



## **A Report on the First Round of a Research Project Investigating Life-Long Learning Needs of Ministry Leaders in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand**

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*With grateful thanks to the 55 Ordained Presbyterian Ministers who  
participated, the Assembly General Secretary, and KCML Faculty*

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## Contents

Summary .....	2
Introduction .....	3
Obtaining the data: A first round of interviews .....	3
Analysing the data.....	4
Engaging with the data .....	4
Introducing the themes .....	5
Theme 1: Reconversion to founding stories .....	7
From the interviews .....	7
The issues.....	16
Educational strategy .....	16
Theme 2: Living together as communities of God's people .....	18
From the interviews .....	18
The issues.....	27
Educational strategy .....	28
Theme 3: Understanding and engaging context.....	29
From the interviews .....	29
The issues.....	40
Educational strategy .....	40
Theme 4: Leading effectively .....	42
From the interviews .....	42
The issues.....	57
Educational strategy .....	57
Theme 5: Reframing/Rethinking current forms of Church .....	59
From the interviews .....	59
The issues.....	74
Educational strategy .....	74
Summary of the themes and issues.....	75
Learning strategies.....	76
Appendix I: Participant information sheet.....	79
Appendix II: Consent form .....	82

## Summary

This report presents the analysis of data from interviews of 55 ordained ministers across the PCANZ, as a first round of research by KCML into life-long learning needs of ministry leaders.

The interview questions asked about leadership challenges, personal and perceived wider church learning needs, spiritual/personal care practices, and delivery options.

Five themes were discerned as emerging from the data:

- Reconversion to founding stories
- Living together as communities of God's people
- Understanding and engaging context
- Leading effectively
- Reframing/Rethinking current forms of Church

The data necessarily (because of the nature of the questions) discusses issues experienced within each of the themes, which become development needs for the Church going forward, and areas into which the PCANZ and KCML can be investing. These issues are summarized at the end of each theme, and altogether toward the end of the document.

KCML cannot meet all needs but can aim to shape educational strategies toward maximum effectiveness with the resources available. The report suggests a number of high-level strategies. One is to focus on educating the educators – those at the front line of ministry. By investing in them the hope is, through them, to invest in many more. Another strategy is to focus on educating for practices or postures. Many of the issues mentioned above will not be solved by content transfer but by learning to live differently.

At the end of the report three recommendations for learning initiatives are offered under the titles: Theology; Connection Hub; and Practices. They remain deliberately broad at this stage as we seek interaction with and feedback from the wider church on this research before focusing on specifics of how and what – delivery and topic.

The important commitment of this research is to engage in listening leadership. From here the data will be presented to and discussed with interested individuals, Presbyteries/Synods, and national bodies.

I look forward to what further interaction with ministry practitioners and thinkers will bring.

## Introduction

This report is the result of analysing the data of fifty-five interviews of Presbyterian ordained ministers – NOMs including chaplains, and LOMs – from around Aotearoa New Zealand. These interviews are the first part of a process to design and deliver opportunities for life-long learning for leaders across the PCANZ. Of vital importance is that this research listens for real needs and responds out of that listening.

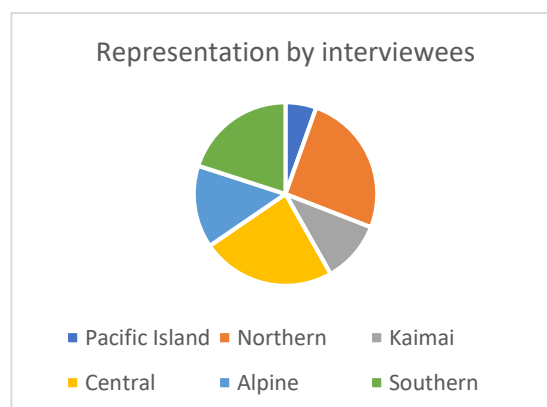
What is offered here is wisdom not only for KCML as an institution seeking to equip through education, but also for the PCANZ as a whole. Evident during the interviews was the deep commitment shown by every participant, not only to their local congregations, but to the work of the wider Church as part of the body of Christ. These people are gold. Their respective calls to ministry run deep. They care for God's people and this Church.

### Obtaining the data: A first round of interviews

The December 2016 Parish Directory provided an initial list of names and contact details for Presbyterian ministers across the country. This was discussed with the Assembly Executive Secretary as some details were already out of date due to movement, retirement, leave, etc.

Random sampling then occurred with care taken to ensure the ordained members of 1/3 of each Presbytery/Synod would be invited to participate.<sup>1</sup> Initial invitations went to 1/3 of KCML graduates from 2008-2014, to enable for faculty a comparison with their colleagues who went through a different training regime. This report draws from all the ensuing data. Those graduates not invited in that initial round were then returned to the main list.

When not enough people responded from the first random selection, a second selection was made from remaining names, mindful of the overall goal of hearing from 1/3 of each Presbytery/Synod. In the final count, Kaimai and Auckland are represented by 24% of their ordained voices while the remainder are represented by 33%.



Participants included 37 men and 18 women and ranged from new graduates to long-experienced ministers close to retirement. They are located in rural, town, and urban contexts, serve in small churches, uniting churches/contexts, medium churches, large/hub churches, education centres and a hospital, and come from across the theological spectrum. Ethnic diversity and ethnically diverse congregations are represented; Asian leaders of Asian congregations are not (yet), however.

Interviews were conducted across May-July 2017 by phone and skype. Three were conducted face-to-face. While 30 minutes was the requested time, the majority went longer, with 3 lasting 75 minutes.

Interviewees were asked about the challenges they were experiencing in their leadership, the education they perceived they need going forward, and the education they perceive the church

<sup>1</sup> In Te Aka Puoho, research of members is an internal process.

needs.<sup>2</sup> Interviewees were also asked about how they care for their own spiritual and personal growth. These results are being collated together here under five themes.

Additionally, ministers were asked about their learning style preferences.

The report finishes with a first proposal of a Learning Matrix with three initiatives identified, along with ideas for their delivery, and possibilities for topics within them.

All interviewees gave permission for their data to be used in return for not being identified by name in its presentation. Consent forms are held by the researcher.

Some have taken the opportunity to request edits upon receipt of the initial version of this report.

### **Analysing the data**

In this round of the research the data was initially lightly analysed by the researcher, and then read and discussed by the faculty of KCML who have observed and conversed on key themes, presenting and underlying issues, and educational strategy, as well as noted possible courses, resourcing and delivery that could be offered by KCML as a result, inspired by suggestions participants made.

While every effort has been made to honour the contributions of the interviewees, which means extensive use has been made of direct quotes, it is inevitable that the organisation of those quotes and the wording of the key themes and presenting issues is influenced by the perspective of the researcher, informed by colleagues at KCML. The hope, nonetheless, is that the wisdom of the collective has been honoured and is able to inform, challenge, encourage, and critique.

### **Engaging with the data**

From here the intent is to

- send this report to all those who participated and invite them to comment
- contact Presbyteries and Synods to ask if they would value a workshop in their area summarising this data, outlining the recommendations for learning initiatives, and inviting feedback from lay and ordained
- offer an online webinar to those who cannot get to a face to face workshop
- hold a data day to discuss the findings with selected folk in key roles in the church
- offer to present to LSC, the KCML Advisory Board and any other interested courts of the church
- publish in relevant journals, both industry and academic
- design educational initiatives inspired by the results

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix I for the questions/Participant Information Sheet.

## Introducing the themes

There is as much diversity in the data as there are contexts and leaders. Nevertheless, five key themes have emerged for discussion:

- reconversion to founding stories
- living together as God's people
- understanding and engaging context
- leading effectively
- reframing/rethinking current forms of Church

Each theme will be taken in turn and discussed by arranging the data in an unfolding conversation before summarizing the issues, and then educational strategies, mindful of what has been offered.

Where a minister is speaking their words are in italics. My own words, and those of KCML faculty, are presented in plain type.

Of course, this research is very much nuanced by the questions that were asked of interviewees. To respond to a query about challenges faced in one's leadership, what one is needing to learn, but also what one believes the Church is needing to learn will invite stories of struggle and the exploration of concerns. But within the responses is inspirational evidence of the depth of thinking, the breadth of care, the honesty, the commitment, and the wisdom of these ministry leaders.

What lies in this data and the emerging themes is in fact an invitation to something much bigger than what a few courses and resources can address. We are being offered an opportunity by those who live and work at the coalface of local ministry leadership to review and rethink together what it is to be the Presbyterian Church in Aotearoa New Zealand today - to celebrate, to lament, to wrestle, to critique and to wonder.

As we prepare to examine the themes, it so happened that one minister touched on all five as they summarised what it was they believed we as the Church are needing to learn. Their words give you a sense of the size of what you are about to read, while prophetically challenging us to dig deep and listen wide, and from those spaces to journey far. You will hear a call to re-reading our foundation document, the Bible, to a "rethink...from the roots up," to "listening to wider culture," to asking "fundamental questions" and to deep change to identity. This is not work with a quick solution but work that challenges the essence of our faith understanding, our life together, and our wider engagement across the PCANZ and with society.

Courage is identified by this minister as the quality we will all need, grounded in and empowered by an understanding of God's deep love for each one of us.

*I have a deep sense that we have really missed the mark in relationship to our understanding of Jesus Christ, in terms of our understanding of the gospel, in terms of what I call capturing the true heart of God. It requires in my view a willingness to rethink this whole business from the roots up. And that requires courage. It requires us to somehow rip our blinkers off and try and read this foundation document with fresh eyes.*

*It requires listening to wider culture. Our culture regularly makes critiques of Christian faith and my sense is that I want to agree with three-quarters of what they say. I really do try and take it on board and hear what they are saying because I think they are offering us a prophetic critique. We've been living in a time and we are living in a time when people have been leaving*

*institutionalized Christianity in droves and most of these people aren't stopping being Christian. They've just had a gutsful of a certain kind of Christianity.*

*[Needed] I think, [is] a willingness to courageously rethink this whole business, to ask some really fundamental questions, to make our whole understanding of these things much more creative, contextual, connected (those are the three C's people talk about).*

*There are enormous feelings of insecurity around this because so many Christian leaders have their identity attached to this whole way and it's just not helpful. When people get it, they say, "This is so liberating! To be able to know that we really are loved by God and that God gives us the freedom to think and to be." We can't get there by our own steam – this is a movement of the Spirit of God. Only God can reveal God to us. But we can hopefully get ourselves to a place where we are open to this. Not closed to it. If we persist in the view that really what we've got is the right message – we've just got to think of a better way of saying it – I think we've got to go a step further and ask the question, 'Have we actually got the right message? What is it that Jesus is really saying?'*

*And so that is what I would call a courageous theology – a willingness to explore. There's a whole lot of things that need to be in place so that people can do that. One of those things is to recognise that I am not my theology. If I was then I'd be terrified every time someone questioned my theology. First and foremost, I am (we are) loved by God – created, reconciled, and redeemed by grace through Jesus Christ and called by God into loving relationship with Godself and with others– irrespective of what our theology might be. Understanding that gives us the courage and the confidence and much-needed humility to be asking some of these deep questions of ourselves.*

## Theme 1: Reconversion to founding stories

The particular language of this theme is mine. As I listened throughout the interviews it became apparent that many ordained ministers are experiencing individuals and/or communities who seem to have journeyed away from the essence of our faith in congregational contexts, as revealed in the Word, Jesus Christ, and in the Scriptures. The scope of our Christian education is of concern; Sunday gatherings – and particularly sermons – have, in the words of a KCML colleague, been doing much of the “heavy lifting” in recent decades, with limited success.

“Founding stories” was used by Alan Roxburgh in a recent book, to speak of our faith resources.<sup>3</sup> Later in this report you will hear people also musing on Presbyterian identity, another kind of founding story.

And why “reconversion”? Because even where people are new to Christian faith it seems that what is being passed on is often so much less of the story than it needs to be. We are all invited to be on a journey of discipleship, across our lifetimes experiencing reconversion that, each time, further deepens, widens and broadens our understanding of God and of what it means to be human. Mary, the mother of Jesus and the disciple Peter, among other biblical characters, stand testament to that.

### From the interviews<sup>4</sup>

Across the interviews a number of ministers registered a deep disquiet about the fundamental foundations upon which many in the churches they lead are building their lives. They speak of biblical illiteracy, a lack of confidence in the gospel, superficial theology, and an urgent need for the intentional formation of disciples.

*I feel I'm dealing with a church without a heart, without a core. By the "core" I mean without an experience of Jesus. So, they have an experience of church and form [but] very few of them pray in any genuine way. I think of our elders. They simply don't pray...Part of it is intellectual. People are desperately holding onto a kind of faith but they're not theist in any way. One of the things I'm very conscious of on a Sunday, as Professor Tom Long put it, is that every sermon now is an interfaith dialogue. I think that is very true of lots of congregations. What you are dealing with is a great diversity of experience of faith and theological perspective, so a minister has to find a way of presenting the gospel that enables a Jesus following atheist and a fervent charismatic Pentecostal to be animated by the same word.*

Particularly sobering evidence of this need for a return to core faith and experience of Jesus was recounted by a hospital chaplain.

*A lot of people come [to hospital] with a faith, but some have beliefs that when they hit health issues prove incompatible with their faith system and it falls apart. God has promised me three score years and ten. God is my hero. God is my fix-it. I just need to pray. I just need to have faith. Why is God doing this to me? Some people carry those kind of core beliefs. It makes their hospital journey really rough because their core beliefs are being eroded. Life is not matching with what they expect. It's a real challenge to work with that. There's a need to help them gently reconstruct their faith...There are times I'd love to wring the necks of some*

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<sup>3</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh, *Structured for Mission: Renewing the Culture of the Church* (Downers Grove, IVP: 2015).

