. No mortal can look on God's awesome presence and glory (1 Tim. 6:16; John 1:18). The holiness and glory of God is revealed supremely in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus (John 1:14, 18; 2 Cor.3:6).

23. God is entirely without evil in his nature or actions. God is opposed to all that is evil, as light is to darkness. God finds evil offensive, and it places a barrier between us and God (Ps. 66:18; Isaiah 59:1-2), a barrier that is only overcome by God's grace (Ps. 103:8-10; Rom. 8:1).

24. God's holiness is expressed throughout the ages in the election of a people to live in communion with him, in their redemption from sin, and in the work of the Holy Spirit who sanctifies them into the likeness of Christ and equips them to be instruments of God's purposes. To this people God utters the promise and the imperative: 'You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy' (Lev.19.2; cf. 1 Pet. 1:15)

25. ...Creator and nurturer of all,

26. The creation was brought forth from nothing; there is nothing that has its origin apart from God (Gen. 1:1; Is. 42:5, 45:18; John 1:3; Col. 1:15-16), and nothing that can finally stand against the fulfilment of God's purposes. Just as we are

formed by God in our mothers' wombs (Ps. 139:13) so was the whole creation brought forth in love. God's creation was deliberate, ordered, and it is very good (Gen.1). Humanity is the pinnacle of God's creation (Gen. 2; Ps. 8:5-6). All creation is subject to the Creator (Ps. 24:1), and brings glory not to itself but to God (Ps. 19:1-4). Creation is to be enjoyed and admired, with thanksgiving to God (James 1:17). Created things are not themselves divine and so to worship them is idolatry (Rom.1:19-22; Is. 44: 9-17).

27. In his great love and power, God cherishes, sustains and cares for his creation (Ps. 104; Ps. 145:14-16).

28. ...Father of Jesus Christ,

29. The New Testament reveals the intimate relationship of the divine Father and Son (John 10:30). After sending prophets and teachers to communicate his call and purpose to Israel, the Father sends his own beloved Son (Matt. 21:33-41). Ancient language of the Church testifies that the Son is 'begotten' of the Father, and 'of one being' with the Father, thereby indicating the church's faith that in Christ we are encountered by none other than the one, holy and eternal God, now made known to us as Father, Son and Spirit. The Father sent the Son to be the saviour and reconciler of the world (Gal. 4:4; John 3:16), and anointed him with the Holy Spirit for that purpose. The Son truly reveals the nature and being of the Father (John 1:18, 16:13-15; Col. 1:15; 1 Cor.12: 4-6).

30. ...Sender of the Holy Spirit,

31. The Spirit of God was active in the creation of the world, and in God's dealings with his people as recorded in the Old Testament. At the time of Jesus' baptism, the Father anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit, commissioning and empowering him for his work on earth. At Pentecost, the Father and the Son poured out the Holy Spirit upon the Church, to empower and sustain its life and mission until Christ returns.

32. ...and Judge of all the earth.

33. The judgement of God has its place within the dynamic of God's love. Strictly speaking judgement is to be distinguished from punishment. God's judgement is the means by which the truth of things is laid bare: the offence of our sinfulness, the vindication of God's purposes, and the truth of God's grace. Jesus confesses the Father as the true judge (John 8: 50). While Christ came to save rather than to judge (John 12:47-48), it is nevertheless through Christ that God's judgement will be conveyed (John 5:30, 8:15-16; Acts 10:42; Rom 2:16). For those who choose to neglect the justice and mercy of God the Scriptures warn of the punishment of exclusion from God's presence. In the light of this, Scripture urges us to place our trust in God's mercy and grace which are found in Christ Jesus.

34. We believe in God the Son, Jesus Christ our Lord

35. Christian confession takes as its central theme the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is the centre of our relationship with God, and the one without whom there would be neither confession nor faith (John 14:6; Eph. 2:1-10; 1 Cor.

1:18, 2:16; Phil. 2:5-11). In Christ we discover both our need for forgiveness and reconciliation, and God's grace. We uphold, therefore, the ancient creedal affirmations concerning Christ which express the very heart of the Christian gospel.

36. When we call Jesus Christ 'Lord', we align ourselves with one of the earliest Christian affirmations, that 'Jesus is Lord.' In our more egalitarian society, the concepts of 'lordship' and 'lord' can be uncomfortable for some. But as the divine Son of God, as confirmed by his resurrection (John 20:28; Rom. 1:4), Christ is fully worthy of being "Lord". Also, the way in which Christ exercised his lordship, was not through being domineering or self-serving, but through humility, servanthood, and self-sacrifice (Mark 10:45; Phil. 2:5-11). In his life, Christ humbly associated with those despised as thieves and prostitutes. In his death, Christ endured what he least deserved: rejection, suffering, and the agony of the Cross. In calling us to accept his Lordship, Christ calls us to acknowledge only that which is his right, and he challenges us to live with the same humility, compassion and self-giving which he has himself shown to us (Matt.16:24-5). In the light of all that Christ is, and all he has done, we willingly bow at the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

37. ...and Saviour,

38. The confession of Jesus as Lord and Saviour is a fundamental affirmation of Christian faith. The biblical conception of salvation is very broad in scope but involves, especially, the overcoming of the alienation that exists between God and the world (2 Cor.5:19; Col. 1:20), the healing of creation's disorder and decay (Rom. 8:19-21) , and the reconciliation of those who were once estranged (Col.1:21). The confession that Christ is the one who accomplishes this salvation entails that he is both one with God, the one through whom all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell (Col. 1:19), and one with humanity; he is like us in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest and atone for the sins of the people (Heb. 2:17). The identification of Christ with God establishes him as the one who, acting in union with the Father and with the Spirit, can forgive the wrong that humanity has done and restore the creation to its divinely ordained purpose. His identification with humankind, on the other hand, establishes him as the one who, acting in our place and on our behalf, makes atonement for sin and offers to the Father a life of perfect obedience and love. Christ becomes our Saviour as we receive the gift of forgiveness and are gathered in faith into his life of communion with God. The saving *work* of Christ is intimately bound up, therefore, with the *person* of Christ who is both:

39. ...truly human and truly divine,

40. Following Scripture and the Christian creeds, we affirm that Jesus Christ is both human (Col 1:19; Col. 2:9; John 1:1) and divine (John 1:14, 20:28; Heb. 1:4-13). This affirmation lies at the heart of Christian faith. Christ's revelatory and saving impact on us depends on the fact that his life has its source in the Father and in eternity (Col 1:19), but is played out within the constraints of the human condition and in a particular historical situation. Uniquely in the person of Jesus Christ, divinity and humanity are shown in their true form. That dual identity is expressed in the creedal phrase 'He was born of the virgin Mary', which attests both his

divine origin (and conception) and his human creatureliness. The Son of God became human for the sake of our salvation and to bring to completion the promised reconciliation between God and humankind.

41. ...who lived among us, full of grace and truth,

42. The Son of God through whom all things were created truly 'lived among us', becoming one with our own material, social and historical existence. The one true Word is not an idea or a symbol but the same historic Jesus of flesh and blood whom we encounter through the four-fold witness of the Gospels. From the perspective of the resurrection we look back at the life Jesus lived for over thirty years in first century Palestine, as a Jew living under Roman occupation, teaching, healing and challenging his people, and gathering a group of followers in anticipation of the final establishment of the Kingdom of God. The historical narrative is, for us, not merely a history lesson. Nor is it simply the story of an inspirational man. It is, rather, the story of the God-man who lived in human frailty a life without sin (Heb. 4:15), of complete faithfulness to God and obedience to the will of the Father. That life is described most fully as 'full of grace and truth' (John 1:14). Grace and truth are inextricably linked in the person of Jesus. His is a life 'full of grace': full of the love and compassion of God, and also the means by which we also may receive the grace of God. His life is full of truth: he is himself the truth about God, and the way by which we too may receive God's truth (John 14:6). Christ brings truth about God, ourselves, and the world. He reveals that truth graciously – in that sense Christ's Truth is also Grace.

43. For our sin he was crucified

44. All people on earth are bound by the all-pervasive human condition called 'original sin'. This condition, which links us to all other human beings 'in Adam' (Rom. 5:12), paradoxically unites us to others while at the same time setting us against them. The essence and root cause of our sinfulness is human rivalry with God (Gen. 3). That pride produces a vain attempt to live in independence of God, an anxious striving against God and a pervasive tendency to doubt and mistrust God. Our sinfulness is also expressed in such wayward behaviour as idolatry, covetousness, lying, stealing, adultery, and murder (Exod. 20). The consequence of our sinfulness is spiritual death (Rom. 6:23). Our human sinfulness has also plunged the whole created order into travail and groaning (Gen. 3:17-18; Rom. 8:22). The fact that our lives are governed by our alienation from God and by sin is not self-evident, nor obvious to us. The truth of our alienation from God and our sinfulness needs to be told to us (John 3:19; 9:35-41). The truth about our condition is revealed through the Scriptures, and especially through Jesus.

