

Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

## Moderator's Green Paper

Rt. Rev Andrew Norton

February 2016

# Green volunteers: your voice (part one)



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From the muddled ground there emerged a green volunteer.

Throughout history the church has shaped society and been shaped by society. There have been times of advance and times of decline; times of struggle and times of renewal. In every age the spirit of God breathes new life. Whatever language you use, crisis or opportunity there is a convergence of factors we find ourselves in, all calling for our attention. For some people all they can see is the muddled ground, but there is a **green volunteer**<sup>i</sup>, there always was and is!

The **green volunteer** is a sign of hope; it is the God-breathed life into our context. Not all can see this, but for those who do, it comes as a call to faith, courage and action. As you read this paper, look for the green volunteer.



## Introduction

I could have never have imagined that when I sent out the White Paper *“It’s a matter of Faith”* back in June 2015, it would have generated countless conversations up and down the country. I have received 63,347 words gathered together in over 90 submissions from both individuals and churches (see appendix for methodology).

As the feedback was largely given on behalf of groups, there is a very strong voice of elders and congregational members.

The voice of ethnic churches is all but absent from this feedback. This is also evident at presbytery meetings around the country. The low or non-existent voice of these communities is cause for great concern. Is this another evidence of disengagement in our church?

Another church community not properly represented in the feedback is young people.

The feedback from those who have responded has been very consistent. Apart from a very few, there has been significant support for the White Paper and the issues it raised. The unexpected outcome is that many congregations have formed study groups of elders and congregation members to continue processing the challenges raised.

The words you read in the following pages are both hopeful and hard-hitting. They represent a deep love for the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, even if it is at times expressed in pain and frustration.

## Green volunteers: your voice (part one)

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This paper, *Green volunteers: your voice (part one)*, is designed to be read in conjunction with the plan for action *Green volunteers: a way forward (part two)*, which has been published as a separate paper.

To honour the efforts of all those who took the time to share their views, I have given priority to reporting back to the wider church, and I will also, in due course, submit both papers to the Council of Assembly.

I believe there action is urgently needed, because to do nothing will result in greater disengagement and division within our Church.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Andrew'.

Rt Rev Andrew Norton  
Moderator Presbyterian Church Aotearoa New Zealand  
February 2016

## General Replies to the White Paper

The White Paper became a thing in itself; an opportunity to reflect, engage and offer feedback. Many people commented on how much they appreciated being involved in such a process:

*I have been an active member of [church name omitted for privacy reasons] for over 40 years and for the last 20 years I have become increasingly disillusioned by our presbytery and by PCANZ. A small group of our parishioners have been reviewing your White Paper which raises a lot of relevant issues about matters that are of real concern to us. Your thoughts, your writings are hugely uplifting to many of us at...; for the first time in many years we are seeing something very positive come out of PCANZ.*

*Wonderful effort, we are using it very closely in a twelve month exercise of who we are and where are we going so it is very timely. National issues are our issues it would seem so your paper will be of huge help to us.*

To transform the White Paper into a twelve month exercise shows a wonderful sense of commitment. This group has taken seriously their commitment to deal with issues wider than their own parish. Another person points to the need for action:

*I worry about the urgency of our situation, as you say a survival church is a dangerous church, we have to stride forward in Christ and somehow avoid talkfests, committees.*

**We have done enough talking.** The survival of the Church is in the hands of those who discern the urgency of the issues and invest themselves in doing something about them. There is hope even in the harsh realities of our situation:

*Having just read this white paper, I found an excellent piece of analysis. The prose is clear and concise, and there is a good balance of identifying issues on the one hand, and proposing solutions on the other. And despite the sometimes grim statistics, there is certainly much cause for hope.*

This “thank you” expresses something more than “thank you for a collection of pages to read”. There is a sense of discerning the move of the Holy Spirit in our midst. Again, this person talks of hope. Hope, though, is fragile.

*I am feeling tearfully blessed by the timing and content of your paper. I'd literally just come from yet another 1 1/2 hour dog walk with a dear friend of great depth, our conversation had so many touch points with your paper. My friend has recently left eldership and our Church due to the apathy in the way we have not addressed the decisions of General Assembly around same sex marriage. I've been really wrestling with my own way forward, and had come to the conclusion to withdraw from leadership and just quietly support the kids program as I waited it out until the kids were grown - pitiful huh?! My hope is returned.*

This next person courageously expresses deep hurt and confusion. Somewhere within the white paper s/he again found their place within the body.

*I wanted to write and thank you for contributing such an insightful, deeply theological, pastoral and prophetic paper. So much of what you observed, I also observed as have many people who have served and/or serve in the PCANZ. It can be hard for some clergy and others to speak out in a climate where there is so much division, suspicion and disrespect and where different voices are ignored and/or marginalised by dogmatism, 'boxed-in' theology and dare I say, some rulings in The Book of Order!*

### Not-so-positive Feedback

*While we appreciated the opportunity to contribute, the discussion paper was too long with way too many questions - once again the church is buried in paper work! How do I say nicely, the white paper didn't inspire me, I think I've had 20 years of Moderators telling me how the church is in a precarious position*

Some people clearly were inspired. Others were not.

*All elders expressed disappointment that the Moderator's White paper was so lacking in Biblical content, and expressed the view that the PCANZ should seek answers in the Bible. If the church is to be treated merely as a business, then we would question the return we are getting on the Assembly Assessment and Presbytery levies that we pay. What amazes me is the complete lack of reference to Scripture and the Word of God.*

I am more than happy for people to express their feelings. It is in open, respectful dialogue that ideas sharpen themselves alongside each other. What matters is not that we disagree, but how we go about disagreeing.

