

June 2015



PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH

IT'S A MATTER OF FAITH

Moderator's White Paper | Rt Rev Andrew Norton



IT'S A MATTER OF FAITH

Introduction

My motive for producing this white paper is to promote engagement, dialogue and action on a number of key issues I see facing our Church today. It is simply “as I see it”. You can agree or disagree, however, what is most needed is engagement with these issues at a congregational and regional (presbytery) level. If I can in any way, prompt or provoke such dialogue and action, this paper will have accomplished a great deal.

I am prepared to name the issues as I see them, but I am also aware that to be critical is one thing and to be constructive is another: “there is a time to tear down and a time to build up”ⁱ. In this paper I attempt to do both.

I have sectioned the paper into two parts. The first section is my view on some of the issues we are facing as a Church. They are:

1. A matter of faith: The spiritual vitality of the Church
2. Disengagement: Individualism and congregationalism
3. Disunity: the woundedness of our Church
4. Loss of voice: A deafening silence
5. Professionalism: Raising the bar
6. The ethics of mission: Checking our motives for mission
7. Busyness: A sickness of the soul
8. Stewardship: Giving an account

The second part of this paper is where presbyteries, sessions and parish councils can have their say. We have talked “at” one another for far too long. I believe that if our Church is to be a grassroots movement of people, then it is time to engage in genuine and deep conversation around these issues. It is only from this engagement that we will start to see the kind of change we need to address the challenges we are facing.

This section includes questions for dialogue and possible ways forward.



How can you respond to this paper?

Not read any further. I know you have a choice as to what you read and engage with. But if there is any value in this conversation you will want to keep reading.

Attack the messenger? I know this happens too. Rather than letters or conversations of anger, hurt, or fear I would prefer and welcome conversations that could just possibly imagine a new way of being.

Start the conversation and see where that leads you.

Be inspired, get stirred up and do something positive.





SECTION I: THE ISSUES

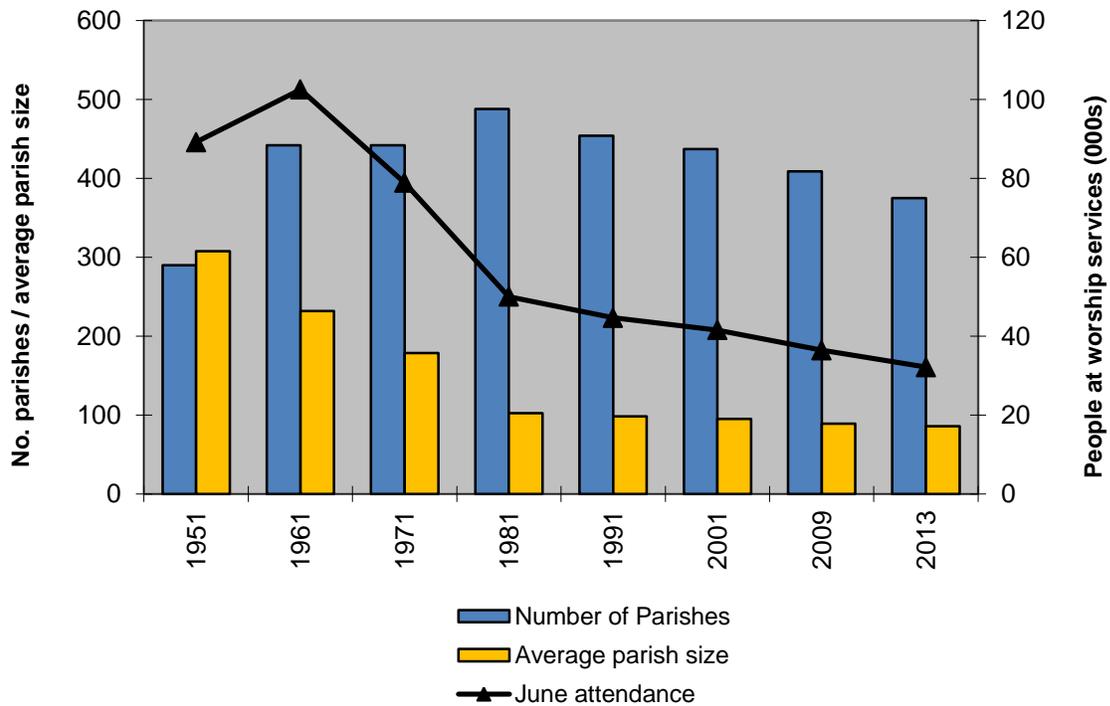
In this section, you will find a summary of the issues as I see them. Before we get started on reviewing these, let's have a quick look at the environment in which we're doing God's work.

The Context

You have no doubt seen or heard the statistics about the increasingly secular nature of our society, and the falling number of people going to church. Figure 1 outlines the trends in our own church attendance since the 50s. Several good papers have been written about this change, and the nature of our existence within our communities, so I'm not going to replicate them here.

Instead, all I wish to do is highlight that we're working in a very different context than our forefathers, and invite you to bear this reality in mind as you read and reflect on the rest of this paper (if you're a facts and statistics person, Appendix 1 contains some key analyses of our parish and ministry life).

Figure 1: Trends in church life since the 1950s¹



¹ Parish Life Survey (2014)



Of all the issues facing our Church I consider that the biggest issue of all is...

A Matter of Faith: The spiritual Vitality of Our Church

Structures and systems, while needing continual reform, will not save us! There is no silver bullet or five-step plan that will take us into the future.