45. At the heart of the Gospel lies the proclamation that through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, we are set free from sin.

46. Although Christ's self-giving life originated in the will of the triune God, the immediate cause of his death lies with humanity and the violence initiated by human sinfulness (Acts 2:22-23, 3:14-15, 5:30, 10:39). Through our sin Christ died, and all humanity is implicated (not in the particular act, but in the sinfulness that lay behind it). Jesus was the victim of human unbelief and injustice, and he died in a manner designed to make death as slow and painful as possible.

47. Christ died not of natural causes but gave himself up to the deadly consequence of human sinfulness and ignorance (Mark 15:24; John 1:10; Rom. 4:25). For our sin Christ was crucified (Rom. 5: 6, 8,15, 6:10; 1 Cor.15:3). In Jesus, God shoulders the burden of the world's sin, graciously taking the place of the guilty in order that sin may be forgiven and we might be reconciled to God (Rom. 3:24; 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 5:8; 1 Pet. 2:24). No single biblical metaphor (e.g. ransom, exchange, substitution, atoning sacrifice) is sufficient to explain the wonder of what was achieved by the Cross, but all bear witness to the saving purposes and great grace of God.
48. The divine love poured out at Calvary , in which the Son offers himself in the Spirit in perfect obedience to the Father, was the saving act of the triune God. God the Father was deeply involved in the suffering of the Cross: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). Although in his humanity Jesus greatly struggled in anticipation of his ordeal, he also fully embraced it (Matt. 26: 36-44), and willingly laid down his life so we might live (1 John 3:16; John 15:13). "Christ loved us, and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:2).
49. As a result of Christ's death for us, we are delivered from the control of sin. Our sinful defiance of God is overcome by the greater power of forgiveness and love. In the light of the Cross, therefore, we are no longer to live for ourselves, but to live for God (2 Cor. 5:15; 1 Cor. 6:11, 20; Rom.12:1; Gal. 2:20).
- 50. and by the power of God was raised from death,**
51. The resurrection accounts in the Gospels leave us in no doubt that Jesus was dead (e.g. John 19: 30:40), and that it was by God's awe-inspiring power that Jesus was raised from death (Matt. 28:2; Acts 2:32; Rom.1:4; Eph. 1:19). Neither by human power, nor as an illusion of human imagination or hopefulness, is Jesus encountered as the Risen One. The risen Jesus leaves the tomb empty (John 20:5-7), encounters the apostles in the flesh (John 20:19), eats and drinks with them (Luke 24:42-3), and, by revealing to them the wounds in his hands and side, invites them to verify that he truly is the one who had been crucified and who is now alive before them. (John 20:27).
52. For the first disciples, and for all who subsequently encounter the risen Lord, the resurrection appearances are an encounter with God (John 20:28). Rather than taking revenge on those who cast him out of their world, or those who deserted him or denied him, God comes back to them in the person of the Risen Son, offering forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration (John 20:21-22, 21:15-17; Acts 2:22-41, 5:29-32).
53. Paul's teaching about a spiritual body (1 Cor. 15:35-49) remains crucial to our faith. It captures something of mystery of the resurrection, and highlights the fact that God's vindication of Jesus and forgiveness of humankind was not accomplished merely by resuscitating Jesus, i.e., by just bringing him *back* to life. Rather, the resurrection of Jesus Christ was entry into a new type of existence, in a body that was the same body but radically transformed. Jesus' resurrection was the beginning of a 'new creation' (2 Cor. 5.17), a new order of life beyond the

- current order - which is subject to decay (Rom. 8.21). The appearances to the apostles of the risen Christ are an intersection of God's new order with the old order which is passing away. Jesus' resurrection body is the prototype of the body of those who will be raised in union with Christ to eternal life (1 Cor. 15: 20-21, 42-56).
54. The resurrection event, made real to us through our own encounter with the risen Christ, is a transforming address from beyond death in which the Spirit gives us the courage and freedom to repent, to look past death as Jesus did (1 Cor 15:54-57; Rom 8:38-9; Heb. 12:1-2) and, indeed, to participate in his life.
 55. While in the post-apostolic age Jesus is no longer physically present in the way experienced in the early church, as risen Lord he remains present through the Spirit, revealing truth, bringing forgiveness and new life, and empowering our service and witness.
 56. In the resurrection of the crucified Jesus God vindicates the man we had violently rejected. In raising Jesus, God declares his judgement on the sinfulness that demanded Jesus' death, and lays bare our foolishness in choosing death rather than God. But God graciously overcomes such death with new life (Col 2:15; 1 John 4:9).
- 57. ...forgiving us, setting us free from sin,**
58. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus inaugurate our salvation and set us out upon a life made new. They do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. In these saving events we are confronted with the truth that we are sinners, but we are not destroyed. In an astonishing revelation of God's grace, our undeserved human verdict of death against the Son of God is answered by God's undeserved verdict towards us of forgiveness and new life. It is the universal witness of the Christian faith that this act of self-giving on God's part reconciles us to God and undoes the grip of original sin. Through faith in Christ we receive the grace of God, and are justified and declared righteous by God. This means not only that our sin has been forgiven but also that we share with Christ his righteous standing before God. (Rom. 3:21-24; 2 Cor. 5:21). The New Testament offers a number of ways of talking about how our salvation is achieved— through victory, through sacrifice, through ransom — but that diverse witness testifies that a new humanity is created by these events and a new community is brought into being, constituted no longer by its solidarity with the first Adam but by a new identity in Christ.
 59. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, of which baptism is the sign and the seal, we are born again to a new life in communion with God and with one another (John 1:12-13; 3:3-8; Rom. 6:4).
 60. This new humanity is brought about through participation in Christ alone and in his life and death (Gal. 2:20, 4:19; Col. 3:3-4, John 15:4-6 etc). We share in this life through faith. Whatever words we use to testify to the atonement accomplished for us in Christ they must spell out the necessity of our reconciliation to God, the overcoming of our alienation, and the new life made possible through Christ's life, death and resurrection. Christ sets us free by

clearing the relational space between God and us of its sinful debris and by incorporating us through the Spirit in his life of loving obedience to the Father. These events in Christ's life initiate a forgiveness whose goal is not a mere amnesty but the bountiful restoration of fellowship and communion.

61. ...and bringing to birth God's new creation.

62. The resurrection of Jesus Christ brings into being God's new creation. It foreshadows that day when all things will be made new in the Kingdom of God (Rom. 8:21, Rev. 21:1-5; Eph. 1:10). This is an event of transformative power, not only for humanity but for the whole cosmos (Col. 1:20; Rom. 8:18-25). The resurrection is understood by Christians to be the first fruits of the longed for completion of God's work in which the dead shall live (Is. 26:19) and the whole earth will at last live in peace (Is. 11:1-9).

63. Now ascended,

64. The biblical witness testifies that the risen Christ is now present at the right hand of God (Heb. 8:1) from where he continues his kingly rule and priestly intercession on behalf of creation (Heb. 4:14; 7:26). The ascended Lord is, in heaven, the mediator of our worship who enables us to draw near to the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16; 10:19-22).

65. ...he calls us to repentance and faith,

66. The good news of Christ calls forth a response of repentance and faith. Repentance means turning away from the life of sin and alienation from God and a grateful turning toward the righteousness that is granted to us in Christ. It is the transformation of one's mind and heart under the impact of God's grace, and flows into a new form of life dedicated to the service of God (Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 2:10).

67. It is in and through Christ that we are called to faith (Rom. 1:16-17; Rom. 3:21-26; Gal. 2:15-21). Faith is not merely assent to doctrines, nor is it a general attitude of credulity. It is a life of trust in our saving God, a life lived by the Spirit's empowering that is conformed to the faithfulness and life of Christ. It is not a life that we can live in our own strength merely by choosing to do so. Our sinful identity, which has been shaped by disobedience 'in Adam' (Rom. 5:12-19,) must be undone by the Spirit, who continues to present the living, forgiving Christ to us (Rom. 8:1-4). It must be remade by the Spirit in conformity with Christ. The faith we are called to is a new life 'in Christ' (2 Cor. 5:17), depends entirely on Christ (Heb. 12:2), and is thus sustained by grace alone (Eph. 2:4-10).

68. ...and restores us to God and to one another.

69. Our reconciliation with God is at the same time the undoing of our former existence, the violence and the ungodliness of which we were previously unaware. The result of this is that the right relationship with God which was enjoyed prior to the fall is restored (Rom. 5:18-19) We are reconciled, put right with God and with one another (Eph. 4:14-16). The life to which we are called in Christ is a life in which divisions are overcome and enmity is brought to an end.

Because of what God has done for us in Christ, we are called to reach out in love to others. (2 Cor. 5:16-21).