### The National Church

We have done great harm that will take years to repair. One of the common themes in the feedback has been how people have felt wounded and abused by the constant conflict and division experienced at general assemblies. The nature of faith is sourced in our experience of God, our beliefs and our convictions. How do we respect and value the convictions of one another? Very poorly according to the feedback I have received:

*Those of us who have attended General Assemblies have shared a disgust at the appalling behaviour exhibited on too many occasions. History records, in this context, that certainty breeds intolerance and consequent unchristian responses.... Assembly is such a poor advertisement for the PCANZ and cuts across much of what we are trying to achieve locally.*

This is an important issue, not only for me personally, but for the leadership of our Church. In a two-year time frame for moderators, there is little opportunity to do more than float ideas and get conversations going. There is no opportunity for long-term planning, little chance of gaining traction on change.

## Green volunteers: your voice (part one)



*Thank you for your willingness to open this discussion and your courage to be who Christ calls you to be in this leadership role. You bless us and encourage us with your wisdom and passion.*

Overall, these comments speak of people who are concerned for the wellbeing of the Church but are not despondent. They delighted in the opportunity to be hopeful together.

## A Matter of Faith: The Spiritual Vitality of the Church

There was a common acceptance of “spiritual vitality” as the **most significant issue facing** the Presbyterian Church today. The Church of the Burning Bush seems to be having difficulty articulating the flame of God in our midst.

*One of the things that struck me was our reticence to share our stories of faith, which seems to be a phenomena of the culture of most of our Presbyterian churches. This reticence stood out in our discussion when the question was asked, “What has God been doing or saying in your life recently?” Our response even as a group all fairly comfortable in one another’s presence was to clam up, until one courageous person spoke up and appended his sharing with an observation: the reason he had been reluctant to speak was because, in this gathering he was afraid of expressing ‘faulty’ theology. There was a perception even in this group of friends that he would be judged. I’m reminded of your challenge to ‘provide safe environments for conversations about doubt.’*

*The Presbyterian Church has prided itself on its academic prowess, but has it pursued knowledge at the cost of faith? We need to pursue truth that engenders a life of faith.*

Expressed in the feedback was a very common theme of “return”, though expressed in many different ways.

Return to the adventure and partnership with God:

*What seems to be being asked for here is the kind of faith that, in 1848, led our forefathers to leave their native land. That faith was laid upon a spirit of self reliance, with no expectation that it would lead to an easy life. The concept of “An extraordinary partnership with God of co- creation” is a powerful one we would do well to explore and develop.*

Return to the ministry of Jesus:

*The top priority should be – “Rediscover the ministry of Jesus as central to the mission of the Church”.*

*We are called to mature in our faith – our journey as Christians is a life-long process of becoming more like Jesus.*

Revitalise:

*The best way we know to revitalise the spiritual vitality of ourselves and our church is to actually have encounters with the Living Christ and the Holy Spirit.*

Retelling stories:

*We began with discussion about what we consider to be signs of spiritual vitality. There was unanimous belief that telling personal stories of experiencing “God moments” in our lives, and hearing the stories of others, is powerful in re-awakening and bolstering our spiritual vitality.*

Teach us to pray:

*We need teaching on listening to God, prayer, meditation and regular bible reading.*

*There seems to be a need to help people increase their confidence in expressing their prayerful thoughts.*

Concern was also expressed in the tension between personal experience and truth revealed in the scriptures:

*However, I am concerned about the concept of “people discovering for themselves that which is really true, that which calls them to church.” While spiritual vitality is a very personal thing – our walk with God is based on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ – we must at the same time acknowledge that the Bible is our absolute authority; that is where we find the truth.*

From the responses and conversations I’ve had around the country we need to acknowledge that within our Church, we have very significant diversity of how we talk about our experience of God. No matter what end of the theological spectrum, there is a major disconnect between our talk about God and our experience of God. For some it is series of faith formulas and for others it is a language of activities. Faith is personalised and privatised making it difficult to tell the stories of God at work in everyday life.

What’s missing?

As I read the feedback I became increasingly uneasy at descriptions of faith experience disconnected from mission. Definitions of faith (doctrinal or confessional) without an outward expression of God’s mission in the world are meaningless. Likewise, missional activity without an encounter with God is futile.

While the feedback in this section makes grim reading it is evidence of a deep spiritual hunger within our church. This then becomes one of the most significant opportunities for renewal. The green volunteer seeks first the dynamic engaged relationship with his/her God.



## Disengagement: Individualism and Congregationalism

There is no doubt that the debates in our Church - going back years - have been a major factor leading to disengagement with the Church as a national body. The cost of this has been huge!

*Historically this mistrust for anything from General Assembly and presbytery dates back many years for this church. Our people have been deeply wounded, and to this day perceive those in PCANZ and presbytery with caution, often wondering where they are coming from.*

This conflict however, is not the only factor causing disengagement; it is part of a wider shift in our society:

*Congregations don't have such a strong sense as they once did that they are part of a national church. This may stem from dissension within the national church over the years, and the fragmentation of the national church. We also have is the general marginalising of Christianity and Christians within society as a whole over recent years.*

*We are caught up in the business of life within our own church family and the greater national body gets little thought.*

*Many now will no longer see ourselves as a national denomination and will rarely consider other Presbyterian churches as part of our family. We have little concern for the wider churches' well being, rather concern for our immediate congregation.*

There is also a feeling of frustration with the tiresome machine of the Church:

*For ministers the Presbyterian ideal is mostly still valued, but the experience of being Presbyterian beyond the congregational level seldom brings joy or gives energy. The overwhelming majority of ministers felt called to ministry in order to serve the people of a parish and thus Presbytery obligations that are often seen as disconnected to this call drain energy and joy. More often than not it feels like we are being sucked into serving the interests of a large machine. Operationally, the Presbyterian mechanism is hugely demanding and consuming of resources.*