Each Sunday we have about 22,000ⁱⁱ people come to our many Presbyterian, cooperating and uniting churches throughout the country (see figure 1). At the core of this weekly pilgrimage is a search to belong and to believe. What we do in that sacred hour is of vital importance. Karl Barth posed a question of those coming to church Sunday after Sunday:

“Is it true, this talk of a loving and good God, who is more than one of the friendly idols whose rise is so easy to account for, and whose dominion is so brief? What the people want to find out and thoroughly understand is, ‘Is it true?’”

But belief as mental assent was not what Barth had in mind. Doctrinal belief will result in a lifeless religion. It is about people’s quest to discover for themselves that which is really true, that which calls them to church.

It is this kind of belief that is translated into a life of faith. Sometimes I wonder if all our noise about being so sure of what we believe and think means that we are not so sure, and therefore can only talk about it and not actively live our faith.

Navigating the future is a matter of authentic faith where we remove every confidence in ourselves or excuse so that we may respond to the call of God. There is no map for tomorrow. We need to rediscover the



“Religion is the possibility of the removal of every ground of confidence except confidence in God alone.”

- Karl Barth





ancient pathways our forebears have trod; the pathway of the unknown a path of mystery, adventure, wonder and faithⁱⁱⁱ.

"Let go of the place that holds, let go of the place that flinches, let go of the place that controls, let go of the place that fears. Just let the ground support me... Walking in the dark night is a way to practice faith, a way to build confidence in the unknown... I learn to practice courage in the vastness of what I can't see."

- Stephanie Kaza

This is a journey that will require faith and a whole lot of courage.

This journey of faith is an inspired journey. The God of imagination who created us in the divine image seeks for us an extraordinary partnership of co-creation. Our future is locked deep within our own imagination.

"The deep imagination is also our primary resource for recognizing the emerging future, for 'seeing' the visionary possibilities of what we can create right now individually and collectively... It is our essential resource for all genuine human creativity." - Bill Plotkin

While some will look at statistics or the conditions of our buildings to assess our health, I believe we need to take a deep look into the spiritual vitality of our congregations and members. Have we lost our imagination that comes from an experience of the spacious and gracious love of God as demonstrated in Jesus Christ?

Disengagement: Individualism and Congregationalism

As Presbyterians I think we have lost an understanding of "we" as congregationalism has become our default system for operation. Once we saw ourselves as a national movement, now we are a loose collection of congregations. We gather together every two years and wave the "Presbyterian" flag yet return home to do our own thing. I don't believe this is intentional, but rather symptomatic of something far deeper.

Life has become all too hard; there is just too much going on. It takes so much energy to keep things going; it is easier just to focus on self.

The debates in the Church over the past 25 years have also worn people down, resulting in distrust of one another and disengagement from a national identity; you in your small corner, and I in mine.

As Presbyterians I think we have lost an understanding of "we" as congregationalism has become our default system for operation.

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We are fooling ourselves if we think the democratic (collective discernment of the spirit of God) ideals can be sustained without deep engagement^{iv}. Without this deep engagement, where the unity of the Spirit of God is discerned, “we” becomes “I”. We become separate - with each one of us doing our own thing with no concern for others. Or even worse “they” become the enemy.

Have we lost the meaning of “we”? Reduced to me, the church becomes the fulfilment of individual needs. Show me where in the Bible the church exists to meet “my needs”? But even worse, when “my needs” or “my views” are not met, do we throw a tantrum, dissociate, disconnect and disengage?



In Those Years

by Adrienne Rich

In those years, people will say, we lost track
of the meaning of we, of you
we found ourselves
reduced to I
and the whole thing became
silly, ironic, terrible:
we were trying to live a personal life
and, yes, that was the only life we could bear witness to
But the dark birds of history screamed and plunged
into our personal weather
They were headed somewhere else but their beaks and pinions drove
along the shore, through the rags of fog
where we stood, saying I





Disunity: The Woundedness of Our Church

I believe that our Church is deeply divided. We have allowed one debate to dominate us for the past 25 years. We have continually divided into camps. When this happens our debate becomes politicised resulting in a lack of biblical discernment, integrity and honest dialogue. What follows are power struggles to discover who is right and who is wrong, leaving everyone wounded through the process.

The depth of division within our Church is rarely talked about openly but is present in passive aggressive behaviour that lies beneath the way we sometimes engage with one another (distrust, suspicion, power plays, manipulation, spiritual abuse and bullying). This becomes most obvious once every two years when we meet as a General Assembly.

In the same way as the prodigal son “came to his senses”, could it be that we are “coming to selves”^v and the conclusion this is not working?

Furthermore, I believe the mission of the Church is not just the return of the prodigal, but the reconciliation of the two brothers. Wouldn't that be amazing!

Did Jesus know that one day we would come to this place and for that reason he prayed “for those who will believe in me through their message”?^{vi}

What an amazing prayer: that they would know and be known and love and be loved. This would be GLORY and therefore the world would come to believe. This is far more than coming to an agreement, but is the activity of being in relationship with God through Jesus Christ and one another; this is the essence mission.

It is time to pray.^{vii}



*“No problem
can be
solved from the
same level of
consciousness
that
created it.”*

- Albert Einstein





Loss of Voice: A Deafening Silence

Once upon a time our Church was a voice to the nation. Social reform in the history of New Zealand was led by Presbyterians! Once upon a time we were not afraid to speak out on public issues and give prophetic leadership to our country. We have largely become silent. How did this happen? While it might be easy to point to financial decisions or our own political in-fighting that saw the demise of our Public Questions Committee, the reality is not only corporately but also individually, we have lost our voice.

Since the Church moved from the centre to the edge of society, others have taken our place. Now is the time, more than ever, to rediscover our prophetic voice in our nation.