70. We believe in God the Holy Spirit...

71. In the Old Testament, belief in the Spirit does not take Christian trinitarian form but the divine Spirit is recognised to be at work in creation (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30), in certain acts disclosing God's will (1 Chron. 18:18; Ezek.11:1, 37:1), and in the actions of particular men and women (Exod. 31:3; Num. 24:2; Judges 6:34; 1 Sam. 11:6). In all these instances, the Spirit is the agent of God's sovereign will.

72. In the New Testament, God's Spirit is recognised again, but particularly in relation to the person of Jesus Christ, and it becomes clear that the Holy Spirit is to be identified with the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9; Acts 16:6-7; Phil. 1:19). Furthermore, it is through the action of the Holy Spirit that Jesus is both conceived (Luke 1:35) and later raised from the dead (1 Peter 3:18). At his baptism the Spirit of God descends on Christ (John 1:32, 3:34; Matt. 3:16) after which the ministry of Christ continually depends upon the guidance and sustaining power of the Spirit (Matt. 4:1; Luke 4:18). The Spirit is also at work in Jesus' miracles (Matt. 12:28; Luke 4:14; Acts 8:39; Rom. 15:19) and is closely related to the words of Jesus and to God's wisdom (John 6:63, 14:16-17, 15:26, 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:12-16; Eph. 1:17).

73. ...the giver of life

74. The Old Testament Scriptures associate the 'breath' of God's spirit with the power that gives life to the world and to God's creatures. Genesis 1:2 speaks of a breath, or a wind from God sweeping over the face of the deep. The Hebrew word translated 'breath' or 'wind' here is the same word translated elsewhere as 'Spirit', thus suggesting that the Spirit is at work at the dawn of creation, bringing forth life and light through the utterance of God's word. As the biblical story progresses, it is confirmed that all of life depends upon God. The Psalmist, for example, says of all living things, 'when you take away your breath, they die and return to their dust... When you send forth your spirit, they are created' (Ps.104:29-30; cf. Gen 6:3). Likewise Job 34: 14-15 reads, 'If he should take back his spirit to himself and gather to himself his breath, all flesh would perish together, and all mortals return to dust.' (Cf. Ezekiel 37: 6, 9-10). Recognising that the life-giving spirit of God is a gift which depends continually on God, the Psalmist prays, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence and take not your holy spirit from me (Ps. 51:10-11).

75. The New Testament takes up this same theme and attributes to the pouring out of God's Spirit the new life of the church, and the enlivening of the disciples at Pentecost to preach the good news (Acts 2).

76. It is by the work of the Spirit that we are made open to the counsel of Christ and come to recognise and confess God (e.g. John 16:8-14). It is by the Spirit that we are born anew, receiving new life from God (John 3:5-8). Not only is life itself enabled and sustained by the Spirit of God, but the fullness of life in Christ that is promised by the Gospel is also the gift of the Spirit.

77. ...at work in all of creation,

78. The Spirit who is present at the dawn of creation and who sustains all created life is also the one who perfects creation and guides it towards fulfillment. Sometimes the work of perfecting the creation involves judgment as in Isaiah 24:16 when the spirit of the Lord gathers the creatures for judgment, or when the wind or spirit of the Lord dries up the land (Hos. 13:15). The same Spirit can turn the desert into a paradise replenishing the earth and enabling it to become fruitful again (Isa. 32:15).

79. The church, in turn, looks forward in hope to the time when the whole creation 'will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God' (Rom 8:21). This fulfillment is attributed by Paul to the work of the Spirit, known in the meantime by its 'first fruits'. The Spirit is thus understood as the power of God active in history, carrying creation forward to the destiny disclosed and inaugurated in Jesus Christ.

80. ...who inspired the Scriptures

81. Because we confess that it is the Holy Spirit who engages and transforms human minds with the truth of Jesus Christ, we acknowledge also that it is the Holy Spirit who has inspired the witness of the Old and New Testaments (2 Tim. 3:16). At all points in the historical process of communicating the truth of God, the Holy Spirit is active, from the inspiration of the prophetic and apostolic witness through to the transformation and enlightenment of the minds of readers and hearers down the ages. The primary agency by which the Spirit does this work is the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and as such these are the 'Word of God'. Through the humanly formed but divinely inspired words of the Scriptures, God addresses the Church and so renews its faith and its life. Since we are dependent for our existence as Church on God speaking through these Scriptures, they are authoritative for our faith and life and are our supreme standard of belief and practice.

82. ...and makes Christ known,

83. The Scriptures indicate that a key role of the Holy Spirit is to witness to the teachings, truth and divine authority of Jesus (John 14:26, 15:26, 16:12-15).

84. The Spirit's role in Jesus' birth, self-understanding, calling, words and work is clearly attested in the Gospels. Where sin blinds us to the true nature of God, particularly the truth about God revealed in the person of Jesus (John 1:10-11; John 9:35; Rom. 1:28), the Spirit communicates the truth about Christ to the Church in every age. It is the work of the Spirit which enables the Church to confess that truth of Christ in the midst of an unbelieving world (John 14:16-17; 26; 15:26-27; 16:13-15; 1 Cor. 12:3). The Spirit also works to bring the world into conviction regarding its own sinfulness (John 15:7-11). Furthermore, the Spirit is the enabling power of the whole life and faithfulness of the believer (Rom. 8:13-17; 1 Cor. 2:13-14; Gal. 5:16-26).

85. ...transforms hearts and minds,

86. It is by the Holy Spirit that every person who becomes a believer is brought to faith and is given assurance of God's love for them (Rom 8:9,11; Gal 4:6-7, 5:16-25). It is the work of the Spirit to convert and to transform human hearts (Rom. 2:29) and in doing so to sanctify or to 'make holy' the life of every believer. By the power of the Spirit, believers in Christ are born anew, receiving a new life of the Spirit within that reflects the mind and nature of Christ (John 3:3-8; Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:22-24)

87. Despite receiving the grace and love of God, we nevertheless continue to fall short of the life that has been gifted to us. We are at once justified and yet still prone to sin. Therefore we must continually come to God in humility and repentance, trusting that through the continuing mercy of God and by the power of the Spirit God will continue to shape us according to his purpose and conform us more and more to Christ. Although the decisive event of our salvation has been accomplished once and for all, the journey of faith, undertaken by grace, is journey toward that day when God's creative and redemptive work will be complete, in the world as also in us.

88. Where hearts and minds are conformed to the truth that is in Christ, there follows, by the power of the Spirit, a reshaping of our lives to conform more nearly to the pattern of Christ's life of faithful obedience to God and compassionate service for others (Eph. 4:22-24). The Holy Spirit brings to every believer the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:13-16; Rom. 8:6). As the mind of Christ grows within the believer, he or she is transformed to live as a child of God (Rom. 8:6-16, 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 5:16, 18, 25).

89. ...gathers us into the community of Christ,

90. One of the first fruits of the Holy Spirit's work at Pentecost is *koinonia* or communion (Acts 2:42-44). The Spirit creates and sustains the unique community that is the Church. The Scriptures describe the Church as the Body of Christ, which is gathered by the Spirit into communion with Christ and has Christ as its head (Eph 1:22-23; Col 1:17-20).

91. The basis of the Church's unity is believers' union with Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, and its community reflects the loving interdependence within the triune being of God. The Church's unity in Christ transcends all boundaries of time, place, customs, race and culture. Although most visible as local worshipping fellowships, and often organised in wider 'denominations' (families of churches), the Church is nevertheless a timeless and universal spiritual fellowship, celebrating one Lord, one Spirit, one faith, one baptism (Eph. 4:4-5).

92. The Church gathers for teaching and nurture, for fellowship and encouragement, for prayer, for worship and praise (1 Tim. 4:13; Heb. 10:24-25; Acts 2: 42-7, 4: 23-31, 13:2,3).

93. The Church is the instrument of Christ's continuing work in the world (John 14:12, 20:21-23; Eph. 4:11,12). It is called to continue Christ's work of preaching and healing, of delivering good news to the poor and release to the captives; it is to work towards the liberation of those who are oppressed, and it is to proclaim the

coming Kingdom of God (Luke 4:18-19; Acts 3:6-8; Col. 1:13,14). It is commissioned to preach the Gospel, and to make disciples of Christ in every nation (Matt. 28:19-20). In all these things the Church shares in God's creative and redemptive purpose for the world.

94. ...empowering the Church in worship and in mission.

95. The Spirit is the generative power behind the birth and life of the Church as well as the birth and life of every believer. The Church is born out of the Spirit's action through the followers of Jesus who gathered in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Through the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, a group of people gathered together to worship God, were marked out by this experience, and charged with engaging in the continuing mission of Jesus Christ. The Church is equipped for this service by the receiving of spiritual gifts for strengthening and edification (1 Cor. 12:7-11), and by the Spirit's work of making known God's Word through preaching and prophetic utterance (Acts 11:28; 1 Cor. 14:1).