At times this machine has been less than helpful leading to further frustration and disengagement:

*Many of us feel disconnected from a church that dictates what we are required to do, does not understand our local situation and has not listened to us, e.g. as in the earthquake strengthening of our church. Our local presbytery ignored us, made no attempt to understand our informed position.*

*We feel that the national Church has not served us well in the past few years and that we have been left to work issues through as an individual congregation.*

What is it that holds us together, a "common" we all share? It's a bit like a working bee where people come together for a common purpose but enjoy the being together as much if not more than the project:

*The reality is that in contrast to fifty years ago, there is little that we do as a national Church. Further, our connections to entities like our Church Schools and Presbyterian Support have weakened. We no longer as a Church send missionaries abroad, having decided around twenty years ago to support such things at a parish level. It is not too late to reverse the trend. We need to find a project that has the support of the vast majority of PCANZ members, of such a scale that it can only be done nationally, and do it.*

*We need to know more about church missions. We hear very little about Global Mission or other national church initiatives in our congregation.*

Some question if brand Presbyterian has relevance. What does it mean to be Presbyterian?

*We are not all well educated about what it means to be 'Presbyterian.' People see less need today for denominational labels.*

*Very few in our congregation will have much knowledge of how the whole Presbyterian system works as an individual church or as a national body.*

The struggle of survival:

*So many parishes are struggling to survive; "I and us" have taken on far more importance than the "we" of the national organisation.*

The cost of disengagement is having a huge impact on the Church. Congregations and ministers are becoming more and more isolated. Information and communication from the wider church is being blocked. I have had people contact me asking for information on the White Paper, their congregation was not told about it. Piles of SPANZ magazines sit in church offices and foyers and never get passed on or promoted.

*We tend to be isolated within our congregations and know little of the wider church. Within our congregation there is little encouragement to grow our faith, individually or in groups. People seem too involved with the nuts and bolts of organisation and financial survival.*

It's not all bad news:

*From a youth ministry perspective, yes, we are a national movement. There's relationship, there's unity, there's common vision, and it's clearly a bigger picture going on. PYM is a Kingdom of God thing, and acts like it: fostering relationships broadly, giving and sharing generously with other movements and churches. It ain't closed off.*



My initial 2015 White Paper gave congregationalism and individualism a bad rap. The problem lies with the “ism”, an attitude or way of being and not with the reality of the local church being the prime agent of mission in their community. Some of the factors leading to disengagement we need to own up to and accept responsibility for; others however are parts of societal and economic forces that are impacting upon us. Within each of the statements of cause, there is also an opportunity for our rediscovery of “WE” as a Presbyterian movement. The way forward is right in front of us. It’s not that we don’t know what to do; rather, it is, are we willing or not to do it?

If we are to reverse the trend of disengagement we need to ask “are we better together?” and “what is our together?” My experience as Moderator is of a Church holding together by a very thin thread. I have been giving voice to our togetherness but I can’t emphasise enough how fragile it is.

The green volunteer scans the broader horizon, looking for the strength that comes when people gather together.

## Disunity: The Woundedness of Our Church

The pain in our church runs very deep. As I have listened to many stories and read the responses, I have been deeply moved, and was often in tears. I am fully aware that if Assembly decisions had gone in a different direction, the comments below would read very similarly. The language on “winning” and “losing” has further increased our division and yet there seems to be a growing realisation that we are all losing through our conflicts:

*There was a consensus that the Church is wounded. The Presbyterian Church that people grew up in has gone and there is little connection with, or regard for, the function of Presbyteries.*

*Since 1962 I have attended meetings of General Assembly, including the ones that dealt with THE ISSUE of Homosexuality and Church leadership. I am burnt by it all.*

It saddens me deeply to hear stories around the country of people who have experiences first-hand of being bullied within our church meetings:

*There needs to be a way of naming manipulative bullying behaviour; we need to explore what bullying is, how it affects people, what we can do about it etc. Unfortunately we do see bullying behaviour at General Assembly debates.*

The problem is not so much the debate, but what the debate is doing to us:

*For myself I found having to continually deny a section of the church what they were fighting for and hoping for over and over again was very difficult, and we were on the “winning” side.*

*I can't imagine what it is like to be on the “losing” side. Though I don't understand or appreciate their thinking or their arguments I do understand their hurt a little.*

And how we see one another:

*The church appears to be fractured into two broad sections, with each seeing the other as deficient in their approach to faith. Many who remain in the church have experienced hurt and misunderstanding and embarrassment. This has meant that church members have at times been hesitant about declaring their faith.*

*Part of the problem with this issue is that it has indeed become a stand-off between damaged parties. Each side argues at the other, forgetting who is getting caught in the cross fire.*

What kind of Church do we want to be and become?

*“PCANZ no longer sees itself as a broad Church”. That's the message we get.*

Feedback suggests that there is a growing desire to change the conversation. There is no quick fix, but what we are doing currently is not working:

*I don't think that can be repaired quickly nationally. The fight over gay rights etc. was very long and very wounding for all concerned over the last 20 years, and it has not stopped. The same people on both sides giving the same old arguments that changed no one's mind at all.*

*Even though this debate has continued for many years, we as a national Church have not taken the time to look at the underlying causes of this disunity. One is differences in biblical interpretation.*

*Some ask, can we trust General Assembly to handle this debate? **We have first to 'fix' what is wrong with GA** before it can be trusted with sensitive issues. In a family situation we would focus on the importance of effective communication rather than force issues to a vote. Why cannot congregations determine their own way on these controversial issues, sensitive to their context and the leading of the Spirit?*

This is not an "issue", it is deeply personal. A significant number of ministers are now unable to provide pastoral care and ministry to members of their congregations. I have also been contacted by ministers who confide in me telling of their own family where they have children in gay relationships. They asked me "What will I do when asked to marry them?". My reply: "I can tell you what the Church says you should do, but I cannot answer for your own conscience".