Sadly, when people do eventually hear us speak it is usually on one topic alone; we come across as a Church that is obsessed with sexual orientation. Our voice is perceived as “against”. Wouldn’t it be great if we discovered the voice of God today that is “for”; a voice for the poor, a voice for the liberation of women and children sex slaves, a voice for victims of human trafficking, a voice for justice and a voice for peace! Who will speak if we do not?

Once upon a time we were not afraid to speak out on public issues... We have largely become silent.

As Moderator, I’m learning that loss of our voice is a significant issue for me and the Church. The Moderator is the only elected person who can speak on behalf of the Church, yet at the same time can only speak on those things that the General Assembly has given agreement to. This is both a safe guard and a muzzling of the Moderator. Are we afraid of what our Moderators might say? Don’t we trust the very process of discernment we have given to the election of the Moderator?

During my time as Moderator I will be giving voice to many issues both inside and outside the Church. See my blog, <http://moderator.presbyterian.org.nz/>, for more information.

Professionalism: Raising the Bar

The rate of change over the past 15 years has been huge, ministers have told me that this has left them wondering if they lack the skills needed for today’s ministry demands and expectations. Doing the same thing and expecting a different result doesn’t work. I believe that the challenges of ministry require continual upskilling in communication, leadership, change management, complexity, emotional intelligence and resilience.

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A job with tenure has built-in obsolescence if professional development is not seen as a priority. There is no such thing as a job as of right, even if it is a calling. In the secular world people often have not one but multiple careers with continual training and retraining. However, upskilling alone is insufficient without the spiritual disciplines of faith. Spiritual renewal needs to be at the heart of all the activities of our ministries.

When using the word "professionalism" I'm calling us back to the original use of the word as used within the Benedictine tradition. A "professional" was a graduate of years of study, work and spiritual discipline with the climax of graduation being a profession of faith.

As a Church we have been proud of the "call" system as a method of discerning God's call in ministry and to a local congregation. That works well at the beginnings of ministry but there is no way to have the conversation of being "uncalled" without significant pain, lengthy commissions and the involvement of lawyers.

With the number of congregations who cannot afford full-time ministry increasing, there is not always a place to be "re-called", leaving both minister and congregation stuck.

I suspect our call system is facing a crisis – maybe it is even in crisis. Our human resource practices of both lay and ordained ministry are struggling to meet the ministry and mission needs we are facing. Presbytery processes are labour intensive and time consuming with the transition process from one minister to another taking about two years. Succession planning is a topic that is rarely talked about^{viii}.

In the last 10 years we have seen the number of active ministers reduce from 420 to 230. This is having a huge impact on presbyteries with fewer ministers being called upon to do more and more duties. But within this number we have another concerning and hidden problem: a number of ministers due to retire cannot afford to do so. This is not healthy for the ministers or the congregations they serve.

We have two processes in place to assist congregations and ministers to reflect on their ministry and development of mission plans: ministry development review (for ministers) and parish reviews. Both ministry



"In times of change it is the learners who inherit the future. Those who have finished learning find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists."

- Eric Hoffer





development reviews and parish reviews are also underway. There is significant concern that ministry development reviews are not transparent, followed up on and are not linked to the parish reviews. The effectiveness of the ministry development reviews is seriously undermined if the wider picture of what is happening within the parish is not taken into account. The crucial conversations are not taking place.

The Ethics of Mission: Checking Our Motives for Mission

I recently had coffee with a leader of a national youth organisation that bases its ministry around friendship evangelism. He retold a story of a student asking another leader "if you knew I would never become a Christian would you still be my friend?" The leader responded "no". This then led to a discussion about the ethics of evangelism which in turn led me to think much more about the ethics of our mission activities.

With an increase in community-based mission ministries we need to ask deeper and more fundamental questions about why we are doing what we are doing.

Is our motive an attempt to "get more people to come to church" or to "lead people to Christ"? Are these motives good enough? Are they ethical?

On the other hand, are our community ministries and/or community events anything more than good works that any social agency could do, and possibly do better?

My concern regarding these questions arises from the precarious state of many churches. After decades of decline could mission be our saving grace? A bit like the dwindling bowling club that wants some new members, not so much to play bowls but to replace the roof and keep the current members in the manner they have become accustomed to, a church with a survival mentality is a dangerous church, for it could do anything in the name of mission.

*When everything is mission,
mission becomes nothing. Yet
at the same time everything
we do must be grounded in
mission...*

For a church that prides itself on theological reflection, I personally find that some of our theology is abysmal. Since when is hiring out the church hall mission? When everything is mission, mission becomes nothing. Yet at the same time everything we do must be grounded in mission because God is missional.



Busyness: A Sickness of the Soul

In the Church, the most common response I hear to the greeting "How are you?" is "Busy!"

I'm more convinced than ever that busyness is a spiritual sickness that plagues our society. If the devil was ever to have a strategy, it must surely be "keep them busy", for it will deaden their souls and rob them of meaning in their work.

C S Lewis, in the brilliant letter from Screwtape to Woodworm, offers the following advice:

"The busier they are, the more likely they will get tired and cranky with each other. We can have lots of fun when that happens. Keep them busy, and they don't take time to talk to each other. Even better, keep them too busy to listen to each other. We know things are going our way when other people become an interruption to them. Just keep reminding them that their tasks are much more important than people!

"Keep them too busy to plan ahead. The less planning and prioritising they do, the better. We're especially in good shape when they don't have time to evaluate what they're doing. If their work isn't effective, we don't have nearly as much to worry about."

Busyness goes far deeper than activity, it is a distractedness that produces muddle-mindedness and ultimately deadens the human soul. At the core is a deep fear of having to face up to our true poverty of spirit and meaning. Or as Judy Lief says: "Our hope is that if we keep all the distractedness going, we will not have to look at who we are, we will not have to feel what we feel, we will not have to see what we see."