96. Worship lies at the heart of the Church's life. Christian worship is the gift of participation in the loving communion of the triune God. The leader of our worship is Christ himself who, as our great High Priest (Heb 4:14-16), gathers us into the communion he shares with the Father and with the Spirit. Through the twofold intercession of Christ (Heb. 7:28) and the Spirit (Rom. 8: 26), and through the exercise of the Spirit's gifts, our stumbling words of worship are received by God as a worthy sacrifice of praise.

97. The preaching of the Word of God and the celebration of baptism and the Lord's Supper central acts of Christian worship. The Word and Sacraments are sacred gifts of God through which the Gospel is proclaimed and enacted. Because of God's promise to be present wherever the Word is preached and the sacraments shared, the sacraments are known as converting ordinances, i.e. as central means by which hearts are renewed and minds transformed by the life-giving presence of God. Faithful preaching of the Word and the celebration of the Sacraments are signs, therefore, of the vitality of the Church in our time and place, and of Christ's continuing ministry among us. Such preaching and celebration are to be treasured and maintained as expressions of our unity with the Church of all ages, and of our adherence to the faith once delivered to the saints.

98. Effective preaching of the Word is endowed with the power of the Spirit, and is focused on the Gospel of Christ (1 Cor. 2:1-5). The Reformed tradition rightly places emphasis on the reverent and careful exposition of Scripture, all of which is inspired by the Spirit and useful for building up the Church (2 Tim. 3:16).

99. Baptism and the Lord's Supper reinforce the truth of God's love and design for the world, call believers to faithfulness, and commission believers back into the world to present the Gospel to those who are 'far away.'

100. Baptism is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace. Baptism is a grateful acknowledgement of the fact that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. It proclaims to us the forgiveness of God and accomplishes on our behalf what we cannot do for ourselves. In the New Testament believers are baptised not

only in water for the remission of sins but also 'in the Spirit' (John 3:7-8; Acts 8:14-17; Rom. 8:15-16; Gal. 3:1-3), so that the Spirit is active in both the birth of new believers and in their growth in faith and love (2 Cor. 3:17,18). Baptism signifies that those called to faith in Christ die and are raised to new life with him, are made members of his Body, the Church, and are commissioned for a life of faithful service with him. In the New Testament, and often in other missional contexts, baptism is administered to new believers, as a powerful sign of new life in Christ and incorporation into the Church. In the post-apostolic age, the Church has also commonly baptised the children of believers. In Reformed understanding, such baptism of children reflects the analogy of the Old Testament practice of circumcision during infancy followed by nurture in the faith as the child grew up (Col. 2: 11-14; Deut. 6: 6-7). The Church also gave the opportunity to individuals baptised as infants later to profess their faith publicly and thus "confirm" their baptism. (The church may also allow opportunities for believers to confirm or renew their baptism). The common practice of infant "dedication" likewise has Old Testament roots, in the law's requirement to dedicate to God the first-born (Exod.13:2; Luke 2:22-23). The New Testament make no requirements as to whether the sign of baptism is best administered by sprinkling, pouring or immersion.

101. The Lord's Supper is a sign and seal of the covenant of redemption. Through the elements of bread and wine, which are symbols of the body and blood of Christ, we are spiritually nourished and strengthened in our life with him. The Lord's Supper is at once a remembrance of Christ's sacrificial death through which the work of redemption is accomplished (1 Cor. 11:24-25), a celebration of his presence with us now (Matt 18:20), and a joyful anticipation of that day when Christ will drink again with his people in the kingdom of God (Matt. 26:29; Mark 14:25).
102. The Church is called to mission, God's mission, in all the world. The Church is called to proclaim Christ to all people - so that all may hear the saving Gospel of Christ (Rom.10:13-15), to make disciples from every nation (Matt. 28:19-20), to bring the salt (flavour) and light (truth) of Christ into every corner of society, to do good, to act in compassion and mercy, to work for justice and peace.
103. It is the Holy Spirit who empowers the whole Church in mission, and in all the tasks of ministry (Acts 1:8; Eph. 4:7-13; 1 Pet. 2:9-10, 4:8-11; 1 Cor. 12).
104. Some are recognised by the Church as called to serve as ministers (pastors), preaching the Word and teaching the faith, building up and encouraging the people of God, overseeing the Church's worship and sacraments, extending pastoral care, and leading the Church in mission (Eph. 4:11-12). In the act of ordination they are set apart in prayer for the Spirit's empowering, and are called by the people to serve in particular settings. In addition to such "teaching elders" the church also elects and ordains in prayer "ruling elders", who, working in partnership with ministers, are called to exercise prayerful oversight of the Church, to care for the people and to contribute to the ministry and mission of the Church.
- 105. ...witnesses to his love in word and in action,**

106. We are called to give an account of Christ to the world in all that we say and do. Just as Jesus gave his life as a testimony to the love of God so our life is to be a living witness to him through whom that same love of God is poured out for us. This act of witness becomes possible only through the further work of God's Spirit who unites us to Christ (John 17: 23), gives us words to speak, and bestows gifts enabling us to participate in the mission of God. Our witness to Christ is to all nations (Acts 1:8; Matt. 28:19-20).

107. ...servants of reconciliation,

108. Christ's mission of reconciliation is effective at several levels. First we are reconciled with God and with others. The mission of Christ is directed to a lost and alienated people and seeks them out rather than waiting for them to come to him (John 20:21; Acts 26:17-18; Luke 15:4-7). Those gathered into community with Christ and made his disciples are called to participate in his mission of reconciliation towards those not yet reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:19-20). The Spirit equips those who are disciples of Christ with gifts suitable for the mission to which they are called, and creates and sustains the Church as an instrument through which the work of Christ is continued in the world

109. ...and stewards of Creation.

110. Where faith in Christ brings reconciliation with God and peace between people, it will also bring a new relationship with the world in which we live. Humanity is appointed to tend and care for the earth (Gen. 2:15), so that it is passed on, still as a blessing, to future generations. The "dominion" over nature given by God to humanity does not mean domination or exploitation, but is rather to reflect God's own delight in the goodness of creation (Gen. 1:12,18, 21, 25, 31). The true nature of dominion is to be discerned in the compassionate service exercised by our Lord himself. God's love for the natural order is also revealed in his intention to restore the whole creation to its original purpose, freedom and glory (Romans 8:19-22).

111. The responsibility God gives us to care for the earth (Gen. 2:15) has implications for all our lives, including matters of ecological and economic sustainability.

112. We belong to this triune God...

113. We belong to God through creation and through redemption. Along with all creatures we are God's creation and, in common with the whole created order, we are sustained by God's life-giving love. Human beings, however, are set apart for a special relationship with God. They are called to live in loving communion with God according to the pattern of Jesus Christ. Humans do violence to the integrity of this relationship, however, when they disobey God's law and fall away from God. The redemptive work of Christ at Calvary and subsequent prompting of the Spirit gathers us again into right relationship with God and thus continues and completes God's creative work. Fallen creatures are reconciled with God (John 3:16; Eph. 2:4-10) and become, again, God's children who are heirs with Christ of God's blessing and promise (Rom. 8:17; Eph. 3:6). We creatures, therefore, have been made by God and are redeemed

by God (Gal. 1:4). Creation and redemption are not discontinuous but the one coherent expression of God's creative love which is directed towards the gathering of all things together in Christ (Eph. 1:10). We who confess our faith together thereby participate in the new life established for us in Christ and so acknowledge that we belong to God.

- 114. ...women and men,
young and old,
from many nations,
in Christ *he iwi kotahi tatou*, [we are one people]**
115. Our unity in Christ does not imply a homogenous church. Belonging to the triune God means we reflect the diversity inherent in God's own being and in the profusion of God's creation. The new creation that is God's new humanity in Christ is richly diverse: it is both Jew and Gentile, female and male, young and old, poor and rich. It represents a vast array of races, languages and cultures (Acts 2:5-11; Rev. 5:9). It includes people of a great variety of natural capacities and spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 1:26; Rom 12: 3-8; 1 Cor. 12-14).
116. In Christ the dividing walls of hostility are broken down (Eph.1:14), and in Christ believers are made one (Gal. 3:28). In Christ diverse groups of people are brought together in a community of faith and love. The body of Christ thus reflects God's purpose to bring all things together in Christ (Eph. 1:10), and is built up as a sign and anticipation of God's kingdom. It is only the power of the risen Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit which brings such reconciliation
117. Some distinctions are named explicitly here to affirm our commitment to the full and equal participation of all peoples within the life of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand.
118. Throughout history, there has often been tension between male and female, not only domestically but also within society and church. Such tensions between men and women are in part a result of humanity's fall into sin (Gen. 3). Paul declares in Gal 3: 28, however, that in Christ male and female are made one and become equal partners in the ministry of Christ. The subordination of women is not supported by the actions of Jesus or by the teachings of Paul.
119. The contrasting cultures of youth and age also contribute to the richness of the Church's life, each having crucial gifts to share for the building up of the Body. The young Timothy was encouraged not to let himself be looked down upon by older Christians but to have faith in his calling (1 Tim. 4:11). Young people must not be seen as 'the church of tomorrow', but as an indispensable part of the Church of today. Older people too must be valued for their own experience, wisdom and dedication.
120. The words 'from many nations' acknowledges that the body of Christ is truly universal, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, comprised of people of 'every tribe and tongue', from every corner of the globe. In Christ, the confusion and divisions of Babel (Gen.11:7-9) are reversed and redeemed, and the oneness that is Christ brings great richness of fellowship and mutual learning. Here in this land the Presbyterian Church is increasingly enriched by people who have come from

many other places and cultures, including those of the Pacific and Asia.