<sup>4</sup> The quotes included in this section suggestion a different picture than what was presented in the 2014 Statistical Update of the PCANZ.

[http://www.presbyterian.org.nz/sites/public\\_files/for\\_parishes/statistics/2014\\_Statistical\\_Update.pdf](http://www.presbyterian.org.nz/sites/public_files/for_parishes/statistics/2014_Statistical_Update.pdf)

*Sunday school teachers or throttle preachers because they set people up for unrealistic expectations. It reinforces for me that God will never leave me nor forsake me. This is my core foundational belief. A lot of people's core foundation is that God will answer my prayers, heal me and provide all I need. We're seeing the reality of what a lifetime of Christian involvement has prepared people for. The palliative care team often ask why is it that Christians seemed to be the most afraid of death. They're right. Christians are asking for more interventions than non-Christians, who seem to cope with their reality much better. It's counter-intuitive, but it's the result of what we preach and teach. The fear of perishing in hell is a part of it. There's a real fear of death. We've used and abused our faith tradition to hold people in fear. The most successful churches are often those that use those tools. The little church that doesn't use fear is declining at a rate of knots.*

Another minister offered the following:

*The thing that comes to mind – and it's probably more typical in our older congregations – is a lack of confidence in the gospel. People aren't sure what they believe in...It comes out of a history of a diverse church across the theological spectrum and trying to hold all that together. It could possibly boil down to discipleship and how we do discipleship. People talk about the Bible Class movement where there was a lot of intentionality around learning scripture, which I think by and large has disappeared. What happened to all those Bible Class students? A lot of them didn't seem to pass on what they knew. For ministers coming in I don't think people come with that experience necessarily either. We might know how to put on a good church service, make it attractive and all that sort of thing, focus on drawing a good crowd, but discipleship, I think, is a problem.*

A number of these particular observations will reappear and be reflected on in following quotes.

Bible Class was also mentioned by another.

*Bible Class is talked about so much and that was so long ago. It was 60 years ago at least. But that's where [people's] theological education stopped, apart from Sunday sermons.*

A KCML faculty member had some pushback to offer.

The Bible Class movement of old is not the problem. I ministered in a parish full of people of that era and they were theologically and biblically very literate and continued to be so. My reading of this issue is the forming and discipling of people under the impact of secularism. The Bible Class movement was discipleship largely conducted within assumptions that New Zealand was a Christian country, so it was not fitted for the secularisation of society that really took hold of the mainstream from the 1970's onwards. This is partly why it was much harder to pass on this "faith" to their children...Many of the Bible Class era are now dead or in rest homes or in their twilight years. The challenges of formation and passing on faith actually lie more in the generations who came after them. We have failed to form people for the secular conditions they occupy.

The minister whose words appeared immediately before the above is a more recent graduate. Training has included a Missional Listening paper where interns gather a group of parish members and together learn to listen for the Spirit of God in scripture and in their neighbourhood, the idea being that through this faith might be deepened, new connections with context might grow, and missional possibilities arise.

*I did that neighbourhood exercise with [my congregation]. People could not do it because they didn't know how to listen, but even prior to that they were so stuck in not knowing*

*enough and feeling inadequate about their Bible knowledge. There's a real biblical illiteracy. They didn't even want to go there and explore that. It was only when I said, "You know, I don't think I know the Bible that well," that it kind of freed things up a bit. They felt that I was going to be testing them, but I wasn't.*

The same minister said,

*The thing I hate most is leading Parish Council meetings. Feels a bit like Vicar of Dibley. It's so easy to revert to administrative stuff because that's tangible. Much harder to talk about spiritual stuff. They won't talk about that stuff because it's private!*

So, at least in this parish, it appears that a privatized faith rooted in limited bible and theological understanding has been contributing to fear, defensiveness and Godless meetings.

Other ministers had the following comments to offer:

*I asked one of my Bible readers at the beginning of this year to read the Bible and she said to me, "I don't own a Bible"...Last year we did a children's play of David and Goliath. My youth group didn't even know the full story...So we're trying to...lay a good foundation of understanding the Bible stories for a lot of the kids. And then some of the adults are coming to know who God is now. Rehearing stories about Jesus and the parables. Some of these people have been at this church for 60-70 years...*

*I would resonate that there is a lack of Bible knowledge.*

*I wanted to serve the parish with Bible study, but they don't come because they don't like the Bible.*

*I think New Zealand has experienced a lot of biblical illiteracy in terms of congregations and people in general...The minister's role does gear a lot around teaching but their only interaction with the Bible is on Sunday. Trying to get people into study groups around the week is difficult.*

That challenge, in regard to lack of time, will reappear across this report.

*We're struggling a bit with that. For many of our folks it is a Bible study group during the week, but we've only got two groups. It's very hard to get people along.*

*We once upon a time approached those to become elders who were biblically astute. That is no longer the case. They lack theological knowledge. I try to stimulate that in leadership meetings but it's the old story, if you do that then what don't you do? You've got their attention for 1-2 hours a month. What do you in that time? How do you get them to commit to doing extra?*

The minister "trying to...lay a good foundation" had this contribution to make:

*I came out of KCML thinking that there was a gap in [things] Pacific//multicultural related to the changing face of the church. We have a big focus on Pacific and Asian ministries but what I've found is the need to recapture a love for reading the Bible. I don't think that many, except among the elderly, have actually read the Bible from cover to cover or can just sit there and absorb a story and see what it means for them. My preaching is trying to identify where God is in life, even in the simple things...There's a lot of focus on these devotional [readings] that they do. People are always telling me to listen to this, [but it's not enough]. That's where my preaching has been going in the last little bit – trying to lay foundations. If we want to have a*

*faith to pass onto our kids but we are not investing in it then we're going to be in big trouble. The church is going to die...When I do baptisms I always buy a gift for the kids. It's either a children's bible or children's bible stories, and I always tell the parents to read the stories with their kids every night. I really want them to read the stories together. I'm trying to focus on the family, putting the onus on the parents as well to live out their faith so the kids can understand it and see for themselves, [now] and as they grow older.*

And this is the nub. The PCANZ puts a high priority on preaching. Ministers are, after all, ordained to Word and Sacrament. Several ministers identified preaching as something they would appreciate further support or development in and already KCML is investing in this.

Colleagues at KCML had these observations to make, having read the data:

We've become so Sunday-centric in terms of church life that people in the pew and maybe elders expect the sermon to do the work of forming and education. It's absolutely a critical part of the church but we've asked it to carry far too much weight. We've just got this inherited understanding that the primary function of the minister is to produce the word on Sunday.

In terms of the place of preaching I do agree...It remains a crucial part of the life of the church but even someone like John Stott would say biblical preaching is **one** of the ways in which the church is strengthened. So not even he was saying it's the only way.

It's not about diminishing preaching, it's actually about expanding the category in which we understand Ministry of the Word. I think there has been a loss and abandonment of good preaching itself but preaching by itself is not the problem. It's the social construct in which preaching is taking place, and the social construct has now put all the eggs in the preaching basket, which it was never meant to have. Biblical preaching on a Sunday can be accomplished because these other things have also taken place, because people are reading their Scriptures, because people are sitting with one another and wrestling over the Scriptures, like the Bereans in Acts. There's a whole loss of these other forms of engaging with scripture and engaging with one another and one's own life and reflecting and discerning what God's doing in the midst of that, alongside good preaching. The history that we've had has not really affirmed the work of the Ministry of the Word outside of preaching.

One minister had the following story to tell regarding the Church's Sunday-centric-ness,

*I say at the start of a service, "We meet God in our lives. We meet God in our workplaces. And for an hour on a Sunday we gather to meet him in community." I say it most weeks as a reminder of what we're doing. This guy...he's very committed, said, "Ah, that's very helpful. I often wonder why we even bother doing this." These views are very common amongst people between 25 and 40.*

This story suggests education regarding God's activity in all of life and the relationship we are being invited into is urgently needed.

Further interviews of ministers explore the impact a long-term lack of commitment to disciplines that lay deep foundations has produced:

*Biblical knowledge is abysmal. I've been going to National Assessment for many years. I'm sure you can see a decline in biblical knowledge of the applicants. That's a weakness. And that flows through to our congregations. Very few of our congregational members read their Bibles*

*once a week and even less study them. Going back to our Reformed heritage it was more than about just reading but knowing and studying.*

*Most people in leadership – ministers and eldership and other ministry leadership – have no idea about spiritual disciplines. None at all. That's a concern. They're not looking at themselves and the conduct of their own lives spiritually. Even prayer and Bible reading are lacking. So we are reaping our lack of investment in these things in decades past because now we have people in positions of leadership who don't have disciplines, aren't particularly biblical, not theological.*

*What is the Christian gospel? I think we need to do some work on that. Euangelion – the idea that we have of the good news is drinking syrupy warm milk. It's not cutting it.*

*I think a lot of the major issues we are facing require us to be theologically alert, astute and up to date. I don't hear that. I hear a lot of superficiality.*

*I would update the theology of all the old Christmas carols on films, CDs, YouTube, shopping malls. This is the main way many people learn Christian theology. I have great difficulty singing them each Christmas...Failing this, they should be banned.*

There is hope, however. Not all are satisfied with what seems, in the eyes of many, to be a deeply dissatisfying status quo. They know they have things to learn, and want to learn, or want to see others learning, even amidst the challenges.

*Some of my people – only some – can't stand the fluffiness of Christianity. They want a deep investigative stimulating, making them really respond on an intellectual level that becomes heart. They don't feel there are very many spaces within the typical parish church that allow for intellectual discussion, deep thinking, provocative thinking, thinking that brings in politics, economics, and worldviews.*

*Our church has a high level of biblical literacy. It's seen in the kids' ministry. For us our challenge is how to minister to children who are over-churched. They come here to a Christian church and their parents are doing a good job in the home. But the heart piece is missing...*

*Practically, at the moment I need Bible study or discipline resources. Our church really wants to learn.*

(In checking I was told the minister is struggling to find resources because what is available is not so relevant to their profoundly multicultural context.)

*Despite the fact that this is an older group they are incredibly busy people. I'd love to see more opportunities for theological education, but not at a university level. Many here are not educated beyond Form Five.*

*I've got a very able, questioning congregation and to be able to encourage them all to grow into their Christian skin would be wonderful.*

Growing ownership of faith and our founding stories, particularly by committing to maturing as disciples of Christ, is key to changing a challenging environment laced with ignorance, competing priorities, and passive, often introverted, behaviours.

*I definitely think we need to find ways to get back to a model where we are intentional about discipleship. Dropping commitment is a bigger issue than dropping membership.*

To know exactly how to go about achieving such growth is not always easy, however. A few admitted this.

*I don't know how you enable congregations as a whole to know what choices are available to them and to have the theology and the experience of Jesus to animate and give them enough hope to make choices.*

*I need to be expanding my own understanding of the kingdom of God and what it means for the here and now and how the church can begin to share that. How can I disciple others into that same understanding?*

*I need to grow in my ability to be discipled and disciple others. I think discipleship is a significant key – real, authentic discipleship. Throughout life how do we mentor others and raise them in the faith? Are we really becoming more like Christ? It's not our current model of learning. We sit passively and listen.*

Others, meanwhile offered reflections into this work of discipleship from personal experience and practice, well worth noting.

*Taking congregations along with us in our growth as Christians, in a way that's encouraging them to express their faith and how things are, is a need. One way to address this is to help bridge the gap between academic, personal, and congregational theology...I think one of the really big issues in terms of knowledge and skills for congregations is for them to know who they are and whose they are in a way that gives them personal authority to speak about what they believe and how they live that out. We need to break down that "minister knows all"/the congregation sits and gets told – the place where people think that theology is something someone else does.*

*Devolved, accountable to a small group in a soft sense, is a great way for Kiwis to believe in things and get on board. Maybe that's an important part of being successful in doing things here in New Zealand. We understand ourselves as being more informal, slightly anti-intellectual...It doesn't mean we're not curious or creative. A lot of the university-type ways of packaging information doesn't work so well for people here.*

*Something that I've discovered. I almost every Sunday begin by saying "I'm not here to tell you what to believe but I can only tell you what I've come to believe in the season I am in." I've been trying to encourage my people to always be openminded. Paul talks a lot about being transformed by the renewing of your mind. He talks about your attitude and your way of thinking being challenged and changed. That's an intricate part of becoming the Good News. The leader needs to model it. Rightly or wrongly the [congregation] is looking to you as a guide. When you display close-mindedness or fundamentalism, when you display being a guard or protector of the faith in the wrong way, then that is what they are going to learn. Ministers need to be constantly evolving and growing. But the second thing is outright to encourage growth. Test these things. I say, "Don't just swallow what I'm giving you. Here are the books I'm reading, go and read them. And if you agree with it, great. If you can't, let's have a conversation." That's what the rabbis did. It was a communal thing. They gathered around the Scriptures and they shared things. They were loosening and binding things all the time. I would say developing open-mindedness in average everyday Christian people, because sometimes they're conditioned into a way of doing things and don't even know why they're thinking that. When you challenge them, then you see things falling apart, so it's developing people who can think for themselves. One of the critiques of Christians is that they are gullible,*

*and they come across as dumb because they are ill-informed. Be informed, be open-minded so that you can have a conversation with someone who is vastly different from you and you can do it without fear and worry and stress that I've got to say the right things or whatever. Trust that the Spirit can work through you. Be yourself.*

*The only viable way I see to encourage our people to have a missional focus in their spirituality and life is to have them be formed as committed, excited disciples who take responsibility for the kingdom life and for sharing in the big project (New Creation or whatever you want to call it). Traditionally our churches have had someone up front talking high minded things, and passive congregations. That in itself won't motivate many people because it doesn't deal with habit and the reflex side of our life that means that we're not likely to go outside our comfort zone and do something differently...Our crushing egalitarianism is very cynical about following leadership generally, though that is changing. From my point of view a large attractional church is fine if it's producing people who look more and more like Jesus. If not, what's the point? It's just another form of entertainment. Even the big churches struggle with the same things as small churches. How do we get our people to be passionate followers of Jesus?*

Committing to discipling others is changing how this minister conceives of ministry and the minister's role.