Our desire to be relevant as a Church may be our downfall. Are we so like the world that we have lost our distinctiveness? If being relevant means becoming more like the society we live in, we are double damned! I am wondering if we have bought into the lie, and if so, are we of no use to ourselves and our community?

I'm afraid our churches are way too busy... Our over-activity is realised acutely in the loss of the dream and deep organisational incoherence

I'm afraid our churches are way too busy and far too noisy, but it goes much deeper than the noise of our activity. Our over-activity is realised acutely in the loss of the dream and deep organisational incoherence. When we don't know where we are going, no measure will tell us how we are going and any direction will do^x.



Stewardship: Giving Account

Our church is changing. If we follow the trends of the past few years we will see a further 20 per cent decline in membership over the next 10 years. Congregation size is declining; more than 110 out of 375 churches have less than 40 adults at worship.

In contrast the wealth of our congregations is increasing. As at 30 June 2014, approximately \$122 million in funds was held by parishes. While it is true that some of this collective accumulated wealth is not available for general purposes and can only be used for specific usage (eg. proceeds from building sales, specific purpose trusts, legacies tagged for capital projects etc), it is estimated that a considerable sum could be available for mission. Imagine the good that could be done with even a small portion of this money!

All it takes is a change in mindset. I'm I remember the words of a hymn I sang as a child..."you in your small corner and I in mine". Whatever else those words mean – they do not reflect a biblical model for stewardship. I firmly believe that together we have the resources for the mission that God is calling us to be part of.

In the Bible, God has much to say about use of money and stored wealth.

Each year Presbyterian churches up and down the country receive millions of dollars in their giving. With the changes in reporting requirements for charities, the government is asking us to justify (rightly so) the benefit to society of this tax-free income. Tax-free, charitable status is a privilege that has to be justified. To comply with new reporting standards^{xi}, we will have to show to the government and one another, complete financial transparency of our income and investments and produce a non-financial report showing membership and activities which benefit the community as well as the congregations of each church^{xii}.

We are benefactors of the generosity, faith and vision of a previous generation who have gifted us with all we need for the future of our Church. The issue we now face is: will we be found by future generations to have been faithful stewards of the resources we have been entrusted with?



*“Unless there is
a new mind
there cannot
be a new line,
the old will go
on repeating
itself with
recurring
deadliness:
without
invention
nothing lies
under the
witch-hazel
bush.”*

- William
Carlos Williams





Blessing of Legacy

by Andrew Norton

Even the great tree of the forest must one day fall
to nourish the next generation.

Hold lightly,
release your grip on what you name as yours
knowing that you too have received legacy.

Give generously as the years pass
of wisdom that has been forged in fire,
of dreams that still wait for a new day
and treasures that will live longer than you -
for one day,
you too will return to the earth.

May the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob bless you with legacy,
so that your name will be spoken
long after your days end.

Conclusion

I was once so sure of many things, now I'm not so sure. Once I had more answers than I did questions. Now, it's the other way around.

I see no way forward to the many issues we face today, other than a way of faith. Do we truly believe in a God who is creating and recreating, a God who is for us and not against us and God who is inviting us to be partners in the good news of liberation and blessing? If so, are we willing to step into the unknown; to let go of all our certainties and embrace the adventure of faith in God alone?

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I offer this white paper as a prayer for the Church that we may “wrestle”^{xiii} with God and come to a place where we may be used by God in a way of blessing in our land.

It is also a conversation that you are invited to engage in so that we may be ready, willing and able to act upon the leading and guidance of God.

Before mission (works) comes intention

Before intention comes attention

Before attention comes love

Before love comes listening

Before listening comes grace

And before grace comes God alone.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Andrew Norton".

Rt Rev Andrew Norton

Moderator – Presbyterian Church Aotearoa New Zealand

June 2015



SECTION II: HOW YOU CAN ENGAGE WITH THIS PAPER

What To Do Now

Firstly, please talk with me at any stage of your discernment and consideration of these issues. Contact me through my blog (all of my contact details are noted here). I look forward to hearing from ministers, leaders and parishes as they go through the process of considering these important matters.

Step 1: Engage in Deep Conversations

My encouragement is for:

- Small groups of ministers to reflect and have deep conversations (not just the trading of opinions).
- Presbyteries to place these (and/or other) conversations on their agenda (not just business).
- Local sessions and parish councils discuss at meetings over the next few months.
- Encourage and invite congregational discussion and dialogue.
- Discuss the issues in this paper in home groups.

You may like to select a small number of the eight issues highlighted in this paper to discuss, or you may wish to consider them all.

Step 2: Give Feedback

Now that you have considered one or all of these issues, please **send me your feedback by 30 September 2015**. You can email feedback to moderator@presbyterian.org.nz or post it to me at Moderator, c/o St Columba at Botany, PO Box 64-136, Botany Downs, Auckland 2163

With regard to feedback, my encouragement is to answer these questions:

- To what extent do you agree or disagree with the issues presented?
- What matters presented should be our priorities?
- Which possible ways forward (for each issue) do you support and why?

Step 3: What happens next?

I am looking forward to receiving feedback from synods, presbyteries, parishes, and church leaders about the issues raised in this paper. I will collate the feedback and report back to the Church on the key themes later this year. I also plan to report key findings to the Council of Assembly's last meeting of 2015 so that Council may consider this feedback as it prepares to set priorities and budgets for the 2016/17 financial year and beyond.