121. The words '*he iwi kotahi tatou*' (meaning 'we are one people') are those used by Governor Hobson after the first signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, on 6 Feb. 1840. The Treaty with the British Crown was intended to protect the original people of this land, the Maori, from exploitation and injustice, and to honour both Maori and settlers as of equal status and rights. The Treaty was promoted by Christian missionaries, and was seen by some Maori as a sacred agreement similar to various biblical covenants. The subsequent history of this land has not always reflected that, and there have been tensions, misunderstandings and conflicts between the *tangata whenua* (the 'people of the land', the Maori) and those who have arrived later (the *tauiwi* — the 'settled tribes', people from Europe and elsewhere). The Treaty implies that all who are *tauiwi* are welcomed by and are free to establish their own bicultural relationship with Maori. As believers in Christ, we acknowledge that the unity among races announced by Hobson will only fully be realised in the oneness that is established in Christ.

122. Pronunciation Guide: He iwi kotahi tatou

'He' as in 'hen.'

'Iwi;' the 'i' as in the double 'ee' in 'deep,' i.e., 'eewee' but said quickly.

'Kotahi' - 'ko' as in 'core;' 'ta' as in 'far' and 'hi' - 'hee' (as in 'deep').

'Tātou' - 'ta', again as in 'far' but lengthen the sound. 'Tou' as in 'tow'.

123. As God's people,

124. Christians are the people of the new covenant. Although the creative and redemptive love of God is directed to the whole of the cosmos, God called and appointed a particular people to be his covenant partner, to be an instrument of and witness to the blessing promised to all nations (Gen. 12:3; Is. 43:10). Beginning with Abraham and Sarah and continuing through successive generations of their descendants, God established Israel as a covenant people (Gen. 17:1-22), blessed and guided them through anointed leaders and prophets, and announced through them the promise of the coming Messiah (Isa. 40:1-11). That messianic promise is fulfilled in Jesus (Mark 8:29), and through him a new covenant was established that now includes Gentiles among the people of God: through Christ, Gentile believers are grafted into God's people, 'Israel' (Rom. 11:17-19). All believers in Christ are thus named as God's people, and are appointed to proclaim the news of God's blessing and love (1 Pet. 2:10).

125. ...we look forward in hope and joy

126. Brought together in Christ, we look forward in hope and joy to the completion of God's purposes for the world, which were revealed in Christ and have been inaugurated with the coming of the Spirit and the birth and growth of the Church (Eph. 1:9-10, 3: 3-10; Col. 1:19). Christian hope for the future is not wishful thinking, but a confident expectation grounded in trust in God. It is given shape by the promises of God attested for us in Scripture, is strengthened by the saving acts of God thus far (supremely in the life, death and resurrection of

Jesus), and is nurtured by the Spirit. The content of Christian hope is described in the Scriptures in a variety of ways, and includes anticipation of the coming Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14; Luke 11:2), the renewal of creation (Rom. 8:21; Rev. 21:1-5), the coming again of Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:28), and that day when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord (Phil. 2:10-11). The Christian hope is centred on the full completion of God's purposes in creation and redemption and the final realisation of God's promise to dwell with humankind and be their God (Rev. 21:3). At the completion of Christ's work, when death will be no more and the earth's travail is at an end, then will the kingdom be handed over to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24), and God will be all in all.

127. ...to the return of Christ,

128. Exactly how these matters will unfold is beyond our human understanding, but it is the witness of the New Testament – as expressed (Rev. 22:20) in almost its final words – that at the end of this age Christ will return. He will come to gather God's people (1 Thess. 4:16-17), to judge the living and the dead (1 Peter 4:5), and to establish fully the Kingdom of God. He will come in power and glory (Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27; Dan. 7:13-14; 2 Thess. 1:7-10). All humanity will see him, and acknowledge his divine authority (Rev. 1:7; Phil. 2:10-11). While believers may look for signs of the end of this age, it is futile to try to predict the timing of Christ's return, as his return will come unexpectedly (Matt. 24:36-39, 44; 1 Thess. 5:1-2; Luke 12:40).

129. ...to the new heaven and earth

130. The scope of God's saving purposes of God embrace not only for individuals, nor only the church, but the whole of God's creation. This is portrayed in Scripture as the coming of a new heaven and earth (Rev. 21:1-5), in which God and humanity will again live in close harmony, and suffering and death will be no more. The promise of a new heaven and earth can be understood to involve the destruction (2 Pet. 3:7-13) and replacement - of the universe as it currently exists, or the divine transformation of the existing universe, its release from all futility, decay and pain, and the restoration to earth of the unrestrained blessing and glory of God (Rom. 8:18-25). Our finite human understanding of such future events is always elusive and inadequate (1 Cor. 13:12). But it is clear that the purpose of God is to redeem and unite all things in Christ, and to establish fully his Kingdom (Eph. 1:9-10; Luke 11:2-3).

131. ...where evil and death will be no more,

132. The Bible makes clear that the establishment of God's justice and peace is not brought about without divine judgement upon all that is set against God. The new creation will be brought forth as God lays bare and overcomes the fruitlessness of all human attempts to establish and sustain life on our own terms, in independence from God. The sinful propensity of human beings is destined to end in death, and can have no share in the life of the kingdom of God. There will be no place for evil when the reign of God has been fully established. God's purpose for the end involves the final defeat of all that stands against God, including the crushing of Satan (Rom. 16:20; Rev. 20:10) and all principalities and powers (1 Cor. 15:25).

133. Likewise, there will be no place for death: this last enemy will itself be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26), and those in Christ shall live for ever in the presence of God (Rev. 21:4-5; John 3:16). All that has cursed humanity down through the ages will be at an end, and God's reign will be complete.

134. **...justice and peace will flourish,**

135. Two of the distinctive marks of the fullness of life that is promised under the reign of God are justice and peace (Isaiah 9:7). Justice also means righteousness in the biblical languages. Justice and righteousness both refer to the right ordering of things according to God's purpose. When that right ordering of things occurs, there will be peace (Ps. 85). In Isaiah's vision of the peaceful kingdom, for example, it is proclaimed that 'the wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together and a little child shall lead them' (Is. 11:6). Isaiah further explains that it is on account of the coming Messiah that the earth will be renewed and peace will be established (Isa. 11:1-2; 42:3-4). In anticipation of the reign of God, the Church is called to share in the mission of God and to strive for justice and for peace in every context.

136. **...and we shall forever delight in the glory of God**

137. The glory of God is the end towards which all creation moves. God's glory is declared in the heavens (Ps. 19:1) and in the midst of creation human beings are called to give glory to God and to enjoy him forever. To enjoy God means to rejoice in all that God has done, and to glorify God means to be with God in joy and to express that joy in thanksgiving and praise. The offering of praise to the glory of God is our first and enduring response to the great things of the gospel (Eph. 1:12).

138. The glorification of the Son rests in his accomplishing what the Father sent him to do, namely the reconciliation of the world to God. Through the work of the Son and the Spirit we are adopted into God's own family of love. The fellowship between Father, Son and Spirit is so wide open that the whole community of Christ's people can find a place within it. Thus Jesus goes on to pray, 'As you, Father are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us' (John 17: 21). The glory of God thereby expresses itself, not in self-glorifying majesty, but in the abundant communication of God's own fullness of life. It is as grateful recipients of this love that we are caught up in creation's offering of praise to God's glory, thus to fulfil the calling to glorify God and enjoy God forever.

139. The glory of God, supremely revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus (2 Cor. 4:6; John 1:18), will be fully apparent to all who are gathered in the everlasting presence of God. The Triune God will be with his people (Rev. 7:9-17; 21:3). They shall forever delight in God's presence (Ps. 16:11), serve God, and together sing praise to God's eternal glory.