*I've undergone a massive change in my leadership style. I see myself primarily as someone who is being disciplined and leading disciples. That's my main responsibility. It's what I embody. This is a challenge for Presbyterians because we are so cerebral. We've bought into the whole Western Enlightenment idea that....the sermon will do the trick. But accountability, vulnerability and trust don't happen well in a public space, in a sermon. We've literally moved house. We've got people who live with us who we've never had before...I'd imagine there are many intentional ways of learning that would achieve this goal. It's an interesting challenge for clergy. We were given all sorts of strange messages about professional boundaries. Of course, there's wisdom in that but the vibe is this disconnect between home and church, work and play. At least in the way I'm understanding church now it's got to be more wholistic. When you put it to clergy...most people get that. They nod assent. Finding practical ways of embodying it is the whole trick.*

Reflections on discipling continue.

*I'm absolutely convinced that our centre needs to be formation and discipleship. Some congregations talk about needing to focus on mission and being missional. I understand that language but if we understand that it is about discipleship and how God sees me and how I see God and having that grow, the missional stuff will happen naturally. As long as we've got it and are intentional as well. But they're painful, sad meetings, talking with Parish councils when they say, 'Oh maybe we should do this and maybe we should do that in our community and maybe that will get more people to church on Sunday.' It's just tragic. They haven't been nurtured...When I see the behaviour around the traps, what do we need in our future? We need to grow so we can be kind. In the PCANZ, imagine if we were kind? And to listen. Those are the two big words. If we could grow in our listening ability to each other and to our community...It's not rocket science but it's really hard...It seems to me that Jesus was always on about breaking down those conversations about who is in and who is out. The image of a well [sinking a well rather than building a fence] is most attractive. [Dallas Willard notes] Jesus only ever invited – you know, invited – us to “come to me, abide in me, learn from me, and follow me.” That's kind of it.*

*In the last couple of years we got to a point in the church where we had to consider whether we would close down or not. The provoking factor was earthquake strengthening. We had to make a choice as to whether we would spend a lot of money on the building for a congregation of forty people. We got to the point where we said we could only justify it if we were going to change significantly the culture of the church. There was a culture that clearly simply wasn't working, so we went through a process of discernment. I came up with what I felt God was nudging me towards, which was a vision of a church focused intentionally around, initially I used the word "evangelism"...The commitment made was to find practical ways to share our faith and how to be a blessing to our community. It was an exciting period with a germ of an idea. But the real kicker came over two years now when a friend introduced me to 3DM...[Since then] the language has got altered and we're very much focused around discipleship. Out of it has come a very specific vision and plan...It's been a very intentional, very focused process of moving our church's culture at marginal rates by adopting new practices towards a more discipling culture. We're making that much more central business. That's what matters. That's what we count. We try not to get obsessed with some of the traditional metrics because we've adopted a belief that if we can get discipleship right, church will be right. Churches arise out of discipleship necessarily, but disciples don't necessarily arrive out of churches.<sup>5</sup>*

*I think the discipleship area – and try and hear discipleship in a very broad sense – is crucial. For me, discipleship is about becoming mature Christians. I don't think it matters what type or brand of Christian...Milton Coleman said to me when I was a student, "You need to know some things about me. I come from a very liberal perspective. My role is to make you the strongest and best evangelical you can be. To know your theology and be the best and most mature you can be." I think we've dropped the ball on this, as congregations and Presbyteries. I prefer a model that enables people to explore, to come up with a range of possibilities with behind that the emphasis on finding ways to help people mature in their faith.*

A practical suggestion enabling people to explore was made in another conversation.

*I'd be interested if KCML ran a day seminar on a particular topic like the Trinity and had two or three people from different theological perspectives and it wasn't to try to prove that one was right and one was wrong. It wasn't an adversarial thing, but just three different ways of trying to understand the Trinity. We could have people from within New Zealand and they might not all be Presbyterians but something that is theological based like that, which celebrates that we are all church and celebrates what is 95% unknown – all of us are on a journey trying to know God. It can be a seminar that has the effect of affirming the diversity of the church.*

Acknowledging that the depth and breadth of our formation experience helps to grow a larger vision, the following were comments made in regard to worship that shapes our gathered life.

*I would really benefit from some fresh resources to use in worship because...I think churches are trying to re-understand what Sundays are all about, particularly as we compete with the mega-church model that does everything bigger, brighter, faster and flashier. If we don't believe in that economy, then what is it we believe in and how do we do it in a life-giving way?...How can it be food for people's souls? A lot of the resources we use are very dated or wordy or written in a language that doesn't really speak to people.*

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<sup>5</sup> See Mike Breen, "Why the Missional Movement will Fail," <http://www.vergenetwork.org/2011/09/14/mike-breen-why-the-missional-movement-will-fail/> (cited 14 September 2017).

*There's certainly a gap around liturgy that's contextual. Adapting to own context and using local images, Te Reo, retelling stories and using storytelling as sharing the faith.*

*I'm also looking for worship resources...How to keep the beauty of the liturgy while getting it down to the level of the ordinary person in the pew?*

*One of the things that started to evolve as new families came along – they make up one-third to a half of our congregation now – they're looking for a different style of worship. A little less head and a bit more heart. We needed to evolve in a style of music choices and the way we delivered our prayers and wove our liturgy...Expertise is one issue – you can coach people along to be more confident – but there was a culture change that needed to happen. Some people needed to let go and others to open up.*

*I'm a creative – a poet and a writer. I always think if the Presbyterian Church ran a creative workshop, something to gather those people who have those skills, potentially to be published. Within our ministry we probably have some tremendously creative people who most of the time are doing the necessary ordinary everyday things but jump at the chance...[Malcolm Gordon's Luke project and other work was acknowledged.] There's probably more room for sharing that resource...It would be good to tap further into it.*

And a reminder.

*In terms of worship...within our denomination there are different, let's call them, schools...But it's almost like the PCANZ is frightened to say we've got different schools. There's not much affirmation that we are a plural church. [At times] it's just like there's a bloody battle field. There are different ways of thinking in our church. Let's just say it's okay to think differently so you can affirm people and give people resources where they are in the stream of theology that they are a part of.*

A member of KCML faculty responded, saying “I call [this] ‘silos of faith flavour,’ where you’ve got people identifying as this particular kind of Presbyterian and not connected to that kind of Presbyterian. I would identify [this] as a lack of a cohesive identity for what is the Presbyterian movement beyond these theological interest groups...We need a foundation for being together beyond being the same as one another.”

(As we will see in a subsequent theme one minister, to borrow words from another faculty member, is “using Presbyterianism as a way of cohering things, of bringing things together in their multicultural context. They say it is ‘one way of holding diverse elements together, culturally and people coming from other multiple church backgrounds and sources.’”)

A final story from a chaplain builds a bridge to our next theme (Living together), anticipates the last (Rethinking/Reframing current forms of Church), and offers a caveat.

*[One year there was] a young guy at Assembly whose opening story was, “We took a young man from Asia. We befriended him. We converted him. We baptised him. And when he came out and the youth group told him he was wrong, he then suicided.” He was struggling with the situation. As a church we are killing people. We are teaching people to hate themselves...But it's not only suicide...that comes out of low self-esteem. I hope that we can be a place where people can truly have the opportunity to develop their spirituality without the church trying to control and dictate who's in and who's out. The liberal part of the church did that in the 60s and 70s, and I'm probably the only one still involved in the church. We gave people permission to think and they did and then they left. The liberal part, we're closing churches hand over fist.*

*They've done a wonderful thing in social justice and community work but they haven't held their young people. The conservative ones have flourished and now hold the balance of power. Some of those enable people to discover that faith can work for people, the truth can set you free. Assurance of salvation should bring transformation, re-grounding. If we can create a church where people are not judged but where we trust God to do the transformation of lives, God can do it.*

### The issues

The interviews suggest that in relation to reconversion to founding stories, a number of issues are at play. These include:

- focus on church form vs experience of Jesus
- Sunday school-sized faith
- a lack of confidence in the gospel
- theology/God knowledge that is too small<sup>6</sup>
- lack of bible knowledge

Observations:

- a heavy reliance over years on the Sunday sermon for Christian education
- need for individuals and communities to prioritise faith formation
- awareness of formation needs to be more than intellectual
- passivity plays a role in promoting unhealthy approaches

### Educational strategy

As mentioned earlier, the challenge in this space, is to ask what investment KCML can and needs to be making, given what the interviewees have described is, in many cases, a generations-long, community-wide problem, which will need all hands on deck making a considerable and intentional investment into their own lives as well as into the lives of others. This is a work the Church needs to be doing in every generation. As one minister observed, if we are not investing in passing our faith on then “the church is going to die.” To borrow from another, “That’s kind of it.”

The significant challenge and named need is faith-maturing grounded in “knowing who and whose we are” and an understanding of our founding stories, particularly the size of the gospel. In this, ministers are our key educators-on-the-ground, after all, in Presbyterian polity, ordained ministers are the teaching elders. No doubt key lay people step up where an ordained minister is not available. To be investing in these leaders is stating the obvious in the context of this research, but perhaps the question for strategy here is ‘What **kind** of educators?’ Some participants noted that the minister becomes a role-model in this context – a disciple making disciples who are making disciples. The contributions suggest here that educators need to be biblically literate, theologically astute, inspiring generations-wide education, located yes in the sermon but necessarily beyond, and clearly modelling ever-deepening and ever-widening maturity in their own faith and life. So they are knowledgeable, well-read, theologically reflective, equipped for educating from children through adults, aware and discerning of contextually-relevant tools and processes they could be employing, operating with love, intelligence and openness, and prayerful Bible readers. Life-long learners!

Of course, as we will discover, this begs the question to the Church of what “ministers” really are to be and do. While Presbyterian polity says “teachers” (or educators), PCANZ reality can perhaps feel

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<sup>6</sup> Cf In 1955 J.B. Phillips wrote *Your God is Too Small*

like “administrators, project managers, evangelists, rescuers, etc etc.” If discipleship is a pressing need is it time to declare some priorities in regard to the minister’s role – what they need to do and what they will not do? We also need to ask what value we place on the teaching role. As one minister observed, there is a real challenge in choosing to value a “discipling culture [rather than being] obsessed with some of the traditional metrics” in the bid to help grow a church with “heart” and a “core.” What real support from the PCANZ system are ministers given in this? Further, one person, no matter how charismatic they may be, can only invest in a community for a period, so they are its servant, not its saviour. Discipleship is **our** journey. It needs to be owned and modelled by each one in the Church. A ministry leader helps to resource this, ideally supported in this work and in their own discipleship by those who have recognised their call.

A further question is around where our priorities lie. This is one for the whole Church to tackle. There is no easy answer but if perhaps a few could be living and modelling maturing faith in Christ and its implications for all aspects of their lives, and gossiping this, might others be inspired?

KCML could:

- design clear life-long learning pathways and appoint a facilitator of/educator in life-long learning to ensure this is resourced
- invest long-term in developing ministers as educators – particularly in dispositions and skills
- ensure Christian education is part of Ministry of the Word training (NOMs and LOMs)
- offer resourcing and support in regard to the maturing faith of ministers themselves, including the practice of disciplines
- keep before us all those questions of “Who is God?” and “What does it mean to be human?”
- become a hub through which leaders can be linked to and informed of methods and means available for resourcing those
- research, recommend and promote a range of discipling initiatives, working across the generations, theological spectrum, and ethnic contexts (including multicultural) and facilitate the sharing of local real-time stories (including as an investment into Church-wide discussion of best ways forward in understanding of ordination etc).
- examine its allocation of resources. It is too much locked into ordination – placing weight on ministers as the key resource for discipleship across the church – when the need in regard to “reconversion” is clearly broad and widespread and a responsibility we all need to take up?

## Theme 2: Living together as communities of God's people

To be church is to be God's people together, disparate people once strangers now brothers and sisters in Christ. There are many joys to share but living together also has its challenges – internal and externally forged.

### From the interviews

*We're wounded people. We behave badly. We need to build authentic relationships... What does it mean to be in good authentic relationship with each other? That's actually really hard. It's really messy. It's complex. It takes trust to walk with each other. I'm not sure we've had great modelling. It's so much simpler just to run a Sunday service and people attend and leave again. It's really hard to build community...It takes years.*

Across the interviews particular mention was made of a few key ingredients of community life as leaders pondered their challenges and the learning gaps. These include power, imagination, perception, patience and persistence.

Power was a particular topic for some, moving into reflections upon conflict and its impact.