Questions for Dialogue and Discussion

This section contains a variety of ideas regarding possible ways forward, as well as some questions intended to encourage conversation. I don't presume to have all the details ironed out for the ideas presented here. Instead, I'm making some suggestions for consideration and discussion. If any of these ideas have strong support, then the why, how and what of resourcing the idea will come later. I also encourage you to come up with your own suggestions for ways forward.

A Matter of Faith: The Spiritual Vitality of the Church

Possible ways forward

- Let's stop talking about God and enter into the deeper conversations of our experience of God.
- Place spiritual formation at the top of each church's priorities.
- Develop a spiritual inventory to assess the spiritual health of each congregation.
- Rediscover the ministry of Jesus as central to the mission of the Church.
- Develop and provide resources on spiritual disciplines.
- Encourage every congregation to have real-life stories of faith every week.
- Provide safe environments for conversations about doubt.
- Learn to pray.

For dialogue

- When you talk about belief, what do you mean?
- Have our ministers become so busy running a church that theological reflection, study and prayer have been relegated to a lower priority?
- Describe a time when a belief changed your life.
- Describe a time when a belief grew tired in your soul.
- How many of your beliefs are you willing to live and die for?
- How is the ministry of Jesus demonstrated in the life of your church?
- Where is the prayer of Jesus in our Church today?
- What is the role of doctrinal belief verses lived belief in the Church?
- Would you describe your local church's belief as "in God alone"?
- Is your congregation a safe place to have conversations about faith, doubt and fear?
- How does your faith inform your decisions and action?
- How does your faith inspire your imagination?
- In what ways do we as a church practice functional atheism (a belief in God, but act as though God does not exist)?



Disengagement: Individualism and Congregationalism

Possible ways forward

- Explore ways of meaningful repentance of our individualism.
- Place a priority on relational engagement rather than judicial and administrative decision making.
- Develop ways of greater engagement at local, regional and national levels.
- Explore other methods of discernment that unite rather than divide with a 60/40 percentage vote.

Dialogue

- In what ways have we lost the meaning of “we”?
- Why do you think this has happened?
- What do you think the “dark birds of history” are in the Adrienne Rich poem?
- What do you think are the factors contributing to the decline in denominationalism?
- Do you think we believe in “we” in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand? If so, why? If no, why not?

Disunity: The Woundedness of Our Church

Possible ways forward

- Explore ways of meaningful repentance of our disunity.
- Name our distrust of one another and work at rebuilding trust by investing in our relationships with each other.
- Stop talking at one another and start truly listening.
- Make a renewed commitment to the prayer and commandments of Jesus.
- Rediscover the spiritual and theological disciplines of discernment and apply these at local, regional and national Church levels for doing business.

Dialogue

- Describe your experience in the church (the good, the bad and the ugly).
- Read and discuss Philip Yancy’s book, *Vanishing Grace*.
- What does the word “evangelical” mean to you?
- What does the word “liberal” mean to you?
- Are we prepared to move beyond labels and rediscover the beauty in these two words?

Loss of Voice: A Deafening Silence

Possible ways forward

This is a significant area that as Moderator I am investing time exploring. Later this year Prescare – a combined Presbyterian Support and Presbyterian Church project - will be releasing a resource titled “Justice & Action” on social transformation as another resource for our Church.

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- Establish an “AA team” (Advocacy and Action) in every congregation that does not have a social issues committee to assess and address an issue of local or international injustice or poverty (eg human trafficking).
- Every congregation partner with Presbyterian Support.

Dialogue

- What gives credibility to the public voice of the church?
- What is the Church “for” rather than “against”?
- What issues that are facing New Zealand today do you think we could have a common voice on?
- What happens when the Church loses its prophetic voice?
- What do you think the Moderator can and cannot say?

Professionalism: Raising the Bar

Possible ways forward

- Discernment of calling every 5-7 years (non-judicial)
- Local churches set aside 10 per cent of the basic stipend annually for professional development of their minister.
- Broaden ministers’ professional experiences by working in the workforce.
- Local church commit to sending their minister on annual spiritual retreat.
- Develop new forms of ministry to utilise the gifts of recently trained ministers.
- View new forms of ministry not as an option but essential for the ongoing mission of the Church - include self-funding work place ministries.
- Presbyteries take responsibility for human/ministry resources and allocate ministry on the basis of need and gifting.
- A very good model for presbyteries to consider is the Church Leadership Support Advisor established recently by the Synod of Otago and Southland.
- Contact the “Leadership Subcommittee” with your thoughts, ideas and feedback on these matters.

Dialogue

- How do you keep your calling fresh and current?
- What have been your most formative and transformative experiences in your professional development?
- What are the main causes of burnout and disillusionment in ministry?
- What skills do you (or your minister) most need to develop?
- What do you think of the statement by Pope Francis^{xiv}, “When professionalism is lacking, there is a slow drift downwards toward mediocrity”?
- Is the stipend an issue when attracting professionals into ministry?
- Is the “stipend” now an obsolete concept?
- What are the alternatives to ordained ministry?
- Do we have accurate information on attrition from ministry?
- Is our model of ministry sustainable?



The Ethics of Mission: Checking Our Motives for Mission

Possible ways forward

- Truthfully examine our motivations for what, why and how we do mission and adjust our behaviours where necessary.
- Identify where we need better theological thinking on what, why and how we do mission.
- Does our theological thinking on mission pass the “yeah right test”? In 2002 the Church commissioned a study^{xv} where one of the findings was that non-churched view the Church with suspicion: “Any questions welcome, no strings attached - yeah right!”

Dialogue

- What do you see as the end goal of the mission of the Church - membership, conversion or the Kingdom of God?
- What was the motive, message and ministry of Jesus?
- When is mission unethical?
- When is mission no longer mission?
- How is mission evaluated and measured? Should it be?
- Does love have an objective or is it "love" period?