*The ban on Presbyterian ministers conducting same sex marriages puts this church's minister in the position of having to refuse to marry their own parishioners.*

The way forward? The following comment calls for respect and calls for a rahui.<sup>ii</sup>

*We believe that minority views should be listened to and treated with respect. We also recognise that this minority see this issue as a social justice issue of fundamental importance. However we are firmly of the view that the current position of the PCANZ is the biblically appropriate position. This position has been agreed to democratically by an increasing majority at repeated General Assemblies. The deliberate repeatedly raising of this controversial and divisive issue is causing much of the disunity within the Church and distracting the Church from mission. It is our view therefore that a moratorium or rahui be introduced on this specific subject for a limited time such as 4 years to allow healing and time to be devoted to mission.*

Others call for different kinds of conversations.

*Perhaps it is time to lay our differences aside for a while and work on the areas that we have in common instead of continually trying to change what is in place. Let us work together to build God's kingdom, not ours, here on earth. Let us rebuild trust by working together on areas that we can agree on.*

*Perhaps there could be a process of conversation between differing parishes, so we listen and speak to one another.*

*The issue of inclusiveness which is causing so much hurt should be banned from General Assembly and dealt with at congregation and presbytery level.*

Allow for graceful exit? When our decisions are exclusive of a section of our church (30 -40%) how do we allow them to exist (or not) among us?

*We suggest that where an individual congregation feel strongly they would want heterosexuals in defacto relationships/gay relationships in their leadership then they would be permitted to withdraw from PCANZ and retain assets (e.g. buildings). In the case of individuals who do not agree with the standards and rules of the church and feel strongly about the issue, they should feel free to withdraw from a PCANZ church and join a church that holds similar views to their own. To continually try and change the views of the majority is counterproductive to the mission of the wider church.*

We are all victims of our decision-making process. The very nature of voting divides us. The more we vote, the more divided we become. We are obsessed with making decisions but give little consideration to spiritual discernment. At the core of “Presbyterianism” is the principle of elders exercising spiritual discernment.

*We should stop talking past /at each other and instead truly listen.*

*Exploring consensus as a way of deciding on issues needs to be undertaken.*

*Our parish council operates, albeit unintentionally most of the time, on a consensus basis. The only exception we can recall in recent years is when we have to vote on some General Assembly papers.*

*PCANZ finds ways to structurally and personally affirm minority viewpoints and niche parishes, who are public about those viewpoints. PCANZ develop a strategy to deliberately build collegial relationships across majority and minority viewpoints.*

*Extend the acknowledgement of mana, respect, space, and resourcing to other ministries within PCANZ – even when we fundamentally disagree with them on matters of belief and ethics.*

When mutually exclusive views are decided upon by a vote there will always be winners and losers, victors and victims. I believe we have failed to listen to God and to one another, and as a result we have marginalised a voice within our own family. What concerns me even more is that we seem unaware of the message I believe we are sending when we vote: “you are not welcome, nor do you belong with us.” Because of this, in many congregations and church gatherings, feedback suggests that it is not safe to be honest about your beliefs or views on sexuality.

We have not addressed the weightier issue of godly people, biblical scholars and social scientists interpreting the same scriptures differently AND if there is validity in this diversity how shall we choose to live together?

The green volunteer is an agent of healing and wholeness.

## Loss of Voice: A Deafening Silence

The responses to this section were very consistent. There is a lament of the loss of the Presbyterian voice into the wider community and a concern that the Moderator is very restricted on what s/he can say or not. There is however a fear the Moderator may not be speaking for all of us or may use their voice for a particular agenda.

*The problem is we are a thinking church and range from theologically conservative to liberal and how can there be a consistent message when different groups within the church have different political agendas? I remember being angered by some of the pronouncements of the Public Questions Committee of PCANZ, as being too liberal to be speaking for me. In our attempts to be inclusive, and our fear of hurting people's feelings [corporately and individually] have we lost not only our voice, but our compass?*

*Some of the issues we see facing in New Zealand today where we can have a common voice are: non- violence, poverty, inadequate housing and preventing human trafficking. We must avoid being political; rather we need to address the issues themselves.*

Maybe we are being all a little too precious on what the Moderator can and can't say. Surely, there is a difference between the voice of a person and the one elected to a position?

*It was felt that if the Moderator was free to speak out and perhaps at times disagree with the Church's stance, then individuals in the Church would then be 'allowed' to have diverging opinions also. The loss of the former broadness of the Church was lamented. Part of the difficulty over the ban on ministers conducting same sex marriages is that it is enforcing conformity on all, rather than allowing breadth and liberty of conscience.*

*We agree that we have lost our voice. We are divided on the issue of giving the Moderator a voice. However, we do agree that a voice should be heard in an effective and timely manner.*

Some look back to the way things were and others want the PQ Committee re-formed

*Several wondered where the PQ Committee had gone, mourning its loss to the church and nation. They remembered the PQ Committee had hired researchers, noting it is hard to be effectively prophetic without adequate information. Speakers for the church needed to be politically savvy, speak with authority and 'know their stuff'. They needed to be objective and passionate not just radical and political. A gentle tenacity was recommended!*

*We recommend that a new Public Questions committee be formed to research and resource the PCANZ around issues of social justice.*

The world is rapidly changing. While we make semi-regular statements on a variety of social issues, I believe that the Church does not have confidence or a fast enough turnaround time to speak meaningfully into national and international events.