*Over the years I've had really bad experiences with congregational members trying to bully me. It's an issue that isn't actually addressed. I know several ministers who have left because of how they were treated. Church is a place of work and we have a right to be safe there. I had to get a restraining order on someone at one stage. There's complaint procedures but generally with ministers the culture of the church is that you put up with it because it's "pastoral care." I'm now saying "No, this is not." Their actions have legal ramifications. When ministers have codes of ethics we have to be supervised. I also have spiritual direction. But congregations seem to think the minister doesn't have emotions and feelings and they are at their beck and call. Some of my colleagues have had dreadful experiences. Society's issues are reflected in the church too.*

*[A challenge has been] dealing with a person who has a very strong character and looking at how we could stop them from being litigious. After a number of difficult months, he chose to leave...Pretty much all of our leaders are in responsible positions and yet what shocked them was the litigious manner and the very strong accusations and bullying that was going on...We don't expect this kind of behaviour from Christians...From a personal perspective I've spent considerable time standing in the gap because I thought it was incredibly important to protect as many people as possible from a situation that was being dealt with by myself and the leadership. A demanding and spiritually exhausting time. I found most had little experience in this area and didn't know quite what to do...There was a sense of being quite isolated in terms of spiritual maturity. It was certainly lacking in some of the leaders. (We as ministers are employed by the Presbytery so one assumes that when you go to your employer they will have your back and, yes, they did but they also said they pretty much couldn't do anything.)*

*The minister before me, he was there twenty years, a bully and quite awful to people but they didn't do anything about it, so they were quite accommodating...It's something quite passive.*

*The energy that goes into conflict and general bad behaviour, the way that a few people can suck up a lot of energy in terms of how the parish runs, how much notice do you take of people's arguments?*

*Conflict resolution...Despite the fact we think people are being judgemental, they often live out of a place of grace and find it difficult to work out the hard decisions. How to make hard decisions?*

*Our leadership cannot handle dispute or conflict inadequately. What they do, in my opinion, is they make light of it. It's almost that whole thing of sweeping it under the carpet. Lots of people call it the ostrich philosophy. Just stick your head in the ground and it will go away. It doesn't go away. Our leadership is not adequately equipped or adequately in the position of how do we deal with it. Often there are comments like "Oh, that's just how they are." It's partly people who are 75+. The Baby Boomers who are now the leaders don't know how to deal with this. They're quite passive. This whole PC thing that we don't deal with the negative stuff, let's speak it nice, look for the good in it, the problem is it doesn't go away. When you look at the big picture it's causing people to turn around and stay away.*

*Accountability. There's a sense that we don't want to be nasty and horrible to anyone so there is some nasty and horrible stuff that needs to be challenged. There is that understanding that we are a church living in the way of Christ...It's speaking truth and love and respect and saying it's not okay. We seem to falter on that last bit.*

*Ministers tend not to be into conflict management. They tend to do the ostrich stuff because we're trying to hold together a volunteer community, so you can't be quite as strident as you might when you've got someone's wages to hold over their head.*

*When there's bad behaviour going on we actually need to call it such and have some ability to say this ministry is killing this place or these people are killing this minister.*

*There is a very very strong resistance to disruption, a very strong consensus around avoiding conflict, and yet this is a time when conflict is absolutely necessary because clearly the way we are being church is just not engaging our society. Since I've been here I've been accused on bringing disunity and there have been a group meeting in private in order to get rid of the minister. I'm used to this so I'm not terribly wounded, but I am sad for the Church...People are just terrified that the church is going to become something other than what they are used to.*

*One of the areas I think the church needs to do something about is the church complaints procedure. Because the complaints procedure is so loose and has very little structure any complaint that comes has to be entertained. When I come from [overseas], and I don't like saying "where I come from," to try and iron out things a complaint has to have fifteen signatures before it can be lodged because by the time it has got to the fifteenth person this thing has been debated and discussed to some quite extent. It has to be genuine to have made it as a complaint...[A lot] is based on assumptions. And because it's an assumption eventually when it works out, if it was just an assumption, then the blame goes on the leadership for not communicating properly!*

Some of the conflict spoken above mentions generational issues. The Pacific Island Synod also experiences intergenerational conflict.

*The younger New Zealand-born generation do not look at their culture the way their parents do. So there are some cultural things that they value but not everything that the older generation would want their children to learn about the culture and do as they have done. There are some real tensions there. For example, when we have funerals there are more and more where New Zealand-born are leading the culture aspect and they do it so differently to*

*their parents...I think a lot of them are of the view that culture should not be above the gospel. Culture should be there as a tool to enhance the spreading of the gospel. The older generation don't look at it that way. They see culture and gospel hand in hand – they go together – and sometimes culture is above the gospel. That's where the conflict is.*

One community has identified conflict as a particular area needing constructive work.

*We're spending a lot of time...around really simple but really effective [methods for] processing conflict in our relationships – spouses, kids. We're spending a lot of time on that because my inkling – well we're proving it – is we need to be really intentional in developing those kind of skills to build more authentic relationships. We just rely on our upbringings and they're inadequate.*

In KCML faculty we have been observing, through our devotions and musing on such texts as Luke 10 (Jesus sending out the disciples to seek houses of peace), Matthew 5 (speaking of peacemakers and reconciliation), Matthew 18 (where two are three are gathered – note the context is not prayer but the need to forgive) and John 20 (Jesus leaving peace). One person observed we are called not to peacekeeping but peace-making as followers of Christ. Meanwhile another drew a link: “‘behaving badly’ [a descriptor they placed against stories like the above] is based on the expectation that surely faith in Christ actually gives us some resources to address that, but it doesn't seem as if the faith in Christ has actually got that far and deep.”

This “surely...but” appears in other behaviour a minister described.

*The hardest part of my role is helping a...church with a distinguished heritage come to terms with its predicament and make choices about its future instead of simply drifting into oblivion. It's teetering on the edge financial viability. Attendance and financial details are nothing like what was told to me when I answered the call...One of the hardest things is helping people come to terms with the situation and to be realistic about what they can and cannot do...I live with a sense of crisis and a sense of urgency but it is not shared by many beyond the chair of our church council and session clerk and maybe one or two others. So, what happens is that they then make decisions on the basis of their own limited experience of the church and their own preferences and so it involves perpetual circling. Either they circle around the issues or they blame. So, they might blame the minister because they thought they were appointing somebody who was going to rescue them. But the dynamic that got them there isn't the dynamic that's going to get them out of the hole they are in. The biggest challenge I face is how do you enable key decision makers, key leaders, who aren't necessarily in appointed positions but who have influence, to step outside their learned behaviour and their framework to see other ways of being and other choices that are life-giving and growing?...In the meantime bizarre behaviour carries on, namely perpetual self-referencing. If they want to deal with something they go back to the same people, but they're the same people who've lived in the church for 50 or 30 or 40 years. They're not people who might give them a different perspective. One of the hardest things is to try and break this pattern of self-referencing and thus the lack of imagination.*

Power and perspective manifests in other ways too.

*A lot of people who hold the power in Samoan congregations are the elders who were born in Samoa, and their perspective is exactly how they grew up in Samoa. They grew up in the Congregational church in Samoa. They think they are Presbyterians but practice Congregationalism. When I came to the parish they needed to have a Congregational meeting*

*once a month. They'd have a session meeting and then a congregational one and it's a disaster because decisions made in session are then fought about in the congregation. When I came I stopped the Congregational meeting. We'll have it when session decides one is needed.*

*Negotiating diversity is a challenge. I am Samoan, part Tongan, born in New Zealand. Many people see me as a Samoan. Will he be pushing for the Samoan community? Like attracting like. Whereas that's not how I see it.*

*I heard this great quote once: "Our imaginations are confined by our experience." So, whenever we try to do something new we always refer back to what we already know.*

Of course, a challenge in such spaces is growth into practices and qualities that enable us to live and operate differently – as authentic communities as per the opening quote in this theme.

*One of the spiritual skills that we need together as ministers and congregations and sessions is the spiritual art of discernment. How do we discern together, not just what I as a minister want or what the congregational member wants, but how do we together discern God's will?*

*We talk a lot about "we use a process of discernment" but I think our understanding of that is very poor, very limited, very superficial...I've been in Parish Council meetings where we've talked about discerning a way ahead and it's effectively been the person with the loudest voice and the most persuasive argument. There have often been people who have sat silent and there has been no silence in the meeting for us to listen for what we might be hearing from God. We use "discernment" when we meet together for General Assembly and I've seen no evidence of that, ever. That I think is just a huge gap for us as a church, when we claim that it is the foundation of our decision-making. I think that if you asked most people in General Assembly, "How do you discern something?" they'd say, "If I like it. If it makes sense. If I agree with it."...Presence is also part of the discernment process, self-awareness, and humility. Presence connects with being open to the more that is within and the more that is without. We tend to be very goal-focused and don't tend to be aware of what is happening now. If [only] people were present to the feeling in the room or the feeling they were experiencing in response to what someone else was saying, but whenever you're not willing to be present to that or don't take into account any of that the conversation, the intention and the direction that we're heading in is completely different. So that willingness to be present to each other and to the energy that we're conscious of around us, but then also being present to God and being present with God (for me that's about your prayer life). A lot of the way that we understand prayer in our churches is cognitive rather than presence. The self-awareness piece is the undergirding of how we are together. So when we meet together and we are not conscious of what we are bringing or what our strengths are or where our own wounding is we can't interact with any honesty because we are constantly triggering each other's wounds and reactivity. But there's a piece in there about being able to recognise what you are bringing, what you are hoping for, and where God is in the midst of that, that allows for grace to come in and that leads to deeper compassion and empathy. [Meanwhile we need to be] understanding humility as not being just like the doormat but having a wise understanding.*

*We need training around spiritual disciplines and practical skills...What does it mean to listen to the voice of God and put that into practice?*

*I'm aware, having supervised an intern, that quite a lot is done about spiritual practices in training. I'd like KCML to resource the church in that for ongoing ministry.*

*Continuing spiritual vitality. I was initially thinking of that for myself, as a challenge for myself, but is that part of the overall environment as well? Are people struggling to connect with God as well? For me the challenge is having a prayer life that is not solely connected to the ministry I do. But I also think when we offer say an evening of prayer and worship or a group time of lectio divina we're likely to get a handful of people we probably could have predicted would have turned up.*

Like the earlier speaker here, others also turned to pondering national gatherings – namely General Assembly – which suggests that spiritual practices could do with renewal across the church and are not just a challenge locally. If that is so, then there is a need to be educating our educators.

*Our decision-making processes in General Assembly, when you ask 200 people to come together it is absolutely painful and not a good way of making decisions.*

*General Assembly is usually bit of a drag. Some good stuff, I suppose, but my guess is that outside of GA those key issues of sexuality and marriage and stuff nobody really talks about. It's never uplifting to have them battled out the way that we do. People have been trying to reach a consensus discussion for years. It just doesn't work...Get to General Assembly and it is antagonistic – us and them. We want to win. It's not reflective of the gospel of reconciliation and of the kingdom of God and the values of the Sermon on the Mount. But what can you do? There are really nice people on both sides, but they get really obnoxious when it comes to that issue. We do leave General Assembly and don't bring it back to our parishes because it breeds disconnect between what goes on there and here.*

*The most challenging things have been outside of the parish, particularly around ways to associate with other people, those who perhaps have different views, and to do it in a safe and helpful way. To discuss issues and get to know each other, but in a discussive and respectful not a debating way. At Presbytery and senior level a cultural way of talking is debate. I do not get a lot out of debating. I can do it but I don't believe there is a right or wrong and debaters often sit around convincing others of their view. I would rather find a space to be able to speak to those things where there's a general respect and an ability to listen, not to prove a point. The formal aspects of relating in a Presbytery and national church tend in my experience to be in debate and right and wrong. Adversarial.*

*[We need] help with regard to what people sometimes call "the soft skills" – respectful communication and deep listening...Not just talking past each other from positions we are not going to be moved from, but genuine conversation in which you are actually not only willing to hear what others say but are willing to be changed by what you hear others saying. I just see so many examples of poor communication amongst colleagues. Something that you see at General Assembly level, the way the whole thing is set up doesn't encourage conversation at all. I sense that what happens is that we kinda listen with only half an ear. We don't really listen with the heart. We listen with half an ear and half a mind, but the other half of the mind is around the questions, "How is what this person is saying threatening what I believe and how can I bolster up what I believe and how can I respond to that?" Not listening at a deep level to the heart concerns of other people with a willingness to suspend your own interests and investments to learn something new and not feel you have to evaluate it or judge it. Just say, "Okay, well I'm not going to make a judgement about this. I'm not promising to agree or disagree with you, just let me understand what you're saying." As a Church we could do a whole lot better, especially around some of the more contentious stuff that goes down around Assembly.*

*I'd really like to see us as a church at a national and Presbytery level apply listening skills, and be appreciative of people with various gifts and viewpoints. I think the Westminster system of meeting organisation whereby you fight it out on the floor and there are winners and losers and we shake hands at the end of the day is not helpful for the church. I'd love the Knox Centre to help us find ways to talk differently to each other...I think very quickly some of the interns are losing interest in the national church because what was modelled at KCML is not the reality at Presbytery and national. I heard last week of a good young minister who is not far off graduating who has given up going to Presbytery, and he will have had it drummed into him that he is part of the regional and national church. It's a big challenge. How do we change the culture?*

Thinking further on the culture of General Assembly, one woman minister noted the fact that

*...a good number of people don't get gender equality. It was really bad at the last Assembly from the leadership in action and in words...Women don't come forward to [leadership] roles because they're more suited to someone more decisive – this is being very general because not all men are like that either.*

She is one of those quoted above who is really put off by the adversarial nature of debate.

Interestingly, few people in these interviews spoke about gender, though one male minister talked of receiving “pushback when I've used images of God that are feminine” despite being in a parish that encourages women's leadership and has a council that is 50/50 male/female. The possible reason for this is that just before this research was being conducted a significant piece of work had been done interviewing women ministry leaders across the church about their experiences and perhaps they chose to focus on other things here. It will be fascinating to read those results.

Just before we step away from General Assembly, a further minister holds another concern.

*A previous Assembly I went to, something that floored me was that the international missions coordinator came to the lectern and said he'd been given five minutes. That shocked me. It's something I've found an enormous gap – an intentional focus on the church as part of mission as a much wider thing...*

This holds echoes of the earlier comment about “perpetual self-referencing.” That minister spoke of the value of experiencing very different expressions of worship for

*being able to imagine a different future or different possibilities. When you've worshipped in an African or Korean church...you know that there are lots of options.*

Society is changing all the time. Technology, changing social mores, people movement, natural disasters, fresh pressures and globalisation are creating new pastoral issues or new-takes-on-old problems. As one minister said, “society's issues are reflected in the church too.” The question is how equipped are we for dealing with them?