*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!
"Who has known the mind of the Lord?"*

*Or who has been his counsellor?"
"Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay him?"
For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory
forever! Amen.*
(Rom. 11: 33-36)

Appendix 7: Formula as currently subscribed to by those being ordained as ministers and elders

1.7 The Formula

Ministers and elders and other office bearers must make themselves accountable to the Church by subscribing to the following formula:

I believe the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith and other subordinate standards of this Church. I acknowledge the Presbyterian government of this Church to be agreeable to the Word of God, and I promise that I will submit to and agree with that government. I promise to observe the order and administration of worship and public ritual as these are or may be allowed in this Church.

Background to proposals 4 and 5

Appendix 3: Council of Assembly Recommendation on Congregational Assessment

Introduction

The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand exists to participate in God's mission. In recent years it has provided Healthy Congregations material and introduced Ministry and Parish Appraisals to help ministers and congregations take stock and review their effectiveness in serving this mandate. However, one of the sad realities of the steady institutional decline experienced in recent decades is that an increasing number of congregations have, or are reaching the point at which their future viability is in question.

While there will probably be widespread agreement that something ought to be done in these situations, finding a universal measure of non-viability will be a far more difficult exercise. After all, even our Lord said, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am also."

Nevertheless, despite that theological truth, certain judgements need to be made on an institutional level, especially where issues concerning the stewardship of resources are involved and/or the ability of the congregation to function as such is in question. The Council of Assembly believes that existing procedures for dissolving a congregation need to be simplified and include a more clear-cut trigger for instigating a review by the Presbytery.

It is also important to note that when we talk about dissolution, the reference is to the end of a congregation's life as a separate, self-managing entity. The presbytery's responsibilities to those who have been part of this congregation remain.

- 5.9 Dissolution of a congregation on the initiative of a church council
- (1) A church council may apply to its presbytery to dissolve the congregation after gaining the approval of at least two-thirds of the members of the congregation present at a duly called meeting of the congregation.
 - (2) A second congregational meeting must then be held with a commission of the presbytery to discuss the consequences of dissolution and to provide congregational members with an opportunity for expressing their concerns and hopes should a decision to be dissolved be finalised.
 - (3) At the conclusion of this meeting, a final congregational decision may be made to dissolve. Such a decision must gain the approval of at least two thirds of the members of the congregation present at a duly called meeting of the congregation.

In a situation where the second congregational meeting fails to gain the required two thirds' support for dissolution, the presbytery must determine whether or not to initiate the procedure to dissolve the congregation under section 10.

- 5.10 Dissolution of a congregation on the initiative of presbytery

- (1) A presbytery must appoint a commission to review the future of a congregation, with the options of continuing its mission, renewing its life and mission, or if need be, dissolution, where:
 - (a) the total number of adults attending public worship falls below an average of 40 per week for 12 consecutive months; and/or
 - (b) the presbytery has reason to believe that a congregation is no longer fulfilling the expectations for mission contained in section 2.

Comment

Why 40? The Council of Assembly is not suggesting that a congregation of less than 40 people is automatically non-viable; nor is it suggesting that congregations of more than 40 people are automatically viable. It is merely suggesting that this be a trigger for instigating a review of this nature. When regular attendance at worship has fallen to this level, chances are the question of institutional viability will have become acute. The review will test the logic of this in a given situation. It will take into account contextual realities at the same time as it asks the hard questions.

- (2) The presbytery commission for such processes will comprise no more than 5 members, including persons particularly suited for appointment, having regard to:
 1. The nature of the congregation under review
 2. An understanding of contemporary theological and mission practice
 3. The legal and administrative requirements of the Book of Order. The majority of members should be members of presbytery.
- (3) The role of the presbytery commission is to enhance the mission of the Church by engaging with a congregation to discern how its life and mission fulfils the functions of a congregation as described in section 5.2 of the Book of Order. It will do this by:
 - (a) informing the congregation that a review is being undertaken
 - (b) state at a congregational meeting the possible outcomes of the review process
 - (c) set a state at which the congregation will report to the commission
 - (d) make a determination as described in section (6)
- (4) A presbytery commission appointed under this section must require the church council to call a congregational meeting in accordance with section 3. The meeting must be chaired by a member of the commission.
- (5) The purpose of the meeting called in accordance with subsection 4 is to inform the congregation that a review of the congregation's future has been initiated by the presbytery, and that one option being considered in the review is the dissolution of the congregation. The reasons for the review must be given. The commission must ask the congregation to give a report as to its life and work in fulfilling its functions under section 2. This report may be in both verbal and written forms and must be presented to the commission within three months of the congregational meeting.
- (6) In its consideration of the report, the commission must decide on one of these three options:
 - (a) that the congregation is fulfilling the functions as set out in section 2 and it should be encouraged to continue in its life and mission
 - (b) that, although some of the functions in section 2 are being met but the viability of the congregation is marginal, and the presbytery will work closely with the church council to find creative ways to stimulate its life and mission, and a further review should be undertaken within a defined period

- (c) that the congregation should be dissolved, and the presbytery ensure the continued pastoral care of the people of the congregation.

5.10A Right of appeal in relation to decision to dissolve a congregation

- (1) In the event a presbytery commission has decided that a congregation should be dissolved under section 10(6)(c), the presbytery commission must inform the Council of Assembly. The Council must appoint a Congregation Evaluation Commission, which will act as a commission of the General Assembly. This Congregation Evaluation Commission shall receive the report of the presbytery commission, together with any written submission by the congregation opposing the presbytery commission's decision to dissolve the congregation.
- (2) The Congregation Evaluation Commission will be appointed by the Council of Assembly and will be convened by a person from the panel of Assembly Judicial Commission members. The commission will comprise between three and five members, including persons particularly suited for appointment having regard to
1. an understanding of contemporary theological and mission practice
2. the legal and administrative requirements of the Book of Order. The commission may be a standing commission of the Church and will retain the right to co-opt an extra member particularly suited for appointment having regard to the nature of the congregation under review.
- (3) In considering the material provided under subsection (1) the Congregation Evaluation Commission must follow the appeal process provided in Chapter 14.23.
- (4) After considering the material and following the appeal process provided in Chapter 14.23, the Congregation Evaluation Commission must determine whether the dissolution of the congregation will proceed, and make any other decisions regarding the future of the congregation that it deems necessary.
- (5) The decision of the Congregation Evaluation Commission is final.

5.10B Failure of congregation to co-operate over dissolution process

Should a church council fail to call a congregational meeting in accordance with the presbytery's requirement under section 10(4), or should the congregation fail to report to the presbytery commission on the required date, or fail to make a submission to the congregation Evaluation Commission, then these failures shall not invalidate the deliberations of the presbytery commission and Congregation Evaluation Commission.

Summary information for dialogue groups on proposal for congregational assessment

See Council of Assembly recommendation page D1-2 and Appendix 3 of the Council's report.

A: Presbytery-initiated process

Book of Order 5.10 and 5.12 are summarised below.

- | | current procedure | proposed procedure |
|----|--|--|
| 1. | Presbytery may consider dissolving a congregation if it has reason to believe that the congregation may no longer be able to fulfill the functions of a congregation (see Book of Order 5.2 below) | Presbytery must review the future of a congregation, with an option of dissolution, if it has reason to believe that the congregation may no longer be able to fulfill the functions of a congregation |

2. Presbytery must initially consult with the congregation, and must have regard to the congregation's views.
3. If presbytery decides to proceed with the investigation, it must consider the function of the congregation, and all other relevant matters. In doing so, it must follow the process of Chapter 5.5. and 5.7 (see below), including hearing from any person who wishes to be heard on the matter. NB: Standard practice is for such investigations to be conducted by a commission of presbytery, but the regulations do not specify this.
4. If presbytery decides to propose dissolution, it must, within 20 working days, notify any interested party, giving reasons and inviting written comments, to be made within 10 days.
5. Presbytery must then consider any written comments and make a final decision, within 20 working days of giving notice.
6. Presbytery must notify the interested parties of its decision, within 5 working days.
7. Any affected person may appeal the decision to Assembly. Appeals must be made within 10 working days of notification of presbytery's decision.
8. An Assembly Judicial Commission must be appointed to hear the appeal, following the procedure in Book of Order Chapter 14.23. The presbytery must disclose all its records relating to the matter, and draw up reasons for its decision.
9. At a hearing, the judicial commission must hear from the appellants and the presbytery.
10. Decisions of a judicial commission are final, and there are no further appeal options.

OR where the average number of adults attending public worship is below 40 Presbytery must appoint a commission to meet with the congregation to explain its concern, and to advise that dissolution may be one possible outcome of the review. The congregation is asked to provide an account of its life and work, both in writing and verbally, in terms of the functions of a congregation, set out in Book of Order 5.2. The report must be presented to the commission within 3 months.

The commission decides one of these 3 options:
 (a) that the congregation is fulfilling the functions as set out on Book of Order 5.2, and it should be encouraged to continue in its life and mission.
 (b) that, although some of the criteria of 5.2 are being met, the viability of the congregation is marginal, and a further review should be undertaken within a defined period
 (c) that the congregation should be dissolved.