*It saddens me that the Moderator of the PCANZ has restrictions on what he says; is that a formula based on personal agendas of those making such a decision? How can the church be*

*taken seriously by a largely secular society when they do not have a very strong and courageous voice to stand up to the wrongs of society.*

*Major issues in NZ are substandard and unaffordable housing, child poverty and child abuse. Internationally there is the refugee situation. We noted that the Anglicans and Catholics spoke out on the refugee crisis and were reported in the media.*

There has been significant affirmation for the work the Moderator has been doing in conjunction with Presbyterian Support as a model of what this could look like going forward.

*There is no denying the mandate in the scriptures to be an advocate for the poor, the widowed, the sick, and the vulnerable. This is where the church's voice should be heard. We need to back up our words with action. The **Justice & Action** booklet is just a start, and we commend that*

Feedback suggests that loss of voice has come at a significant cost to New Zealand society; we have not been an effective voice against injustice, the poor and the oppressed.

*When the church was no longer part of the mainstream, informing social policy and influencing politics; it did not know what role to take that was distinctly Presbyterian rather than ecumenical. It was uncomfortable with a prophetic role – speaking into the times. Maybe a change to the office of the Moderator – saying we trust this person to speak for our denomination – will be a way of achieving this.*

*It was great that the PCANZ raised a voice for Climate issues recently. But in general the loss of voice is very obvious and sad.*

*There is a lack of connection between Presbyterian Support and local congregations. We need to open up dialogue with them to see how we can best work together.*

Some congregations expressed their sadness at losing their voice due to the policies of the Church. How can a congregation speak up when it is at variance with the position of the Church?:

*Bans such as the one proposed in the present legislation is a silencing of churches like us.*

As Moderator I have walked a very fine line on what I have said in public statements, as I am only able to speak on behalf of the Church on matters decided by a previous General Assembly. I have spoken out on child poverty, violence against women and children, alcohol abuse, climate change and refugee quotas. Where I could find no link, I spoke up any way! The only criticism has been that I've been too slow (eg. Syrian refugee crisis).

Let us consider partnering with like-minded organisations like Presbyterian Support and New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services, for example, in addressing social injustice going forward. **Together** we have the research and the expertise. It is time for us to return again to the conversation and give voice and action to the issues facing New Zealand society today. This was in our history. It is up to us if we want it in our future!

The green volunteer speaks from his / her heart, with boldness and grace.



## Professionalism: Raising the Bar

The feedback in this section on professionalism came as a surprise to me. The surprise was the level of intensity and disconnect around issues with our call system. While we would want to affirm the language of “calling”, some suggested that it can also be used as a spiritual cop-out by both the congregation and ministers.

*I don't trust the call system very much.*

*I think it's often used as a spiritual sounding excuse for doing what you want.*

*Although I do believe God calls people.. all his people, and that the King does reassign people*

*We are in the throes of calling a minister and the requirements of the system have been pedantic and in some ways exhausting. It seems to have circumvented the Holy Spirit's leading and inserted format.*

Calling a minister is one thing, but how do we know when the “call” has come to and end? The following comment is representative of conversations of a number of people.

*I do wonder at the relevance of the call [and stipend] and a parish's inability to seek the resignation of a minister. As it is, the only option is for people to leave which destroys a church, rather than hurt the feelings of a minister who has failed.*

We have a great resource in our ministers but the Church appears to be out of step with current human resources (people and capability) practice.

*Since the mid 1980s, there has been a revolution in the public sector, including education through the introduction of modern management practices though initially opposed, over a period of time it has become clear that there are new instruments such as performance review and appraisal that are very helpful to both employer and employee.*

Feedback supports the view that ministry reviews lack transparency and aren't believed to be of any real value. There is a disconnect between what church members expect in a performance appraisal and what the church has as a “ministry development review”.

*We agree that reviews of the minister and the parish should be concurrent and transparent.*

*We have created burdens with reviews being overcomplicated, tiresome, time-consuming and expensive. Then there's the question of what is done with the results?*

This is not to be a beat up on ministers; to be fair the conversations were about the lack of professionalism, therefore the outstanding leadership of ministers did not feature. The feedback does however indicate we have a significant issue in this area.

*Many ministers are simply out of their depth in today's church. They fear ministry reviews because they need their job. We need to find a way for people who are no longer effective in ministry and do not wish to commit to professional development to be redeployed.*

*Many ministers would benefit from working in the general work place.*

*I think huge amounts of ministers are not prepared or trained or perhaps even of the right makeup for the leadership that the church needs.*

Training for ministers was a prominent feature in the feedback. Acknowledgement was made of the new directions over recent years, but some frustration remains; the new has not yet trickled down to the grass roots of the church.

*The message of how ministers are presently being trained has not trickled down to the congregations. The ministers we have need to be brought into the new understandings and ways of functioning. It is difficult for ministers and parishes to tell each other the truth about what is happening because of the fear of criticism. This needs special attention! We need to use the expertise of people who know how to address this kind of issue.*

*KCML should perhaps have a hand in collaborating with that minister about how it is used, and a specific long term course of uniquely crafted professional development.*

*Bi-vocational work should be encouraged, and opportunities made by the PCANZ to help that happen.*

A picture emerged of exhausted leaders. The recurring theme of spiritual vitality impacts how leadership is given and received.

*Refreshing and renewing the spirit of the leaders is so sorely needed and the Presbyterian Church does not appear to have been a priority as far as I have noticed. There seems to have been a "ruling by the willing" rather than a professionalism in action.*

I received feedback from supervisors of ministers. They expressed concern about the provision of supervision not being fully utilised by ministers, with low levels of engagement. Burnout, disillusionment and isolation were common themes. Ministers who have had bad experiences at presbytery or Assembly have become disengaged with, and isolated from, "the Church" and their colleagues. This is to the point where ministers are no longer able to recognise the support and resources of the wider Church as being available to them.