*Pastoral skills are one of the most difficult ones to teach because the pastoral context is becoming more and more complex. For example, the number of people who call themselves members, aren't married, have children whom they want baptised or christened who are from that kind of background who are struggling with issues the church never engaged with 20 years ago, who have psychological or mental health issues. It just has become so messy. With the politically correct age we live in as a pastoral carer you expose yourself to a degree of challenge and risk that wasn't there in the past and there are some situations that I just*

wouldn't let my elders anywhere near. It's tripping up all sorts of people in Christian leadership so there's a real need for some skill-based training, even just to keep people safe or to teach them when not to engage pastorally. At the moment there is just too much pastoral stuff that falls into the too hard basket...I am interim moderator of a church that is busy putting itself together after a leadership crisis. They are not adept at pastoral care because people are limited in skills and knowledge. If we had the chance to start again in terms of delivery of pastoral care how would we redesign it to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? It wouldn't look anything like the traditional models of pastoral care. We're probably only qualified to deliver those to church people. How am I going to teach them? What skills do they need? I could support someone dying of cancer who is a church person. On the other hand, what about with someone who's child has been murdered overseas and they can't get the body home?

I came out [of training] thinking that I was here to fix people and make people better. There are people with significant needs. What do you say to someone who self-harms? That's been a constant feature of my ministry years. Or the guy at the rest home who realises that he's descending into Alzheimer's.

Pastorally...drinking and family violence has been a bit of a major. It's settled down a bit now but certainly we've had seasons where we've had a lot of craziness going on. To be honest, it's dealing with the agencies because they're rubbish out here. It's hasn't been pleasant. Family violence tends to be with some of the immigrant families. Adapting from another culture into New Zealand culture, coming from isolated islands that a number have been living on, that's led to a few challenges here. There's also mental health in regards to that. We've got a community worker who works for the church who has taken a lot of the weight of these things, and a youth worker too. They're at the coal face. I tend to manage, provide oversight. One of the good things is that across the community the community workers keep in touch quite regularly, so the support network there is quite good. Police, school principals, CYFS. But there's only so much that ministry trainees can do, unless you're training social workers. It's the ability to know who is the best person to deal with that. That is tricky if you have a small congregation, particularly if the other agencies aren't doing their jobs very well. There needs to be a strong idea of what your main tasks and responsibilities are and when to let go. And that's incredibly difficult to have to do.

Other pastoral challenges were related (with passionate concern).

In terms of pastoral care, I have met very serious matters. Addiction in pornography. Addiction in alcohol. Our church is very multi-cultural with many cultures, and so totally different people, but I know these are very serious issues, which affect the family. They are really struggling...Especially in terms of pornography. I think it's happening more inside the church than outside the church. We need to prepare for that. Our church is a very normal church, but I have found many issues like this coming from the congregation. There are even ministers addicted to pornography.

We had a sexual allegation made against one of my top people. That was gruelling. It was all in confidence, but it was highly suspicious. All sorts of other things came out. At the end the person came out innocent but I'm still fairly raw from the whole thing. You come out of it limping a bit. It was made by someone outside of the church. The person was quite toxic...I tried to be as transparent as I could with the church thought I couldn't answer all the questions. It went right to the top very quickly, but it probably shouldn't have gone that far.

*Should have been investigated. I don't know if it was handled well through Presbytery. I was told not to tell my elders, which created problems as well. It wasn't pretty. We did everything by the book and the people that made the accusation weren't satisfied. They thought there had been collusion, but we did everything as good as we could.*

*We had a key couple [in leadership] went through quite a bitter marriage separation. I felt quite out of my league with that. It was more than two years ago but we are still dealing with the aftermath.*

*The digital age and social media – bullying and all that is quite big – for the younger generations. The older generations is more around visitation. How are you doing? They don't really share. They are quite private. I have a beautiful relationship with my people but when they are in hospital or sick or going for surgery they don't contact you. Whereas the young folk don't hesitate [to contact me]. It's a different mindset.*

*We had a really dramatic series of events in our parish, which culminated about 18 months ago. Had a parishioner who didn't like us. It started when we went on study leave and we got emails saying, "Don't come back." Later we received abusive emails saying we had stolen money from the church. Anytime we tried to talk to her she wouldn't respond. Her elder tried to do her best. My husband then moved into chaplaincy and I moved into full-time ministry in the parish after a congregational vote. One day a policeman came and knocked on our door. Someone had rung Crimestoppers saying I had abused a child at a holiday program. I double checked with families in case something had happened. There was no education for me around how to deal with it, who to contact...The process was so time-consuming. Then it was my first day taking the service on my own. This woman got up and said, "I have something to say." She went off her rag. Said I'd abused a child and an elderly person – named them – and then said I needed to be killed. Elders ushered her out. My children heard this as they were sitting in church at the time. They got horribly worried. Session and board of managers chair went to the police station and filled trespass orders. They made the difficult decision to say she couldn't attend church. Session members became bouncers. I then had varied conversations. Why did you ring the police? Why didn't you ring an ambulance? In hindsight, I'm sure it's a psychotic meltdown. So...mental health care. Because it was a threat to my life we went the way of the police but unless you've had some training and discussion about what you do with people [with mental health] it's hard to recognise what is happening. We had a seminar on mental health in the church and it was packed. 300 people were there. As ministers, we're not trained to deal with those real wacko people...I really think there needs to be more training in this. I've talked with other ministers....one who's had a death threat. Presbytery was useless. We ended up making a complaint against her and went to a church court, but the process felt wrong. We couldn't talk to her and so the church was unable to offer her support and pastoral care.*

And then there are the challenges that the earthquakes have brought...

*We had the Christchurch earthquakes six years ago and then Kaikoura last year. Dealing with refugees. Dealing with parishioners who are normally calm and responsible and their emotional response. Supporting the local government people...I'm good at finding pastoral response for others but not good for myself. Finding people who can care for the carers, and have some understanding, [is a challenge.] Someone in the national office sent down work about merging parishes. Showed a complete lack of understanding. They were well-intentioned but these are extra layers we really don't need. I must say, however, that the response from the national church has been outstanding and now priorities set up by the*

*Alpine Presbytery have been adopted by the National Office...One of the difficult things to deal with is people who want to do something and don't know what to do so they bake and send you loads of boxes of cakes that you can't do anything with because there isn't the storage to cope with them. By contrast I got a phone call from an Auckland parish who collected an offering and sent money, allowing us to decide. It was enough to take the congregation out for lunch after church at a local café. We got a treat and the café got business, so it helped everyone.*

*After a disaster those who are not immediately involved don't realise how many years it will take to recover.*

*Earthquakes. The uncertainty. As people age their anxiety levels increase. The uncertainty of not knowing what is next, which for younger ones is exciting, is destabilising for older people with concerns over where's my funeral going to be, etc. They were a very bonded group so those bonds get a bit stretched when the early adopters are fine with the change and the later adopters are struggling. It's trying to keep the whole and keep it knitted together through the changes. That's quite challenging...We've still got elderly parishioners who are out of their houses, waiting for repairs and fighting with insurance companies, so they've lost six years of their 70s or whatever and it's like, "Do we need this house back or do we just go into care?"... Continuing earthquakes create stress. But now six years later we've discovered that members of our family are showing signs of delayed PTSD reactions. It's taken that long to finally get to the surface.*

*One of the things the earthquakes have aggravated is people leaving. We are now facing having to sell the church...One parishioner was baptised in that church, however, so I'm dealing with the grief of loss of people [and losing the building] even though they know in their heads that this needs to happen. We need more help with this grief/trauma.*

From a completely different setting, another minister was also pondering endings.

*Questions about legacy. Are you going to be the group that makes the hard decisions? Once you start the process the Book of Order provides you with what's required. But sitting with people, telling their story again and again, and allowing them to make decisions seems to have been key. It's basically congregational grief. I look at the pain in these people's faces...*

Amidst the pastoral issues other challenges to living as the community of God's people are those of connection, and commitment (time reappears as a challenger to the Church).

*One we find tricky is the issue of engagement. The congregation is in a huge state of flux. Last week we had 60 people in church and this week 100+. As tools for engagement we have electronic and social media options. We've just commissioned the development of a church app...We've spent quite a lot of money developing it. How do we share that with the wider church?*

*The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the parish was challenging with a lot of work going into it. Although we had a very committed committee that worked very hard I led the group in such a way that the program would fall into place. We have three ethnicities in the parish – Cook Islanders, Samoans, Tokelauans – and quite a few intermarriages with Palangi married in...It took one and a half years to prepare and then at the same time we built a new manse. Financially that project cost us \$800,000. It's all completed, all paid off. The challenge is to help the people to remain faithful in the midst of all these commitments.*

*A major challenge has been motivating leadership at a parish level – elders and ministry leaders. People are tired, they are generally aging, and they have an increasing array of other commitments and responsibilities outside of church contexts.*

*And then when you come in from the outside [as a minister] there's not a structure for networking [with colleagues.] I tried to set up some coffee things and some readings groups. There was a little enthusiasm and then the wind went out of the sails. How many ministers meet with other colleagues for support in Presbyterian churches?*

Compliance and other financial and administrative realities are also putting a strain on communities. A number of ministers mentioned the new Charities Commission requirements for recording, expected of every Presbyterian parish, health and safety policies, managing employment contracts, and property management issues. Surprising was the number of parishes who were engaging in building projects (the leadership theme will address this more). With such a demanding infrastructure, it can be difficult to be agile.

*How do we manage financially, because it does have a big bearing on what we can do or think we can do? Budget is more about survival than How do we think bigger? How do we connect? What else can we do? Sometimes we can be too conservative in the way we manage our finances. I think that's more significant than a lot of other stuff because it does tend to place a ball and chain on mission and possibilities for future growth. We had a treasurer, a really good guy and quite competent, a bank manager. He never said, "No," but you never were sure if he was comfortable. Our treasurer now was running a billion dollar company in Hong Kong. He has a very different way of thinking about finances. There's a lack of entrepreneurship perhaps. Not that you want to go off and lose money, but if you are going to live by faith you need to take some risks. You want to be able to go out and take more manageable risks. We are risk-averse. If you can get around that one then that starts to open a whole bunch of doors about what you can do in the community and how you connect with people because finance is usually part of that. Often people just need to hear that it can be different and given ideas about how.*

## The issues

The interviews suggest that in relation to living together as the community of God's people, a number of issues are at play. These include:

- bad behaviour/toxic cultures
- lack of imagination
- lack of capacity in spiritual discernment
- inability to listen
- 21<sup>st</sup> century pastoral issues (eg self-harm, pornography, mental health, varied families etc)
- multi-committed lifestyles
- demanding infrastructure
- risk-averse

## Educational strategy

Our life as communities of God's people is shaped by the nature of our faith and by our external realities. But while some things are done to us, our response and our behaviours are our responsibility. For many of the ministers in this research both are of real concern, but particularly the latter.

Into the spaces described, what might KCML invest in that could be truly useful. What might help resource and educate the educators, and the church? One point of interest was the note from a minister that KCML seems to be modelling skills and practices of community to its interns that they would like the church – and this comment was made in the context of comments about General Assembly, so starting with its leader/representatives – to learn. Another was the awareness that while ministers are busy with the realities of the everyday it is hard to access pastoral and creative resourcing that could take a church into new or deeper spaces. There is wisdom to be found across the church and beyond.

So, KCML could

- be a place of resource and educational collaboration – gathering, partnering, curating, promoting, hosting and leading resource creation, resource collation, resource evaluation and recommendation, and resource dissemination. This includes providing links to research and resources created by current and retired ministry practitioners, and contacts they have found valuable, with recognised experience in such areas as special topics within pastoral care.
- story-gatherers offering case studies (including good news ones) and access to living libraries<sup>7</sup>
- research and recommend educational opportunities offered by those – including across and beyond the church – who hold expertise, as well as offer educational opportunities when faculty hold expertise
- offer opportunities to not just think our way but live our way into a new imagination of what it means to be the community of God's people. So not education in the modernist content-transfer model but experiential education.
- educate the educators by offering mentoring, coaching, small-group guidance and facilitation of peer groups

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<sup>7</sup> "Living libraries" are where "people are on loan to readers". See <http://humanlibrary.org/> And "reading is a conversation." <http://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/living-library>

### Theme 3: Understanding and engaging context

*We don't connect with the 85% of Kiwis who aren't in church, and in the research I've read, around half of them would either pray or believe in God or have some kind of faith...Deep down as humans we're looking for being paid attention to. We all long for that authentic community where we can grow and be disciplined and disciple others, where we can be nurtured and do life with each other.*

Among the interviewees there was a general recognition that bridging between church and society in ways that are contextual agile is crucial if we are truly to be salt and light for all.

Our contexts are changing. What was true for and the experience of one generation is not necessarily so for the next. Migration brings diversity. Subcultures proliferate. Economics, politics, religious and social realities, and technological advances produce new possibilities and stressors. More than ever is there a need for understanding and postures that will build relationship.

For Christians, faith is not lived apart from context. God affirmed this in the incarnation; Jesus lived this throughout the gospels; the Spirit empowers us for this. Our challenge today, however, is that we often “other” context, even while we inhabit it. The sacred/secular divide is an example – we separate the two even while we live in both. And so grows ignorance, misunderstanding, introversion, separatism, and irony in that. Which need work.

More than that God calls us to partner in transformation and reconciliation, “for God so loved the world...”

#### From the interviews

As we began, one minister asked a very important question.

*More formational to the question “How do we do church going forward?” is “Do we believe in the church?” If you try and say that the growth of the church is about what we do it's the wrong question. Of course it's important, but do we actually believe that the church is God's answer for the world?*

This minister had a story of renewal to tell when a congregation answered “yes.” Certainly we have to know why it is we gather, why and to what God calls the church – and it is more than just for the social benefit of a particular group.