If dissolution is ordered, the Assembly Executive Secretary is advised, and the Council of Assembly appoints a Congregation Evaluation Commission. The evaluation commission receives a report from the presbytery commission, together with a written submission by the congregation.

At a hearing, the evaluation commission invites both the presbytery and the congregation to speak to the decision of the presbytery commission. Decisions of an evaluation commission are final, and there are no further appeal options.

B: Congregation- initiated process

Book of Order 5.9 is summarized below

- | | | |
|----|---|--|
| 1. | A church council may apply to presbytery to dissolve the congregation, with the approval of at least 2 thirds of the members of its congregation present at a congregational meeting. | A church council may apply to presbytery to dissolve the congregation, with the approval of at least 2 thirds of the members of its congregation present at a congregational meeting. |
| 2. | The presbytery must investigate an application to dissolve the congregation, as per the procedures of Chapter 5.5. and 5.7 (see below) | A second congregational meeting is held, with a commission of presbytery, to discuss the consequences of dissolution, and to provide congregational members with an opportunity for expressing their concerns and hopes, should a decision to dissolve be finalised. |
| 3. | | At the conclusion of the second congregational meeting, a final decision to dissolve must be approved by at least two thirds of the members. |
| 4. | | Where the congregational meeting fails to gain the required two third's support, the presbytery will determine whether or not to initiate the procedure to dissolve the congregation. |

Book of Order

5.2 Functions of the congregation

- (1) The functions of the congregation are
 - (a) to worship God,
 - (b) to participate in God's mission to the world,
 - (c) to provide pastoral care for one another and the wider community,
 - (d) to nurture faith within the congregation and the wider community, and
 - (e) to provide for the congregation's property and finances.
- (2) In participating in God's mission to the world, the congregation must
 - (a) identify and play its role in God's mission to the world,
 - (b) call appropriate ministry leadership,
 - (c) elect congregational office bearers, and
 - (d) accept the discipline and government of the Church.
- (3) The congregation may make proposals to the church council which will further God's mission.
- (4) In providing for the congregation's property and finances, the congregation must
 - (a) support its life, mission and work,
 - (b) approve the budget and financial statements at the annual general meeting,
 - (c) appoint a suitably qualified person to review or audit the accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Act, and
 - (d) hold any meeting necessary to deal with the congregation's property.
- (5) In undertaking any function set out in subsection (1), the congregation must have regard to
 - (a) its mission and financial resources, and
 - (b) the policies of the General Assembly.

5.5 Matters to be investigated before forming a new congregation

- (1) If an application is made to a presbytery to form a new congregation or to recognise an existing group of persons as a congregation, or, if a presbytery is considering taking the initiative to do so, the presbytery must give notice to any

neighbouring congregation or congregations and investigate all matters relevant to the application or consideration, including the following:

- (a) the reasons and circumstances which have led to the application, if any,
- (b) whether the members and associate members of the proposed congregation can comply with section 2,
- (c) whether there are any existing congregations including those congregations operating under the Act of Commitment which can accommodate the needs of the applicants,
- (d) whether any neighbouring congregation has any objection, and
- (e) the resources which the applicants will supply to support the life of the congregation.

5.7 Procedures to be followed before deciding whether to form a new congregation

- (1) If a neighbouring congregation objects to the formation of a new congregation, the presbytery must have regard to those objections before making a decision.
- (2) The presbytery must hear any person who wishes to be heard on the matter.
- (3) Before making a decision, a presbytery must consider
 - (a) all relevant information obtained in the course of making its investigations under section 5,
 - (b) any objections or submissions made to it about the matter, and
 - (c) any other matter which the presbytery considers relevant to the application.
- (4) If a decision is likely to affect adversely the applicant or any other person or congregation, the presbytery must advise the relevant persons or congregation and give them an opportunity to be heard or make written submissions.
- (5) A presbytery must make its final decision at a meeting of the presbytery.

8.16 Delegation

- (1) A presbytery may delegate any of its functions or powers to any committee or person as it sees fit, except in relation to
 - (a) dissolution of a pastoral tie
 - (b) dissolution of a congregation
 - (c) approval of the presbytery's budget or imposition of a levy.

Appendix 3 – Council of Assembly regulations on Congregational Assessment

Since this report was published in the General Assembly papers, a number of questions have been raised, which we hope, by answering now, might help in the discussion about these recommendations.

What is the background for bringing these changes?

Our Church is changing quite rapidly. Over the past 10 years the number of congregations (Presbyterian and cooperative ventures with whom we have an association) with fewer than 40 adults at worship has increased from about 100 to around 150 of our total number of approximately 415 congregations. A further 25 per cent of our congregations now have between 40 and 80 adults attending each Sunday,

with their typical age profile suggesting there will be rapid further decline over the next 10 years.

Most of the numerical growth in our Church over recent times has come about through the work of larger and multi staffed congregations. Though there are always exceptions, the data suggests that while it is very difficult for a congregation who spend most of their resources sustaining full time sole charge ministry, we have virtually no examples of significant growth from congregations without sustained and time-committed leadership. With the rapid decline of the number of stipendiary ministers in our Church (from well over 400 to around 250 in the last 20 years), it seems very likely that our capacity to provide to all our congregations effective ministry by a theologically trained and supported minister is going to continue to diminish.

There are examples of congregations developing positive and constructive responses to their changing circumstances. For example, larger regional congregations taking responsibility for leadership among former independent congregations on their borders, and small communities of faith choosing to worship in homes or facilities that they do not own. There are of course many smaller congregations who are providing exceptional mission and ministry within their communities.

How will these changes be implemented?

While these new regulations may well create more work for presbyteries and for the Council in the short to medium term, they are intended to provide a direction for institutional reform. These changes, we hope, will strengthen our Church's long term ability to support ministry, mission and effective outreach. A rapidly increasing number of small congregations, coupled with a significant decline in the ability of congregations to fund theologically trained and competent ministers and other leaders, is unlikely to achieve good long term mission outcomes for our Church. There is also a concern that as congregations become smaller they can become more vulnerable in terms of compliance with legislation associated with health and safety and employment, as well as our own Church regulations. Small congregations can find it harder to sustain the forms of worship and the provision of Biblical teaching important to the reformed tradition.

What about Cooperating Ventures?

These regulations provide for Presbyterian congregations only. Some further discussion needs to take place with our partner Churches on how to address the challenges associated with the burgeoning number of small UCANZ congregations.

What is wrong with the existing regulations?

The existing regulations can require a presbytery to commit significant resources over a sustained period of time to what can end up being a somewhat technical and legalistic process. If a congregation is resistant there will inevitably be appeals to the General Assembly resulting in legal processes placing further demands on our resources. The new regulations are simpler to implement, take less time, place the onus on the congregation to indicate how they are fulfilling their mission, and provide for a hearing by a neutral committee whose concern focuses on the fairness of the decisions being made.

Background to Proposals 8, 9 and 10

Chapter 15 Review Commission – Report to the General Assembly

1. Introduction:

In September 2009 the convenor of the Assembly Nominating Committee advised as follows: “I am writing to indicate that the Council of Assembly has approved you to be members of the Commission re the review of chapter 15 of the Book of Order disciplinary processes for the church – members being Mrs Marie Callendar, Rev Loisa Fruean, Sir Robin Gray, Rev Alastair Smales, Mr Peter Whiteside, Rev Reg Weeks as convenor and Mr Bruce Corkill as a corresponding member.

The task of the commission is to review the BOO disciplinary processes as required by decision [08.069] -

That the General Assembly appoint a widely representative Commission to:

- a) Review chapter 15 of the Book of Order in light of [the presbytery’s concerns]; and,
- b) Propose to the next General Assembly regulations by which a Session/Parish Council and/or a Presbytery/District Council may hear and determine appropriate complaints and exercise appropriate discipline;”

In discharging its responsibilities the Commission sought and received responses from Presbyteries, Contact Persons, Presbytery disciplinary commissions, interested church members and appropriate officers of the General Assembly both of PCANZ and PCUSA. The commission wishes to thank all those who put time and effort in to making submissions on issues related to the review.

It was clear from the collated responses that only a few of the larger Presbyteries had actual experience with cases of discipline. It was also noted that some of the concerns had arisen under the provisions of the initial (2006) version of Chapter 15, and had been largely dealt with under the changes made by the 2008 Assembly.

However, a significant theme in the responses was the issue which prompted the Ashburton Presbytery to seek a review in the first place, namely that the present Chapter 15 requires all issues to be dealt with by a national process which is too complicated and legalistic for many of the less serious issues which in the past had been under the purview of the Church Council, or the Presbytery. The Commission therefore saw it as a key task to draw boundaries around what could, and should be dealt with locally and what needs to be dealt with nationally.