Busyness: A Sickness of the Soul

Possible ways forward

- Before beginning any new ministry, ask what two ministries you are willing to stop.
- Rediscover the spiritual discipline of silence (corporate and individual).
- Conduct a “busyness audit” on your congregation to assess the health of your congregation.
- Focus on the spiritual disciplines of renewal.
- Ask “why are we doing this?”
- Send all ministers on an annual spiritual retreat (this is not their holiday!)
- Reduce the number of church meetings.

For dialogue

- What do you say when asked, “Are you busy?”
- Is the current activity of our Church self-renewing and sustainable?
- In what ways does our activity as a church work against the teaching of Jesus^{xvi}?
- What is the greatest gift we could be offering our society?
- In what ways should we strive, or not strive, to be relevant to our society?
- How much of what we do as a church is “cultural Christianity”?
- What is the burn-out rate of your volunteers?
- What happens if your activity is not birthed out of the stillness of God^{xvii}?



Stewardship: Giving an Account

Possible ways forward

- Ask some frank questions. Assess the real cost of your current ministry. What is it costing you? Can you afford it? Can you afford to pay yourself rent on your current facility? Ask, “What is the capital value of your facilities?” and give yourself a 5 per cent return on that number. Are you getting a good return on investment to that? How is God getting a good return on your investment (see Matthew 13:1-24)?
- The newly formed Mission Enterprise Fund is designed to address some of these issues. This is a fantastic first step, the test will be on how willing we are to share these resources.
- Congregation-to-congregation partnership. Those who have reserves could partner with congregations who are developing new ministries. A great example of this is St John’s Wellington with Knox Waitara.
- Congregational legacy. Every congregation in New Zealand has been gifted legacy by those who have gone before. We need now to establish a legacy mindset for the future of our Church that engages activity in new church planting for the future. Do we have within us what is needed to create a future worthy of our past?
- While the numbers speak for themselves about the decline in numbers across our denomination and of the growing number of smaller congregations, I’m not advocating that big is good and small is bad. What I am advocating is, that how we do church in these different environments will be very different. We simply cannot continue under our current assumptions.

Dialogue

- What do you think about closing churches?
- What is the ethics of a congregation having significant financial reserves only to sustain the status quo?
- Have a look at Tim Keller^{xviii} on the *Prodigal God*. Are we in danger of being the older brother?
- Who paid the price for the restoration of the younger brother?
- How does our management of financial resources weigh up against biblical stewardship?
- For those saving for a “rainy day” when is it time to give it away or spend it?
- Is it possible to do church without a church?
- Why are we so obsessed with church buildings?
- When is it time to close a church?
- If your church didn’t exist would the community miss it?
- What is the unique gift that your church has to offer to the community that no one else can offer?
- How do we give account to New Zealand society for the benefit we offer?
- Are our buildings fit for purpose? If so can you articulate that purpose?



Blessing of Imagination

by Andrew Norton

May God light a fire in your imagination!

May God break the chains of
small minded people who say to you

“it can’t be done”,

“it will never work”,

or

“we’ve done that before”.

May God light a fire in your imagination!

May it be daring and bold enough to send shivers up your spine.

May it rattle the cage of comfort and lead you into the sacred work of re-creation.

May you come to accept yourself as one who is made in the imagination of God.

May the world see in your eyes a holy fire. May God light a fire in your imagination!

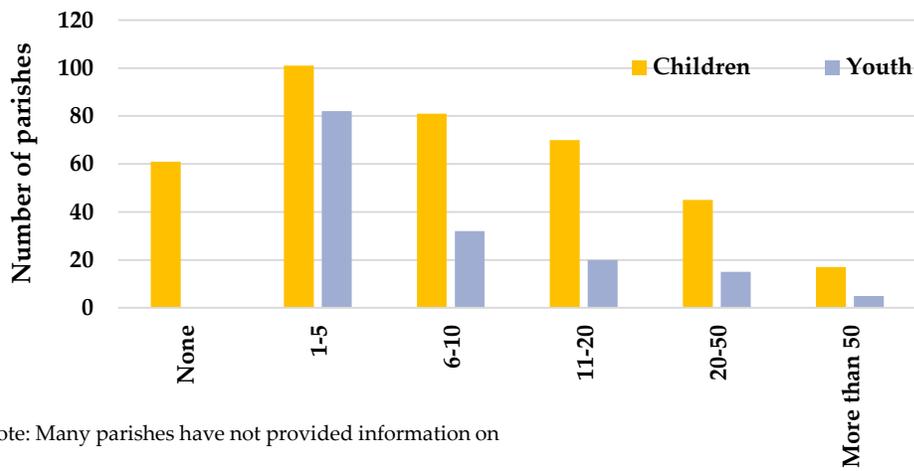




Appendix 1: Statistics About Parish Life

I would like to acknowledge the Church Property Trustees and Margaret Galt for many of the statistics quoted in this report. Where indicated, the data is from the Parish Life Survey 2014.