The feedback in this section is very hard hitting on ministers. There is another side of the story not recorded in the feedback. In my conversations with ministers, they tell me "ministry is really hard". Everything is changing and it's all too easy to blame ministers. I have had numerous conversations with ministers confiding in me with stories of abuse, power plays and bullying from congregational members and elders. Many ministers do not feel safe within their congregations or presbyteries. Where the relationship between minister and elders and congregation is good it is very good, where is it bad it is horrible!

Sadly, I believe that we have very few tools in the tool box to address this issue and the ones we do have are not fit for purpose. There are conversations of calling, performance, accountability, trust, safety and empowerment that people want to have but are not having. For our Church to rediscover the ministry of the **whole people of God** these conversations need to take place.

## Green volunteers: your voice (part one)



The green volunteer is a minister committed to the art and craft of ministry knowing s/he needs continual supervision, spiritual direction and professional development.

The green volunteers who are elders or leaders in our Church take responsibility for building relationships of openness and trust with their minister, held together with mutual respect and grace.

## The Ethics of Mission: Checking our Motives for Mission

The question of the ethics of mission is a work in progress, with many congregations wanting to continue this conversation long after the feedback was due.

*Apparently the meeting on Thursday night went too far when it said the end goal of mission is “definitely not for membership”. In this unqualified form the answer given was controversial. It could easily be seen as the kind of “abysmal theology” you referred to. We need to affirm church as Christ’s Kingdom made visible and local. We need to know that in the book of Acts God was busy adding to the church all who were being saved.*

What is and what is not mission?

*We began with a discussion of the meaning of ethical. It seemed easier to define what kind of mission is not ethical - it is not self serving, it is not to remake “them” in our image, it is not facilitated by coercion, enticement or bribery. We considered the meaning “mission”. We had differing views of the relative importance of the missions Jesus articulated, to show God’s love and to make disciples: We were agreed that ethical mission must be about acting with grace and love and with a desire to serve. There should be no hidden agendas.*

Mission as a way of life: Mission is not the activity of doing. It is about who we are and to whom we belong:

*Mission has to be about more than doing stuff that any other (secular) organisation can do, and more than forming relationships for the sole purpose of influencing a conversion. It’s about living what we believe in and out-loving even those we find unlovable.*

*People holding powerful and demanding positions have been heard to say (a) what a privilege it is to be able to do such a job, and (b) what tremendous satisfaction they get doing it. A sign of ethical health of our mission motives might be is that both of these feelings are in force amongst the practitioners.*

A sign of God’s Kingdom on earth; what if our mission plan was replaced by a single question - What would our community look like if the Kingdom of God came?

*The Church’s mission is to bring the good news that all are acceptable to God and that we are unique and precious with special gifts and talents which we are free to use because of that acceptance. If this leads to people seeing their role in promoting “the Kingdom of God” outside the church, that’s fine, but it would be good if they could find encouragement and support, within a loving congregation.*

*While we would hope that this would embody membership, conversion and the Kingdom of God, the important thing is to encourage others to enter into a relationship with God through Christ and to support them in discovering what it means to daily live in God’s Kingdom. The choice to commit to our church is theirs alone. It’s not about filling the pews to boost the coffers.*

Many churches derive income from government contracts or hiring of their facilities. A question to consider is “Would you still do this if you did not get income from it?” Is it simply a “transaction” or is it a transformational relationship?

*In our situation we do still believe that hiring the hall out is part of our MISSION: encouraging community groups to meet by providing safe and affordable premises does foster the values we derive from Jesus. We do not pretend that it is a recruiting ground for church membership. Our worship life is to refresh, heal, teach and encourage those associated with the church. These ministries impact society; they are intended to “equip the saints” for mission proper: which will most naturally and most usually be exercised in the individual encounters of our everyday lives, just as we see in the Jesus of the gospels.*

There needs to be a very clear link between our corporate discernment of God’s mission AND our acts of service.

*This is the slippery slope – community development – community mission – community ministry – good works – missional communities – evangelism ... a fine balance is needed. More than that – Godly discernment is needed. Congregations are uncomfortable talking and listening to God. One congregation told me they don’t pray – it is the minister’s job to do that.*

The role of presbytery is vital. If mission plans are an exercise in filling our forms, then they are a waste of time. If they reflect the discernment of a congregation they are truly powerful.

*Presbytery has a leadership role here. They see congregational mission plans when they look at parish reviews. They have a role in holding parishes accountable for what is in these plans. The same is so for mission plans submitted as part of approval processes for sale, purchase and construction applications. I am seeing more presbyteries get real here and not approve anything but a rigorous and honest mission plan.*

I’m delighted by the level of conversations throughout the Church on mission in our communities. We are making a huge shift from thinking about **the mission of the Church** to **the mission of God!**

My only caution, it’s not the “new thing” to fill empty pews. We are called to be faithful to the mission of God in our communities no matter what size our church may be!

The green volunteer is known by his/her authenticity and integrity in living a gospel of amazing grace.

## Busyness: A Sickness of the Soul

When I first wrote this section on busyness in the White Paper I had no idea that I was speaking so clearly to myself. I have been very busy in the past 12 months! The problem is I love being busy. I thrive on it! But is it sustainable? No. As I have reflected on this, I've come to see that the bigger picture is not about busyness, but the "rhythm" of our lives, or as Eugene Peterson describes, the "rhythms of grace".

The problem is not in the activity of the church but the rhythm of our activity giving space, rest and stillness. Could this be our most treasured gift to our communities?