A KCML faculty member added the following: “Do we believe in the gospel – in God loving the world?” This question acknowledges an even bigger reality, one in and to which the church is a sign and instrument.

Another minister picked up something of this and a challenge the church is facing:

*I believe Christianity is the hope for humanity. We've got a God who's passionate about humanity and people crying out for answers, and the church sits in the middle. We play games, rearrange the deck chairs. We have to take seriously where we sit...we've got a world where the answers aren't there and it's changing really quick, but we know – at least in theory – Christianity's the answer because God did it. Somehow we've got to earth it.*

It is true that there is a disconnect that we need to be working on. As mentioned by one minister quoted in the first theme (Reconversion to founding stories), we have a crisis of commitment and of

numbers. We have things to learn about God and God's invitation to us all; others can help us in "earthing" this.

*I just think we need a bit of a reality check. Why is it that people don't come to church anymore or don't believe in God anymore? Even how people perceive the church today. We need a reality check in that regard and then I think we need to see some of the good news stories of things that are working well in the world today.*

*How we go about sharing our faith [is something] the church has been strong at in the past but that's going a long way back now. If the church is going to survive and thrive then that's something that we need to take seriously again. It takes time to get credibility. We don't have our heads around how we are geared for looking to connect with people. I know there are other churches that do this really well, including Pressy Churches, but you don't hear about them too much.*

Remember, from the quote noted in the section title "Introducing the themes," the observation that among our teachers will be those who are our critics?

*Our culture regularly makes critiques of Christian faith and my sense is that I want to agree with three-quarters of what they say. I really do try and take it on board and hear what they are saying because I think they are offering us a prophetic critique.*

And so, as one minister said,

*if there is anything to learn it is how to take a community out into the community*

in ways that will help Church members to understand and enact their role as bringers of truly Good News for all people (assuming we understand the size of that, as per the previous theme).

*We're the little local community church, which has real advantage. I'm known in the community. There's a real sense of being present. But somehow there's a lot of church people so much in their work. We need to be looking at how to be missional where they are.*

*In terms of our learning – I'm thinking about elders and key leaders, probably clergy as well – we need a lot of help in growing in our ability to theologically reflect on our context, whether that's listening to our community or reading the newspaper. We need to find a way of being present in a community but living a life that is attractive. Like the Celts, [for example].*

*The ongoing task is of listening to God's voice in the context that we're in...How do we know how to discern God's voice?*

Chaplains experience the realities of our society and the disconnect with Christian faith every day in their workplaces. It is giving them sober and invaluable understanding.

*In the 1990s when I was attending Assembly the press/media was there trying to capture what we were saying but they didn't even bother with us this time. We've become very irrelevant. In a sense it makes part of our job in chaplaincy harder. I've been working hard to talk with junior doctors and nurses to explain what spirituality is and talk about the value we can add to the patient experience. Young people don't know what the word "chaplain" means. And when you try to explain about ministry and the church that doesn't mean anything either. There's a lot of mythology out there that is prevalent. "Church, religion causes all the wars – Ireland, ISIS!*

*The changing environment within society today towards things religious is impacting on what we stand for as a church school. It used to be in our mission statement – a clear statement*

*about Christian values. The students are really good, but obviously there is a trend away from things religious. I am very much into mindfulness [as a way] to try and find opportunities for the boys to experience something of God, the spiritual or sacred. It's about opening up some of the issues and engaging in things.*

*The Board of Trustees of my school have allowed the special character to be set by the market, so we're embarrassed by our heritage and Christian character. It may be because of a trend in millennial culture away from institutional religion. Some of the fallout...has been the relational aspect of working with colleagues who don't see me as adding anything of value. So there have been a number of instances where staff have been, I would go so far as to say, bullying and undermining.*

*Speaking from the local situation, I feel it would be really good if the church acknowledged the roles of chaplains more. When it was the local Presbytery I never sensed there was a great deal of interest in what was happening in school. For me that meant I stopped going to Presbytery because it was totally irrelevant. It is important to be acknowledged for the cutting edge stuff we are doing. Chaplaincy is becoming a lot harder. It's a societal thing. Fewer of the students and their families have any association with the church. They don't know what the expectations are. They don't know how to behave, etc. [In the meantime] a large number of students are coming from families where mum and dad have separated, a smaller amount of students are wrestling with gender identity, and the pressures of NCEA hit earlier than it did for my generation...The age of technology has really changed the nature of our school. These kids are just so worldly at a younger age, exposed to things that are not wholesome.*

*I haven't attended Assembly since the end of the last century, so I went last year. A lot has changed but one of the things that intrigued me was the talk of "community facing ministry." Chaplaincy is community facing ministry...We're here. We're doing it.*

*We chaplains are at the cutting edge...Is there a way for us to offer something back to the church regarding our experience?*

Another chaplain offered a further reflection on the pressing need for the Church to engage with a context that is significantly changing from what it was and has been, and in ways that might require revisiting of our founding stories.

*One of the challenging things in multi-faith communities is... people who just can't see beyond their Christian horizons...But I'm challenged to love, and to love unconditionally – and believe me it's a challenge...I don't think of them as other. I think of them as part of me. I think of them as part of my congregation...so it hurts me if I think that someone who is of a non-faith or of a different faith or of the same faith was being persecuted or given a level of intolerance or a level of disrespect. It pains me greatly. I find the word 'tolerance' not very helpful from my perspective because you can tolerate bad behaviour but when you respect someone...you show them different courtesies you might not show someone that you don't respect. It's also been my biggest personal challenge, especially in the broader world where Islamic terrorism has alienated people and therefore anyone who is a non-Islamic person can feel they can treat them in whatever way they like in a non-Islamic dominant society. There's this pathetic heresy that NZ is supposed to be largely secular, has Christian underpinnings. It's important to note that there are some major changes to NZ and especially Auckland...When you come from an approach of love then you have to presume that this is my brother, this is my sister. We don't just come as individuals, we come from a faith-based perspective, which is the*

*commonality...There's an approach that says if you don't push the Christian name then you're being disloyal to the Christian God that you know. I want to challenge all that...The levels of hate and the level of hatred that we promote and then we say, however that's being Christian and this is what our Christian God would have us do...But if Jesus has come then surely he fully questions every perspective...about what people are actually doing in the name of the God that they think they perceive and know.*

An increasingly multi-faith context is reflective of our growing multi-cultural context. Recent studies show that over 220 ethnicities live in Auckland alone<sup>8</sup>. It is now the 4<sup>th</sup> most diverse city in the world with 39% of the population having been born overseas. Compare this to 32% of Queenstown residents and you get a sense of a country that is looking very different to the one many Presbyterians grew up in.<sup>9</sup>

*Just in our little street we've had three properties change ownership in the last few months and they're all from mainland China. You talk with them and they don't even know what a church is, let alone want to go to one. All the church stuff I'm good at, but I'm not sure I'm good at cross-cultural mission. There's a huge influx...What's my ministry in that context? If we don't learn to engage with our Asian neighbours, we'll become extinct. We have modest growth. We have enough people for now. But the demographic is changing. "Kiwi" culture is disappearing so we're actually having to figure out how to minister into a new environment.*

*One of the challenges for us in our little corner is that probably 45% of our suburb are Mandarin speakers. For us as an English-speaking congregation we have a Mandarin speaking congregation, so there is a leadership challenge, personally, as the sole charge minister with serving a culture where you don't speak their language or have understanding of cultural things. I still need to increase my concept of Mandarin and the interface of cultural and Christian in that. Then there is the Filipino influx. It's a huge challenge for me as a local parish minister.*

*The intercultural stuff. I am learning – learning fast. I need to learn more. Language helps. The difference it makes if you can greet a group of people in their own language. Deeper than that is the spiritualities from different racial groups. There are profound differences, I've discovered.*

As a KCML faculty member observed

We need ecclesiological images that can help these churches be diverse.

One minister interviewed speaks four languages, which is proving necessary for ministry in their congregation. (Already, facility in languages other than English is becoming apparent as a need for leaders in the future.)

*A multicultural church is richer in the sense that there are different cultural backgrounds, and different understandings [alongside] the diversity of generations. In my church I work with 12*

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<sup>8</sup> Lincoln Tan, "Auckland more diverse than London or New York," *NZ Herald*, 17 January 2016, [http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=11575305](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11575305) cited 19 September 2017. In this article Tan was drawing from the 2015 World Migration Report. No doubt statistics will have changed further since.

<sup>9</sup> "2013 Census Quick Stats About a Place: Queenstown-Lakes District," [http://www.stats.govt.nz/Census/2013-census/profile-and-summary-reports/quickstats-about-a-place.aspx?request\\_value=15000&tabname=Culturaldiversity](http://www.stats.govt.nz/Census/2013-census/profile-and-summary-reports/quickstats-about-a-place.aspx?request_value=15000&tabname=Culturaldiversity), cited 19 September 2017.

*classes of diversity (4 languages, several generations [migrants, 1.5ers, second gen])<sup>10</sup>...Being multi-lingual is very important but very challenging. You only have so much time in the service to cover things so that everyone will have at least a thread of understanding.*

There is much to be sensitive to.

*The church is pretty up for new people moving in, so that's quite good, but yeah, ethnic is a bit of a challenge just because of the way certain cultures look at things. We've got a lot of Pacific families coming in. Trying to get them to become part of the family, as it were, has not been easy – though it's getting better now – because they are reticent...We have one on eldership and we're starting to make inroads. Kiribas and Tuvalu are our main groupings.*

*Maybe a third of our people have lived in New Zealand for less than seven years. They're people who may not as yet have established social networks. I understand that some of the Chinese churches are doing really well because they provide a social and cultural connection and people are introduced to Christ through that...We need to be aware that even if people come over here with white skin and speaking English that there is a cultural adjustment to be made. We dropped the ball with a wonderful Scottish couple who we thought were integrating really well. He was suggesting that there was potential for a ministry to new migrants and what I didn't read between the lines was that he was feeling lonely and isolated. Then we've had South Africans who are struggling with the secular nature of New Zealand...I've found out that over our area a third are from East Asia. Some parts are about half. Certainly, the Presbyterian Church on a Sunday morning is not reflective.*

*The biggest challenge in this area is encouraging and building unity. We are very diverse. We did an Alpha course. 52 came. 3 had English as their first language...We are also a congregation, which is actually congregations. Two have been together for 150 years but have operated as separate congregations, only coming together recently. So there's old jealousies, hurts. "People didn't like us." "People left us." It's been lingering for 20, 30 years some of this stuff. It's been compounded in a way with the newer groups coming in. Our largest congregation now is Brazilian. It's about 30% bigger than the other congregations...So now we're getting new jealousies. "Our church is being taken over." I hear that a lot. I find this stuff incredibly complex and draining. Then even within the different New Zealand groups there is incredible diversity.*

Engaging in mission becomes a challenge when the church community has a focus that looks different from other realities in the local community.

*The Samoan church needs to work out its sense of mission and what God wants them to do in terms of outreach. It's difficult for Samoan people to work that out because they are more inward focused than outward focused. The culture to me makes it more inward. We come here and we say, "This is part of our culture" so therefore immediately you exclude everyone else. We need to ask, "Who is your community?" When we talk about community we talk about people living within a certain locality. Where we live there is a mixture of Asians and others.*

*The biggest challenge is that word "mission." Mission to the community. Looking at this area where I am I'm aware there are other groups in this community. There's an old part of the*

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<sup>10</sup> Migrants are those born and raised in another country, arriving from their teens onwards. 1.5ers were born overseas but arrived in NZ as children. Second gen are those born in NZ to migrants, often speaking English rather than their parents' mother tongue.

*neighbourhood, from the 60s, and a new part. There was a Pacific Island wave of people. Then there's an Asian layer, from Korea mainly. We've got this diversity, but it would be nice to reach the new couples coming here and to reach into the Asian community...Some people reach in through language classes. It's a possibility, but then I've got to look at the capability of my congregation. A lot are in the older age group and the active ones work. Less than half of my congregation would be capable of doing something new. A few are in rest homes or housebound, so we try and keep in touch with them as well, as part of our pastoral ministry. We have an old pastoral model.*

And then there is the reality that first and foremost we are a bicultural nation. How is the PCANZ doing when it comes to engaging with Maori?

*The absence of Tikanga Maori in the Presbyterian Church, the lack of it, strikes you. BOOM. Even in a liberal congregation.*

*How do we integrate first and foremost with Maori? That's biculturalism. We got it all planned out at the last Assembly. But HOW? How do we train ministers to lead this integration or whatever we want to call it? Structured ways of listening to stories [is one way.] Presbyterian Northern two years ago employed a man who designed a course that's brilliant for helping you understand Maori culture...*

*Here we [the minister and spouse] experienced an awareness at quite a deep personal level of a lot of Maori pain and aspiration. It was strong and affected both of us. We looked at each other and asked, "What should we do?" We took up a course at the Maori Wananga in language and culture. I can honestly say that for us in terms of what is going down here it's been the single most important thing that we have done...It has, for both of us, opened up a quite extraordinary space. One of the things we learned is that Maori don't just listen with the ear. For Maori 90% of their listening is with the heart. I think we could learn so much from that, especially, I think, for leaders in areas where this is a real issue (most of the North Island). If we are not prepared to learn about this and enter this space and learn a bit of the language then we're not really being genuine listeners and partners in this whole process.*

So there is much we could be doing – foundations we could be laying and learning. There is a saying in this country that becoming bicultural is the important first step to becoming truly multicultural. But that will only be possible if we are willing to step outside of ourselves.

*There's a huge culture of "them" and "us". In the church, outside the church, there's a huge thing with Maori. I can smell apartheid a mile off and this area where I'm in is 50% Maori. We need to learn how to embrace people from different cultures. There's a horrible stigma in the church – not just the Presbyterian Church – of prejudice against other cultures and the less fortunate. The less fortunate, when they come into the church, have no voice. The older generation have a mean stingy spirit, a lack of hospitality, however excessively giving and excessively hospitable to those in my circle, those whom I agree with, who look like me, smell like me, talk to me. The distinction becomes obvious in the way they are mean when it comes to outsiders.*

If this minister is right, we have much work to do.