Figure 3: The number of children and young people at worship



Note: Many parishes have not provided information on

Source: Parish Life Survey 2014

Figure 5: Age profile of ministers contributing to and receiving payments from Beneficiary Fund

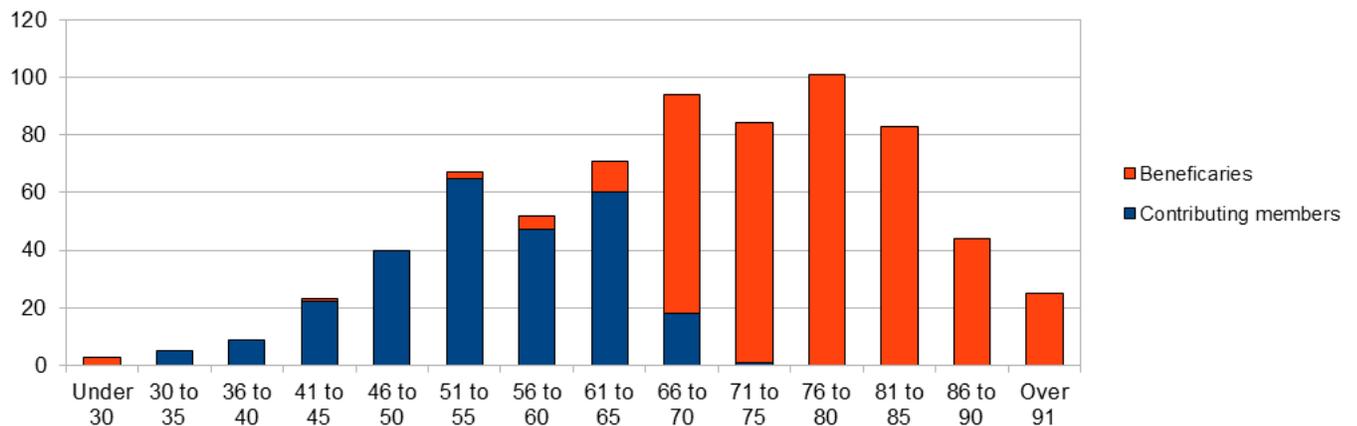
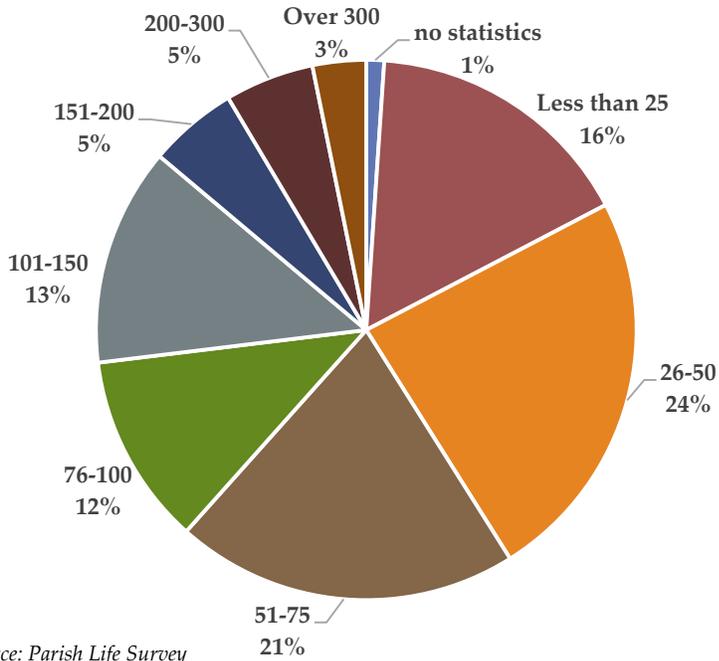