*We agree to an extent that churches on a whole are too busy but feel that overall the busyness of our church is not too bad. Modern society has provided us with a huge range of choices of stuff to do outside of work. We have lots of labour saving devices to allow us more time, but this extra free time is often filled up with doing more stuff. As a society we seem to have forgotten how to "stop and smell the roses". We need to put time aside to be still – to rest and relax, both physically and spiritually. Unfortunately many people are not able to do this – it may be something that as a church we can help people to reconnect with God through being still.*

*Busyness is part of our protestant heritage. Busyness and productivity is valued – maybe more than achievement or being fruitful. Busyness distracts us from our mission. It gives us a reason not to be involved in the lives of the other. It keeps us isolated and individualistic. There is a deep theological poverty here. Yes we are called to action, not just talking about stuff, but the action has to derive from "who we are" and more importantly "whose we are".*

Our world is way too busy, way too noisy; maybe this is where the Church could be of greatest value to our society?

*The church needs to be relevant in that it needs to present God's kingdom in a way that people can understand and which speaks to their needs. If relevance means making the church more like society then it has lost its way. Stillness is needed for discernment.*

*Rediscover the spiritual discipline of silence (corporate and individual).*

*"Busyness without blessedness leads to barrenness". Learning to be relational and less programme oriented and allowing time and space for reflection before action helps.*

The cost of busyness is the dehumanising of people and relationships. Relationships should always be a priority. Although people have obligations to fulfil, spending time with each other should never be neglected. Fellowship and communication leads to unity in the body.

*Busyness: Some volunteers are overwhelmed by their responsibilities. Most of the volunteers are older people, because young couples don't have time. Young couples feel the pressures of modern society to live the way others do. They don't have time or money to help others. It will require a big change in society to get enough volunteers to carry out programmes.*

Margaret Gault<sup>iii</sup> (see [www.moderator.presbyterian.org.nz](http://www.moderator.presbyterian.org.nz)) suggests the greater problem behind our falling attendance is not our membership, but rather our attendance rate.

*In 1961 the average adult member attended church 5.3 times each month; by 1981 they attended 3.2 times; and by 2014 they attended 1.8 times. If the people currently on our church roll attended at the same rate as in 1961, we would have 84,000 in our June attendance instead of just under 29,000. Even if they attended at the 1981 rate we would have almost double the number in the pews on any Sunday.*

I believe the competition for the sacred hour is not Sunday trading, work, sport or recreation; it is exhaustion! People are exhausted; going to church is the first thing struck off their to-do list. What kind of church would be good news to those who are exhausted?

I believe this could be one of the most significant missional opportunities available to us as a Church.

The green volunteer brings a presence of calm. They have time to be still, listen and pray.

## Stewardship: Giving an Account

Stewardship is a very timely conversation. The new Charities Commission regulations require all charities to give a financial and non-financial account of their activities in line with their purpose. I think this is very Biblical! The starting point of stewardship is a clear understanding of ownership and purpose. We do not own the Church and the Church is given for the extension of God's Kingdom, a purpose far greater than ourselves.

*If our management of financial resources is selfish and introverted it clearly does not weigh up against biblical stewardship.*

Preservation verses purpose; where are we putting our dollars?

*The purpose of our buildings should be for worship and mission related activities. A large number of our church buildings are simply not fit for purpose in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We need to put considerable effort into thinking through what is needed now as well as what will be needed in the future and find ways to bring congregations to the realisation of what changes are required.*

*Money needs to be allocated wisely around the congregations. As a church we know the benefits of congregational giving as we have been blessed by another church giving to us. We need to ask ourselves if we are obsessed with church buildings. In our view, we believe that churches should be functional and user friendly.*

*If all a church is doing is maintaining the 'status quo' then they need to look at what and why they are doing things. A church needs to be outward thinking i.e. looking outside of themselves and looking at the community.*

*A church could maintain the status quo for many years, if the congregation is able to keep it going. However it would be hoped that the Presbytery would be able to provide independent and realistic advice to this church that would enable it to make the right decision for the future. And also that the congregation would be listening to God.*

Imagine what we could achieve if we partnered together?

*There are a lot of resources available through other congregations and these should be made use of, to enable weaker churches to grow and be strengthened.*

Back to the future: our Church was founded on a vision; in many cases today's "vision" has become the preservation of the past with maintenance of buildings being a significant focus for some congregations.

*With respect to upkeep and maintenance of buildings, by and large we have done and continue to do, a good job. Where we may have not done as well as we might is keeping faith with the dreams of our Presbyterian forebears. This is perhaps our biggest challenge.*



*Perhaps we should try to do something big and meaningful. Right now we have (in principle) the resources and the skill set to do it. We just need the vision.*

Each Sunday an offering is given in churches throughout the country, people stand and pray; a prayer of thanksgiving and dedication for the extension of God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. I have to ask, when is a gift not a gift? The answer: when you take it back!

*The parish could be closed down by Presbytery, and some potential donors are most unwilling to give money that could be used by Presbytery beyond the parish, if the parish ceased to exist.*

*Is it ethical for a Presbytery to direct money away from a town and a parish for uses not envisaged or agreed by the donors or the local parish?*

*Sorry, the idea of taking from some to give to others with an "in" idea rankles. Why should congregations who carefully look after their funds be forced to fund someone else's dreams?*

Once again our distrust and division gets in the way.

*Stewardship and mission should reflect the theology of PCANZ. Many of our ordained ministers have a conservative theology, others have an evolving theology, but they are not working together so we have a divided church. Are we an inclusive church or are we an exclusive church?*

*We would not like to see more money going into central funds, when decisions and appointments made centrally are being placed in the hands of a few and there is little in way of accountability.*

I am deeply concerned by the number of congregations throughout New Zealand who have tens of millions of dollars in the bank and doing nothing with it. Nothing! It has accumulated over the years through sale of property – property gifted by a former generation of visionaries with passion for the mission of God. Now these resources sit in the bank for lack of vision.