2. A Key task

- 2.1 The commission noted that Chapter 15.2 uses the term “**conduct unbecoming**” as the basis for establishing a complaint without saying clearly what sort of conduct was indicated. The commission proposes this term be defined as conduct which calls into question the suitability of the respondent to retain office or membership. Inevitably the interpretation of such a definition will be subjective, and may be modified to a certain degree by the climate of moral and social opinion of the day. Nonetheless we believe that Scripture, tradition, common church usage, and such Assembly formulations as the Code of Ethics will provide

guidelines robust enough to produce an even handed outcome to the processing of a complaint under Chapter 15.

- 2.2 The Commission also believes that such a definition provides the basis for deciding at an early stage, which issues are of such a nature as to require the processes already established in Chapter 15, and which would best be dealt with by a process more immediate, flexible, and relatively local yet providing an optimum degree of objectivity. It is therefore our recommendation that a Pastoral Resolution Committee should be appointed by each presbytery to deal with disputes, grievances and complaints of a nature that do not involve conduct that is unbecoming, and yet require a greater element of neutrality than may be present in a Church Council. Supplementary provisions will be required to provide guidance for the Pastoral Resolution Committees. Their procedures could best be modelled on the proceedings of the Disputes Tribunal. It has elsewhere been strongly recommended that where Presbyteries or Te Aka Puaho are required to deal with a case of sexual misconduct a commission be appointed. A Presbytery may decide that the Pastoral Resolutions Committee be commissioned on occasion to act in such situations, or establish it as a standing commission to handle all matters under Chapter 15

3. Review

- 3.1 While the Commission was required to review Chapter 15, it saw that task as being one of identifying the degree to which Chapter 15 was achieving its purpose, and what modifications may improve the process, rather than devising or advocating a different process. In general terms it is the Commission's finding that the 2008 version appears to function satisfactorily for those cases where the basis of a complaint of conduct unbecoming is established. It is particularly assisted where Presbyteries have established a Disciplinary Commission. However, a number of submissions particularly from Presbytery disciplinary commissions, as well as discussions with the National Complaints Officer, alerted us to areas where improvements might be made.
- 3.2 A number of changes are proposed and they are presented in this report in the order they occur in the clauses of Chapter 15 itself. To show the overall effect on the process a copy of the Chapter as amended appears as an appendix to this report.

Section 15.1

The Commission decided after consideration of the PCUSA regulations to augment the Introduction by clarifying various aspects such as the source of the Church's authority and its intention in having such regulations.

Section 15.7

This subsection required a procedure more convoluted than necessary in the case where a Presbytery or Te Aka Puaho decides to initiate a complaint. The proposed amendments will leave the initiative in the hands of the person appointed to act on behalf of the court.

Section 15.7A - Self-Accusation

A new procedure, based on the PCUSA regulations, is proposed to give a person prepared to self-accuse the opportunity to bring themselves before the Church for discipline. Such a procedure would allow the person who self-accuses to take

the initiative in trying to resolve a situation where a complaint is likely to be brought against that person in relation to the relevant conduct. Such a complaint, if received, could then be dealt with in light of the disciplinary procedure to which the respondent has already been subject.

Section 15.9

A proposed new sub-section (2) is to provide for a support person for the respondent.

Sections 15.10 and 15.11 - Time limits

It was felt by the Commission, and confirmed through submissions that the time frame for the process can produce unnecessary delays. The proposal is that the time limits in these sections be reduced from 21 working days to 15 working days. These limits should help keep the process moving without causing undue pressure on the people involved.

Section 15.11A - Respondent allowed to respond

As a matter of natural justice a new section is proposed to allow the respondent to respond to the complainant's comments made under section 15.11.

Section 15.12A – Church Council informed

It was felt this provision needs to be revised in order to provide an element of discretion to meet the circumstances of any particular case.

Section 15.14(1)(d) - Oversight

Submissions made clear that there is a need for guidelines for disciplinary committees regarding "oversight" (as referred to in section 15.14 (1) (d)) The Commission's view is that these could best be provided in the Supplementary Provisions.

Further, it is important that Assessors send full reasons for their decisions to the disciplinary committee undertaking the oversight so as to assist them in determining what appropriate actions should be taken to help restore a respondent to full participation in the faith community of the Church.

Section 15.14(1)(e)

If the proposed Pastoral Resolution Committee is adopted then a new sub-section should be added to allow the assessors to direct that a complaint not involving conduct that is unbecoming be dealt with by the Pastoral Resolution Committee of the relevant Presbytery.

4. Conclusion

If the above changes seem relatively minor, that is because in the main Chapter 15 provides a clear, robust and fair process for dealing with complaints of such a nature that if proven the respondent is likely to lose his or her position, and possibly not only current income but future status. These are serious issues both for the complainant and for the respondent.

However, such a process is too complex for the resolution of many of the pastoral issues which occur in the day to day life of parishes. Without a satisfactory alternative such issues are likely to fall by the wayside and those concerned to raise such issues left with no opportunity or medium of resolution.

The Commission is strongly of the view that the proposed Pastoral Resolutions Committee provides the appropriate mechanism to deal with such issues, leaving the Disciplinary processes of Chapter 15 for the serious cases.

Background to Proposal 11

- 1.1 The changes proposed to the Book of Order contained in Appendix 2 all require adoption *ad interim* and reference to presbyteries including Te Aka Puaho in accordance with Chapter 14.9 of the Book of Order.
 - a. Item 1. A change is required to Chapter 6.8 to recognise the Ministry Development Programme and authorise supplementary provisions in that regard.
 - b. A minor change is required to Chapter 7.23(b) referring to a letter of commission for commissioners to presbytery, rather than a form.
 - c. One matter that was overlooked when the Book of Order was enacted in 2006 was provisions regarding *ministers emeritae* and the removal of names of ministers from the rolls of ministers (in respect of which approval of supplementary provisions is now sought). The Committee now seeks to remedy these omissions.
 - d. The Commission chaired by the Rev. Reg Weeks has suggested a definition of "conduct unbecoming" for the purposes of Chapter 15 dealing with discipline. Obviously sexual misconduct is a form of "conduct unbecoming", and the Committee feels there is a necessity to insert a definition of "sexual misconduct", as well as setting out the consequences of a conviction in a court of law for a criminal charge involving sexual misconduct as well as the power for the Church to still exercise discipline in relation to sexual misconduct where the person concerned has been acquitted on a criminal charge relating to that same conduct. These provisions are consistent with Appendix E9 under the old Book of Order.
-

Appendix 2 - Amendments to the 2006 Book of Order

1. Amend Chapter 6.8(2) by deleting the words "continuing ministry formation and supervision in accordance with section 8 of Chapter 9 and replacing it with the words "ministry development in accordance with supplementary provisions."
2. Amend Chapter 7.23(4) by deleting the word "form" and replacing it with the word "letter".
3. Enact new Chapters 10.32A and 10.32B as follows:

10.32A *Ministers Emeritae*

When a minister retires or has become incapacitated, except where the presbytery of which the minister is a member deems it not to be in the interests of the Church, the minister shall be granted by the presbytery the status of minister emeritus or emerita and shall be eligible to be appointed as a member of that presbytery.

10.32B *Removal of Names from Rolls of Ministers*

In addition to the powers described in Chapter 10.32 for the removal of names of ministers from the rolls of ministers, there shall also be a power to remove such names when a minister has been the subject of an order made pursuant to Chapter 15.27(1)(a) or been engaged in another calling and not been a member of any presbytery for 5 years

(such period being capable of extension to 7 years) pursuant to supplementary provisions.

4. Amend Chapter 15.2(1) by adding at the end of the existing sentence "'conduct unbecoming' includes sexual misconduct",

and inserting new provisions as chapter 15.2(3) and (4):

15.2(3) If a respondent to a charge in respect of sexual misconduct has been convicted in a court of law of any criminal charge relating to sexual misconduct the Church must for the purposes of dealing with a complaint concerning the same matter accept such charge as proven without further inquiry, and proceed to consider penalty and other matters provided for in this chapter without further proof of such charge.

15.2(4) If the respondent who has been charged with sexual misconduct has been acquitted in a court of law of any criminal charge relating to sexual misconduct, the Church may, in its discretion, investigate and/or lay a complaint concerning the same matter under this chapter.

Background to Proposal 12

Extract of chapter 9 of the Book of Order

Section 9.1 a reads:

Section 9.1(1A) is “Sexual relations outside marriage -

In accordance with the supreme and subordinate standards of the Church, sessions, parish councils, presbyteries and united district councils shall not accept for training, license, ordain or induct anyone involved in a sexual relationship outside of a faithful marriage between a man and a woman. In relation to homosexuality, and the interests of natural justice, this ruling shall not prejudice anyone who, as at 29 September 2006, had been accepted for training, licensed, ordained or inducted.”