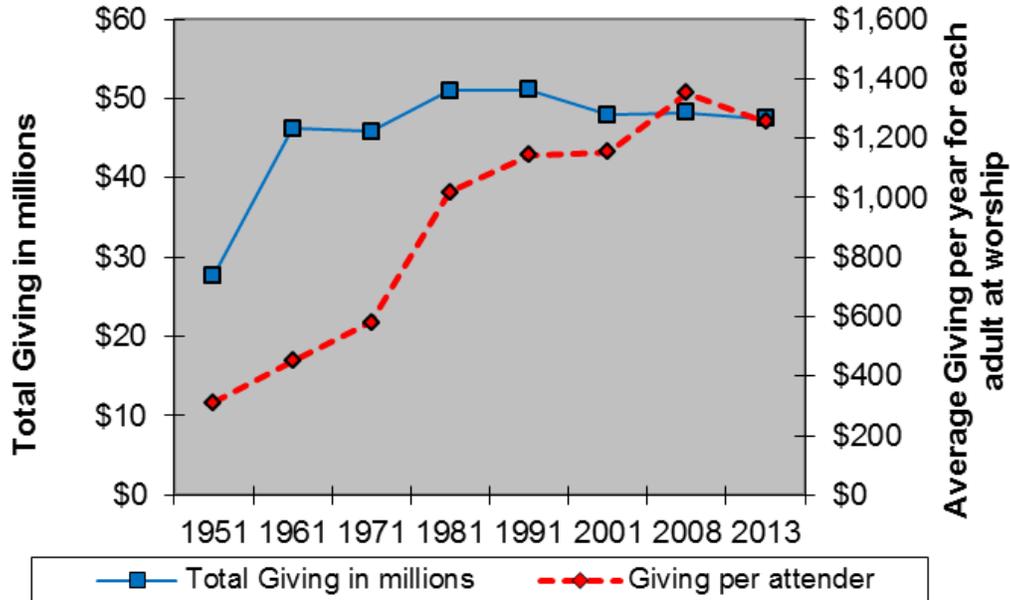


Figure 4: The size of parishes by number of people at worship



Source: Parish Life Survey

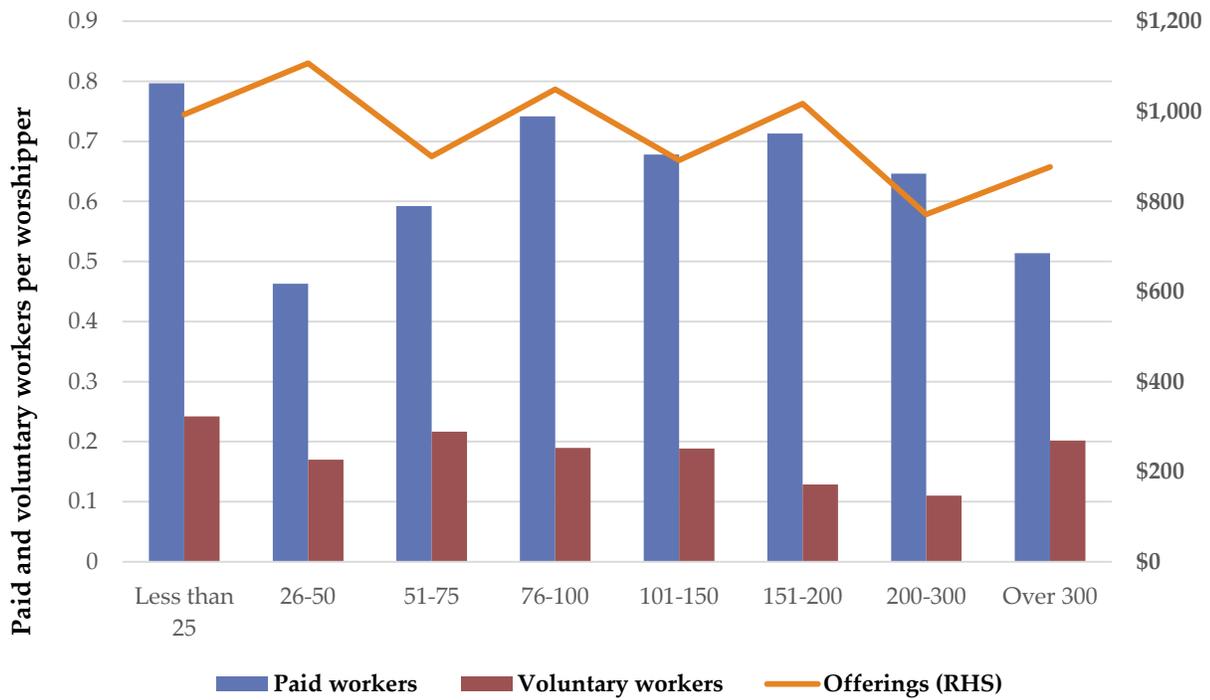
Figure 6: Presbyterian real giving from 1951 to 2013 (adjusted to 2001 dollars)



Source: Parish Life Survey



Figure 6: Resources per person at worship



Source: Parish Life Survey



Further Resources and Reading

See <http://moderator.presbyterian.org.nz/> for further articles; “**When a system is capable of evil.**”

Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry by Ruth Haley Barton (2008)

This is an excellent book on the rediscovery of spiritual disciplines in ministry. Also includes a great chapter on discerning God’s will together.

Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When the Stakes are High by Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, Switzler (2012)

This is a resource I wish I had many years ago. We all know that there are hard conversations that need to take place but we try to avoid them as much as we can. This book offers wonderful wisdom on how to have those conversations.

Wiser: Getting Beyond Groupthink to Make Groups Smarter by Cass Sunstein (2014)

This is a piece of academic research put together in a very practical way to help groups make better decisions. Why do smart people sometimes make dumb decisions? Given our Presbyterian understanding of collective decision making, this book is essential reading.

A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life, Parker J. Palmer (2004)

The Advantage by Patrick Lencioni (2012)

This is one of the best books on organisational health and how teams can work to achieve outstanding results.

Managing Polarities in Congregations by Roy M. Oswald and Barry Johnson (2010)

Over the years the Alban Institute have published great resources for churches. This is by far the best! Given the deep divisions in the church (over many possible things) this book offers a healthy way of working through those.



Vanishing Grace: Whatever Happened to the Good News? by Philip Yancey (2014)

This is a classic Yancey with sharp critique, insightful wisdom and practical application. At the core of all we do as a church we must have the question “Are we being good news to the world?” at the top of our agenda. This book offers a way of asking and answering that question.

Endnotes

ⁱ Ecclesiastes 3:3

ⁱⁱ The latest Census records some 300,000 people as census Presbyterians. Our membership currently stands at 35,473 and weekly attendance is 21,888 as per 2013 statistical return. There are significant issues with the reporting of our own statistics to due to the desire to keep them as low as possible to avoid payment of Assembly Assessment.

ⁱⁱⁱ Genesis 12:1-19, 2 Corinthians 5:7, Hebrews 11

^{iv} Arnold Mindell, The Deep Democracy of open Forums

^v Luke 15:17

^{vi} John 17:6-26

^{vii} 2 Chronicles 7:14

^{viii} Carolyn Weese & J. Russell Cabtree: The Elephant in the Boardroom

^{ix} Proverbs 29:18

^{xi} If you have any questions about compliance to the new regulations please contact Assembly office.

^{xii} The Council of Assembly booklet ‘Bringing Clarity to our mission’ in part 2 highlights this very matter.

^{xiii} Genesis 32:22-32

^{xiv} For further discussion have a look at the <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/22/pope-francis-scathing-critique-vatican-officials-curia-speech> How could these apply to our Church?

^{xv} A.C. Nielsen report “Attracting New Zealanders to Spiritual Life”

^{xvi} Matthew 11:28-30. Try reading it in the Message translation.

^{xvii} Psalm 46:10

^{xviii} http://www.churchleaders.com/outreach-missions/outreach-missions-videos/245452-timothy-keller-leading-people-prodigal-god.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=cl_topvideos&utm_content=CL%20TodaysVideo%20-%2020150109

IT'S A MATTER OF FAITH