Where and how people live – literally – also impacts engagement.

*We are a gathered church. People come from all over. We're close to the CBD. So the challenge is how do we create a sense of community and family when we are so spread out?...How do*

*gathered communities connect with their local community? What and where is their local community – where they live or where they gather?*

Meanwhile a number of ministers mused on the implications of housing development for the church.

*I'm aware driving around that we have huge housing going up. I'm wondering how at a Presbytery level we can grow, nurture, learn to know how to reach into these new housing estates. 20,000 homes and you are starting to look at a new parish. The North Shore [Auckland] has phenomenal growth going on. How do ministers grapple with and address that issue with a session or board of managers that is at least 20 years behind the times?*

*Near to our church we have almost 2000 new homes developing so we need to prepare for the future. In our leadership meeting I have support but one among the leaders said very negative words: "We have land near to our church being developed but no one is coming to church." I was very shocked, and it was really not good for all of us, but it was a challenge and I thought, "How can I inspire our congregation to motivate them to engage in the wider mission?"*

*One thing I've been looking to do in my next study leave is to look at the idea of church planting. Particularly here where the growth is just staggering.*

*I often think about the fact that Auckland churches are in a context where the population is growing by, what is it, 40,000 a year? We've got to be in that game of planting new ideas as the population increases.*

Meanwhile, the topic of housing offers other realities to be grappling with also.

*One of the challenges we face is that we're in a more affluent area...Some of our areas are gated communities. There are big dogs. It's not a community where people are mixing. They're sticking in the groups of people they know. The challenge is, what is our niche? How can we shine God's love in this community when physically and emotionally it has everything that it needs and where people are culturally trained to be very independent? A gap in our knowledge and skill is how to do mission in our area. We've employed a children's worker. We want half her time to be engaged in community and she's running into just the real difficulty of what that means.*

*A huge challenge now is that Kiwi kids don't have the ability to live in this area. If I was coming to Auckland, neither would I. There's no young families that can afford to live here.*

*The Anglican Church is doing a focus on housing for the month of August. I picked up an issue of SPANZ on the topic and it was excellent, but I found out that virtually no one in my church has read it...The Anglican Bible study and discussion guide on housing is awesome so I'm going to do it. There are good patterns in Presbyterianism that we are freeing up money for mission, but very little engagement on social issues on a wider level.*

Following on from that last comment, two other ministers mused on the fact that not only engagement with public issues, but public faith expression, could do with some attention.

*In Wellington you lose your job if you talk about God in the public workplace. There is a culture of reticence speaking about God...Even trying to foster questions over coffee after the service I thought could be one faith place where people could learn to speak of God, but people wouldn't...So how do you develop a desire among your people to naturally talk about God? How do we take God out of Sunday into the rest of the week?*

*We seem to be quite reticent to have a public face to the public media. I think Otago is different. I think the Otago Daily Times prints quite regularly the perspectives of ministers and the church on different social media issues. [Note: Another minister, in a small South Island town, said they were regularly asked.] In Auckland I haven't seen an opinion piece printed by a Presbyterian minister other than myself. I'm engaged with a great trust for children. We had an opening and they didn't invite the press along. We don't want to seem proud or...there's something cultural there. We do some really cool things in the denomination and we don't really tell people about it and we don't publicly comment. People think that the Salvation Army are the people to be reading about social justice. Well, actually!*

Meanwhile one minister has been connecting successfully but noted another platform and reality that the Church needs to grapple with.

*In the past 12 months I've introduced four people to Kingdom of God. One was in the context of a Sunday morning service, the others over social media. All four I have spent time with them. Our church hasn't even begun to think about becoming digital. When you do it online, then what? How do we disciple those people? How do we become digital disciples?*

And a further thought from another minister:

*The preaching model needs to change. You don't want to lose the scriptural base, but people reflect better when you tell stories (even older people). Narrative method. Our older ministers need to look at that particularly because the preaching style we were raised on doesn't work anymore. And technology – we need to be trained how to use it.*

Engaging one's context, it seems, requires courage, an ability to look beyond oneself, generosity, humility, skills in deep listening, the breaking down of suspicion (often born in ignorance), the belief that what one has is worth sharing and the desire to share it, and the building of savvy – including technologically savvy – connections. Hospitality, welcoming the stranger, being guest as well as host, is key also. All are qualities needed in the midst of a growing and informed interaction with the issues and the realities of our local contexts.

*Good advice tends to come from knowing the context. Best to listen and hear and build trust. It's slow and difficult. I listen to those holding long local knowledge. It's somewhat dated but it's still intelligent. Often societies and towns are shaped by the history and it's important to know that. Harnessing it and tapping into it is important, and in the midst of that is listening to what the Spirit is saying.*

*If we are going to be an effective minister we need to develop what Paul was good at. He could become a Jew for the Jew, poor for the poor, rich for the rich. He had an ability to speak the language of the marketplace that people could connect with and through that he was able to speak and embody the Good News. I think a lot of us, we've lost that art because we've been conditioned by techniques that worked in the past but not anymore, if ever. If you can't add value to the life of my atheist neighbour, we're stuffed. And when you're stuck in a Christian bubble you are setting yourself up for heartache. You're training and conditioning yourself for defending your faith instead of having an openness and allowing God's spirit to have his way in this conversation.*

There is a simplicity in engagement also that we should not forget.

*We have an interfaith reflection group and about twelve of us went to visit the local Buddhist community. We were in the middle of a Buddhist Affirmation event, like a Buddhist mission*

*month. People wrote what they were going to do and put it on a green bit of paper and stuck it on a tree and the leader read out some of the things on the tree. One was "smile more often." Another was "use less plastic bags." They were all little things. There was nothing like "form a play group for the most disadvantaged people in our society." Now that would have been the Presbyterians. Big goal, want to make a difference, want to do big, big stuff. This Buddhist thing was all about the little stuff. We make mission into a big thing. It's how you affirm people in the little things too.*

One minister named their particular learning needs as:

*Listening in mission...It's difficult for me to go out and meet people...Accountability, that's what I need. A group of people who are trying the same journey, trying to overcome the same fears or whatever they are and come back and report/share what's happening. Then the next step...[When] I've had conversations, what's the next step for introducing people to the gospel? Getting alongside and sharing without shoving it down throats...Another challenge is moving from the personal salvation message to the God-is-trying-to-save-the-world message. That we might have something to offer this world and it's not just life after death after heaven.*

For another,

*We've done a lot of listening to the community and that kind of training. I get a bit ho-hum when Presbytery starts going down that track again. Gosh, if you haven't done that by now! Maybe it's about training in the next stage.*

Obviously different people and congregations are at different places in the journey. But a journey it needs to be, supported and equipped so that, for each one, the next best steps can be taken.

One disturbing story reminds us that we can be our own worst enemies. Parochialism causes blindness. Will we nurture our prophets and delight in the possibilities they see?

*There was a gap in the community here. We had all these social agencies, and no one is connected to one another. We have over 48 social agencies in one town alone that do all of Matthew 25. The church wasn't anywhere. [So I said] we can hold a big party at my house and you're all invited, free of charge. We invited the entire community to come and party with us and find out what it is that we do because we want to find out what it is **you** do. A disgruntled group [in the congregation] lodged a complaint that I was using "their" church money [for the party]. I am working in the community far too much and not looking after them, so they blocked the money. I was basically forced and had to go through the process of establishing a charitable trust to continue with this vision. This year we held it at the War Memorial and not at the church and we had over 36 social agencies come on board and 1400 people come to connect with us.*

This story also begs the question, What size is your gospel? What does it mean to be the people of God?

This same minister highly recommends learning from and with peers in one's local community. Answers to engaging context certainly do not all lie in the church. And there may be crucial friends to be found elsewhere. There is a program that enables you to set up a peer mentoring group with other local leaders.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "The Power of Peer Mentoring," The New Zealand Coaching and Mentoring Centre, <http://www.coachingmentoring.co.nz/>

*[This] peer mentoring group [is] giving a minister tools of how do I engage with my society, with service providers. How do I form collaborations and working relationships with those key people in society? It's all very well to tell someone to go and do it but can we design models that help a minister actually do that?*

What other resources might be out there that church leaders could benefit from?

Before we consider one last aspect of context, one minister made an intriguing observation worth noting.

*Using the Marxist principle, you need to notice when people start using a certain word or a certain phrase because it generally represents the fact that they have become alienated from the context. So, when you start hearing so much about "mission" it...is an expression of alienation or of not having it...*

Increasing talk of "mission" – and I heard pressure as well as some reservation alongside enthusiasm across a number of interviews – does suggest it has been a gap. And then the minister said,

*The more we use the word – and I'm talking as someone fascinated by missiology – I just wonder how helpful it is.*

There is a danger in an increasing use of the word "mission" that unless the full theological weight of it is understood, it is reduced in meaning and therefore in usefulness. Recent scholarship reminds us that it is not the church of God that has a mission but the God of mission who has a church.<sup>12</sup> So even more than explaining what, "mission" explains why.

The language we use in church and how we use it – and this is true of many words – reveals much about our understanding, our reality, and our vision. It is good to be mindful of this, open to review, and to consider expanding our vocabulary – in depth and breadth.<sup>13</sup>

Listen as another minister reflects. They were calling for caution in talk of "mission" at the expense of "worship."

*I think there's an imbalance in the church. There's been a lot of talk about mission but it's been talked about as if it's the only thing – the be all and end all...To me mission is a big Christian word but it's not the biggest. That would be worship...The shorter catechism is about bringing the whole of what we understand of ourselves and the whole of what we understand of the world to the whole of what we understand of God, so it's a dynamic, changing thing and it will come up in different ways in different places. I think in a lot of the church talk about mission it has not done the theological stuff properly. Different parts of the church define it narrowly. We've painted ourselves into a corner. Could KCML do something that brings worship and mission together?*

As a last aspect of this data around "engaging context," a number of ministers also spoke of something which is proving a significant challenge within their congregations. Gaps in and between generations are affecting internal effectiveness. Inattention to this is creating dislocations of

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<sup>12</sup> Paraphrased from Jurgen Moltmann.

<sup>13</sup> You may have noticed "mission" is not included in the name of this theme.

knowledge, divides of misunderstanding, or practical challenges that are threatening ongoing viability and healthy community.<sup>14</sup>

Before we hear from the interviewees, this was the response from a KCML faculty member having read the material that has been included under “living in community” and what follows.

There is a major generational issue to do with power and imagination. It’s reflected in several places. It’s about what people imagine the church is and should be doing for them. It’s about power and control. And it’s also about energy levels required to maintain what’s currently in place.

And now for the data.

*The PIC has been ruled by the older people because in Samoa you respect your elders. Young people think so differently. They’ve left the church to go somewhere else or stay at home. There is a lot of work to be done to find out the spiritual needs of our young people and how we can shape our ministry so it is geared toward them. My worry is that the young people will leave – well, they already are moving away...*

*I inherited a church of about 20-25 people with mostly people in the 70s+, a culture that’s not easily connectable with the younger generation and also declining energy levels.*

*Basically I’m a chaplain of an old people’s home. We’re really good at catering for the over 65s. There’s some cool stuff happens for the seniors...But the trouble is that 90+% of my pastoral work is with seniors. I actually have a whole lot of skills caring for families, young children and youth but if I suddenly said, “Oh, I’m not available pastorally to the senior people,” I’d be out of a job pretty quick...It would take a brave congregation to say we’ll look after our own pastoral needs or have an honorary assistant minister to look after our own pastoral needs and we want to release our minister to minister to children and young families and to run the youth group.*

*I feel inadequate in terms of how to connect with the young generation...We do have good discussions with our children. I try to use both English and Samoan in services. Most of it is in Samoan because of the older generation. Most of those would like it all in Samoan but I say we should tell the story in a language that all can easily understand. Shifting from one language to another is mentally tiring...I could take the easy way out and just minister to the older Samoans in the Samoan language but that will exclude the younger people and they will eventually go. The generations are so different, and their needs are so different.*

*My generation [children of the elders] had left because of the tension, because of the language. Some of our services where the youth really want to express themselves in worship, the elders of the church don’t want that. I at times need to be the buffer. In elders’ meetings those issues come up time and time again and I try to diffuse things. We need a balance.*

*When children are present with their parents they won’t say anything. When I came I wanted to hear what young people have to say, and their views. But they have been told that when their parents are there they are to be seen and not heard. So when I came, I tried to create a*

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<sup>14</sup> Aware of this challenge, Rev Hamish Galloway made this a focus of his latest study leave: Hamish Galloway, “Empowering the Next Generation: Young Adults and the Church. A Sabbatical Report,” (Hope Springs: 2015), [http://www.hopechurch.net.nz/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Hope\\_Springs\\_v4-web.pdf](http://www.hopechurch.net.nz/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Hope_Springs_v4-web.pdf) (cited 20 September 2017).

*forum where young people would participate and discuss some of the issues. When I tried to establish parish camps and gatherings I would delegate all the organisation to the “young people.” First born generation in New Zealand are not in fact young! They have teenage children of their own. [The elders] were amazed! They didn’t think the “young people” could do that. Now they are starting to let go some of their authority and let some of their children lead.*

*[Christian vocabulary is another language challenge.] Our language is not yet reformed. Even words like “transformed” or “born again,” people ask what do they mean? “Being renewed in your mind,” what does that mean? The next generation have no idea what we are talking about. It’s part of our exclusivity.*

*I’d like to refresh my knowledge on Baby Boomers – their influence, their declining influence, why we are where we are because of their leadership. [It would be good to be] continually refreshing on generational things and how that impacts church.*

Clear in these quotes is the reality of a deep and wide chasm, particularly between the generations. It is being exacerbated by the fact that older generations continue to decide for the Church, and by a lack of between-generation communication and understanding.