It's not about money or buildings, it's an attitude. Where an attitude is one of service and a greater common good there is no shortage; there is abundance! But where the attitude is about entitlement and regulations, selfishness and scarcity reign supreme.

*The church is an organisation that does not exist for itself, but for others - but sometimes it does not function like this. We are always in danger of being the older brother. The father pays the price for the restoration of the younger brother, but the older brother also needs restoration. His attitudes show that he also lacks love for the father and has a sense of entitlement; works hard for his father for the wealth and status it will bring him. The father goes out to both brothers.*

There is hope. There has never been a better time; a new season for planting.



*Planting a new church is to create community where people meet, become known and support each other and to share their faith journey. Yes there does need to be forward thinking. It is necessary to plant a new way of being in people's minds.*

*There is (or should be) a link between the closure of a church and the planting of a new church!*

Here's what the Church Property Trustees have to say in their news letter from January 2015

***"Not mine, but Thine***

*For many, a change in mind-set will be needed to move away from their current regard of the buildings they worship in and the financial assets they are privileged to hold as being "mine". These assets are, and in fact always have been, a resource for God's mission through the Presbyterian Church.*

*We remind you of the three basic principles surrounding property decisions as stated in the Property Handbook and encourage you to be guided by these and by the vision outlined in Bringing Clarity to Our Mission.*

*Everyone making decisions about property or finance within the Church is a "trustee." This means putting aside our own preferences and acting with care and prudence for the Church as a whole. We are a Church – not a collection of independent congregations. That is why the Presbytery and the National Church through the Trustees also must approve property transactions.*

*Our decisions must keep faith with the long-term interests of the whole Church."*

The green volunteer believes money is a sacred trust, holds it lightly, gives generously and with discernment, leveraging it for growth.

## A Way Forward

I am so thankful you have taken the time to engage in this conversation and for all those who have put their words in print. This is a huge sign of hope!

From the muddled ground the green volunteers already emerge.

*“Green volunteers: a way forward” (part two)*, is a call to faith, courage and action.

**It will require faith.** The Church is not just another organisation struggling to reinvent itself in a rapidly changing landscape. Restructuring will not work! In the language of our own heritage nothing short of a reformation is required. This reformation is a God thing; where God disrupts, at time destroys and then breathes new life into the dead structures and dry bones. It’s called resurrection.

**It will require courage.** Courage is “from the heart”. It is the courage to do the right thing rather than do things right. For too long the Presbyterian Church has been obsessed with doing things right (according to the book). If this reformation is to see the light of day we need to do the RIGHT thing.

**It will require action.** Nothing ever changes without changing our behaviour. “Green volunteers: a way forward” is a **plan of action**. Will you join me on this journey of reformation?

*See! The winter is past;  
the rains are over and gone.  
<sup>12</sup>Flowers appear on the earth;  
the season of singing has come,  
the cooing of doves  
is heard in our land.*

*Song of Songs 2:12*

## Appendix 1

### Methodology

This document is to be read in conjunction with the Moderator's White Paper June 2015 *"It's a Matter of Faith"* and *"Green volunteers: A way forward"*

I have received 63,347 words gathered together in over 90 submissions from both individuals and churches! The submissions are predominantly on behalf of a groups (sessions, parish councils and discussion groups) therefore represent a significant voice of congregational members.

As I reviewed the data I removed the names of the respondents to ensure I have not given bias or favoured any one voice.

Some material was sent and spoken to me in confidence. One email was border line abusive.

### Your voice and mine

I have done my very best to preserve the integrity of voices of all expressing a range of views. Where views expressed common and outlying voices this is reflected. At the same time I recognise my own interpretative bias. I have engaged with your voice weaving a conversation with "Andrew". My voice is clear, and I trust it pays the greatest respect to all who have engaged with me during my past year as Moderator.

### The limitations

The voice of ethnic churches is all but absent from this feedback. This is also evident at presbytery meetings around the country. The low or nonexistent voice of these communities in our Church processes is cause for great concern. It would be good to understand more about why this is the case. It is my view a paper-based method of consultation does not work in these cultures but requires open and face-to-face meetings.

### Who is missing?

While I received one response from PYM (Presbyterian Youth Movement) the voice of a younger generation is noticeably absent from this conversation.

### A caution

It is my hunch, that the issues facing the Church raised in the White Paper, are largely confined to the demographic of our current church membership and are the result of significant historical and sociological factors.

I would therefore question the capacity of existing members, structures and mindsets to have the imagination required to create the new. This can only be done with a whole new group of people

around the table. This new will include be the voice of the ethnic communities and a younger generation.

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<sup>i</sup> Inspired by Carrie Newcomer “You can do this hard thing”

<sup>ii</sup> Rāhui may be imposed for many reasons, including a perceived need for conservation of food resources or because the area concerned is in a state of 'tapu', due, for example, to a recent death in the area, out of respect for the dead and to prevent the gathering of food there for a specified period. Rāhui may be placed on land, sea, rivers, forests, gardens, fishing grounds, and other food resources. A rāhui is given its authority by the [mana](#) of the person or group that imposes it. An area may be set aside for a special purpose or function. Trees may be set aside as a carving resource; or flax bushes for the weaving of a special cloak for a chief. Areas may be placed under rāhui requiring them to be left to lie fallow so that the resources may regenerate. (Barlow 1994:104,105).

Rāhui in this sense is not “not talking about the issues” it is allowing for a regenerative and restorative process to take place for the healing of the land. What would that look like for the PCANZ?

<sup>iii</sup> See Margaret Gault [Looking forward](#)