A final thought:

*Sometimes I get invitations from other churches to say, “We’re running this thing here. It’s a ministry for young men. Have you got any young men who are interested?” And I was thinking, why don’t they try and reach out to unchurched young men instead of getting the same ones and shuffling them around the churches? Reach out to the unchurched, because that’s the challenge for all of us. How do we reach them? If I knew the answer, my church would be full!*

## The issues

The interviews suggest that in relation to understanding and engaging context, a number of issues are at play. These include:

- do we believe the gospel is for all and the church is a sign and instrument?
- sacred/secular divide
- introversion
- inability to listen
- fear of the other/silo-ing
- bicultural, then multicultural gaps
- generational chasm

### Observations

- a need to learn from those amongst us who are engaging – chaplains, prophets, workers, neighbours
- a need for care in the use of the term “mission”

## Educational strategy

New Zealand is becoming increasingly diverse. We need every local church to be comfortable in their own skin, listening to their unique contexts. It is clear from the data that the challenge for ministry leaders is that of being able, with their communities, to read, understand, and effectively engage their contexts in ways that ground and empower us to share our story of faith in the everyday

realities of our neighbours, having first checked that we understand why the church needs to be doing this. There is another need – to be engaging the generations in our own church effectively.

Understanding and engaging with our contexts is a work that benefits from three things – good theology, access to informative resources, and practice in dispositions or postures that enhance our ability to notice and to connect effectively. Regarding theology, we need to be ensuring that why we would engage contexts is grounded in God and understanding of God’s call upon the church. Regarding resources, as one minister said, “We’ve got good resources nationally, so keep us aware of what those resources can offer us so there’s a sense of how the church can be responsive.” Additionally, several ministers spoke of wanting “take-homes” – things that can be practised and actioned, tried, experimented with, and evaluated. But for those “take-homes” to be truly useful, inspiration, energy, imagination, and accountability will be needed. Training in dispositions or postures will help build readiness and provide disciplines for the journey.

Given the great diversity of contexts evident across the interviews, information-giving will be useful and of limited use. What is needed is a way to (further) empower ministry leaders to access helpful theological conversation, as well as context-specific information and resourcing, while being offered opportunities and possibilities for them and their people to learn and practice how to engage their contexts.

KCML could

- educate the educators as they are educating – leadership development in which ministry leaders are led while leading others. As an example, in “Listening in Mission” KCML faculty (and/or invited others) work with a group of leaders who work with small groups of congregational members over a period of 4 months to listen for the Spirit of God speaking through scripture and in their communities
- facilitate thoughtful theological conversation in concepts such as “church,” “mission,” and “worship” and their interface
- collate and disseminate information about and opportunities for resourcing and training into context-specific issues. Sources would come from within and beyond the Church, including Presbyterian stories, and the expertise of those dedicated to particular issues. This would invest into **understanding contexts**
- offer training in practices (dispositions, or postures) for **engaging contexts** that invites ministry leaders into experiential education opportunities. “Listening in Mission” is one. Other training could be in discernment-for-witness (moving hearing to action-response),<sup>15</sup> theological reflection (bringing biblical themes into conversation with current local issues and exploring ways to proactively inhabit the intersection between faith and culture), and listening-to-cultures (practices for building intercultural/intergenerational communities), etc

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<sup>15</sup> Rev Heather Simpson’s study leave report outlines a prayer-based way of doing this. “Courageous in Context,” 2016.

## Theme 4: Leading effectively

This theme focuses on the challenges and joys of leading effectively in ministry contexts. What are the realities for leaders? Their struggles? Their hopes, and learning and resourcing needs?

### From the interviews

One of the greatest challenges for leaders is expectation – their own of themselves and of others, and others of them, especially in current contexts.

*We live in this hinge of history where everything is changing but we often don't have a clear mandate and we often don't have that clear authority to work towards the appropriate changes...Some of us see it more clearly and know where we want to go. Some of us haven't got a clue. Some of us want to stay where we have been. The expectations of congregations, minister, Presbytery and General Assembly etc etc are all very mixed and muddled. We don't have common expectations. Which kind of means the challenge is how do you be a person who can build trust and take people where they didn't think they wanted to go and still have the skills to do it? So there's this personality thing vs skills. Where I am now they had two ministries that were chalk and cheese and made people unhappy. All I've needed to do to make them fall in love with me is to be kind to them. Eg to let them sing the songs they like. Other places I've gone haven't had that kind of need. Their expectations have been "so-and-so was marvellous, and you are not nearly as good." One of the things they talked about in training is getting pastoral credit in the bank. Learning how to build trust before embarking on change is probably pretty important.*

And what skills are needed for the transition?

*I think genuine consultation and knowing how to bring people with you. Will ministers learn to consult and listen and take on board congregational things? And will congregations actually learn to think and pray together? One of the things I've said when changing congregations, I pray please God give me at least two people who can think. That's hugely significant because one of our huge challenges is for people who come to church to operate as adults and think. It's really easy for people to come to church, throw off their adult selves, sit in the pew as children and let it happen. If their child is kept happy with the right music, then they think the minister's probably okay. If their child is not kept happy with the right music, then there's all hell to pay because I work as an adult all week and then I come to church and expect to feel nice. There's need for instant gratification, but we really just need people to stay as adults and to be adults together. We need people to go, "Oh, I might be as responsible before God as [my minister]. Maybe it's not all on his/her shoulders as to whether I grow spiritually or not. Maybe as a Christian adult growing in Christ I might need to take responsibility." It's a generational [piece of Christian education] but you see it's a generational thing for ministers as well. If you go with the model of transactional analysis, then ministers quite like to be the bossy parent. They like it when they've got passive children and get annoyed when there's naughty children. Ministers need to know how to operate out of their adult as well and they need to not need a whole lot of 'yes' people.*

Skills identified here include consultation, discernment, discontent with the status quo, managing expectations, adult-to-adult relationships, and interpretation.

There were further reflections from other ministers. They came at this topic of expectations from a range of angles.

*People want different things. In a congregation of 100 you'll have 100 different job descriptions of what you should be doing, what your theology should be, and what success in your position looks like...When you're a minister you're constantly being compared to the church down the road or the pastor down the road and the way they do things or think things and people will vote with their feet...You've got to be true to yourself first and foremost and who God called you to be. You've got to be faithful to what you believe. You can't get up and preach what you don't believe. It's just having that sense of who I am. I'm not just going to change everything to suit a group of people. And then at the same time acknowledging that we're always growing and changing. Everyone is different. It's a strength. We're allowed to have different views.*

*People leave because their expectations are not being met, but their expectations are not realistic, so how do we as leaders work with that?*

*[From a LOM] The biggest issue is to understand the way that parishioners view you. I've always been a member of the church. When you're the minister you get treated differently. Things like the fuss that's made over you when you come for a visit. It's been a real adjustment.*

*For me in the last few years I've been trying to learn how to be a minister again in a Samoan congregation...I've had to think quite differently and it's frustrating at times. People's perspective – how they view ministry and church, mission and God. Especially too when they look at the minister as someone they expect to do everything...In this context the minister is leader, so he needs to be the driver of any project.*

*I'm sole charge in a church is that regenerating, so as a sole charge person there are significant challenges in terms of what is expected of me and the scope of the tasks is bigger than ever before. There is a lack of know-how in our congregation, a lack of capacity and expertise around management functions in this church and so it falls on you as the minister to be the administrator and musician, etc.*

*I don't think new ministers are being trained for the reality that they are going to face. There is the theory and then the reality. Like the younger minister who said, "I didn't know it was going to be like this." He was stressed because he didn't know that people were going to be disagreeing with him. You're dealing with human beings, the needy ones, the ones that don't care. You've got the ones that are militant, you've got the sweet and lovely ones, you've got people who will argue with you. It would be good to get some older ministers in to talk with the younger ones about the experiences they've had to deal with. I've had to deal with an elder embezzling a couple of hundred thousand of my parishioner's money. I've had to deal with an horrendous amount of stuff like that. It's why I've gone grey. There's a lot to it.*

*An incident made me very surprised. Apparently, this parish had discussed a lot when they called me...I went away for two weeks. Just before I went one council member stood and said, "It's time to chat about the future of this church." I hadn't been informed so I didn't know what to do. It seemed like that wanted to have an amalgamation [with another church.] I wasn't sure and didn't know what to ask. When I said, "All in favour please say 'yes,'" they all said yes! As a novice minister I should have said, "Wait until I get back." So while a minister is leading them they wanted to explore their future possibilities...For me it's all a learning curve. I didn't learn this from KCML. And I have little support. I do from my former mentor and a group of women. I meet with my supervisor once a month. But not in terms of parish life. So I'm*

*questioning my position. Am I a temporary minister? Or do they want me to continue in their journey as a worshipping centre? Initially it was a shock, but now I am continuing to reflect on what it means to me and my ministry.*

*The expectations now of how a minister as a professional behaves are very different from twenty years ago. The standards of behaviour expected are much higher now or perhaps more clearly articulated. I would never now give a woman a ride home in my car, or even a male probably. There are some things I simply would not do. The door of my study, I asked for glass to go in...I think the older you become you can get a bit too blazé. I'm just much more aware now of risk. It's about being a professional. What appals me is the behaviour, that even if a minister doesn't do anything wrong they put themselves at risk. Part of that is around sexism. Some of my retired colleagues speak appallingly. Well, Assembly brought this to me as well. There's a lot of sexism in Assembly.*

*Sometimes we underestimate the role of leadership in the church. We have a very flat structure...It changes every two years. Central Presbytery we have four pastoral moderators and an executive secretary (administrator) and two convenors who rotate. We don't actually have a clear leader. I've got an issue, who do I go to? I don't always know. Sometimes it would be really nice to know who to go to and for that leader to be a spiritual and pastoral leader, not a business leader.*

There are many expectations to be managing – individual, cultural, generational, gender, and denominational. As one minister noted, this work is deeply challenging because

*As ministers, sometimes there's kudos connected with our role but actually we are all in negotiated leadership. Our mana or standing from which to say something is reliant very much on the relationships that we've established.*

Which suggests that care for self is important for leaders so that the place from which one negotiates is God-shaped. A number reflected on the qualities needing to be cultivated, beginning with

*learning to love oneself. In my early preaching days in parish ministry the first time I came across in the lectionary "love the Lord your God" and "love your neighbour as yourself" was one of those inspired sermons. I said I think there are some people in this congregation for whom the order needs to be changed. Need to start with love of self, that leads to genuine love of neighbour and, doing that, we will be loving God. It was one of those moments that was profound, and I was left asking, "Why am I saying this?" I have learned that unless I am truly loving myself, unless I am looking after my own spiritual well-being, unless I'm looking after my own physical well-being, I am no longer going to be of any benefit to others.*

*What I have learned is that any sort of empowerment has to begin at a local level. And that local level is yourself or myself. What is self? Unless you know who you are you can't empower other people.*

*Self-care – understanding your body and how it works and your energy and your desire to do things. You have a desire to want to do some things but maybe your body is going to restrict you. It hasn't had time to replenish itself or heal. At the moment with me I've done so many pastoral visits of sick people and I haven't given it the full weight of the toll that it takes on me. I've just accepted that this is part of my ministry and I'll keep going. I'll pray and I'll hang out with them for an hour or two but I've taken it for granted that I am able to do it because I go*

*to the gym a lot. I've got the energy but I know my being sick [right now] is telling me that I need to be aware of what's out there as well. So there's spiritual battles but there's also physical battles. Self-care is important.*

*For many years I've grappled with the fact that unless you were emotionally mature you could never look like you were spiritually mature. At this stage of my life I now realise they are one and the same thing. My womanly insight would be that self-awareness is one of the major essentials for ministers. Boys are not quite so good at it because they've got more culturally to get through because they've got to give up the macho and the ego leadership stuff...But because they are the dominant group it's essential that they learn self-awareness.*

*One thing that would be helpful for me is...I think men get their worth from work. It's a stereotypical comment but I think it's possibly more accurate for men than women. Reading Nouwen it's about accepting God's faithfulness and understanding myself as God's beloved. Acceptance is ultimately faithfulness to the Christian faith rather than results-based stuff. That is easy to say but when you're in a building that seats 100 and you've got 20 people and are struggling from a lack of resources...In that place, where does one get one's value and sense of worth from?*

*I need to grow in my inner world, so that my need to be busy or liked or to be someone (or whatever is driving my busyness) I don't need it anymore...I use time management techniques but actually the more important question is "So why did you need to spend time doing that? What's going on inside?"*

*Character, integrity, resilience...How do you build resilience? How do you bounce back from the hits? How do you take who you are and accept who you are? How do you live in such a way that some of your shadows become less prominent over the years?*

*In ministry. I need many types of ability. I have to be leading the meeting, preaching, doing pastoral care. Being a minister is really not easy. Hopefully I have grown...Self-care and self-awareness is very important...We need to learn about it more.*

*You get warned all along that your personal spirituality will fall by the wayside. You'll get used to reading the Bible for other people and not for yourself. I don't ever want that to happen to me, but it has, and it does. So I would like to be more intentional about retreats and those kinds of things that affect me as a person, not just me as a minister.*

Some ministers find spiritual growth occurring in their work.

*Some say you shouldn't combine sermon writing with spiritual life. For me the process is incredibly personally nourishing and deeply impacting.*

*I'm not a great devotional scripture reader but saying that my devotions are how I'm responding to whatever lectionary readings are coming up. We're told not to do that, but I integrate...My service preparation I love and it keeps me alive.*

*A lot of it comes out of connection with the people in the parish. We're growing together in different ways. We're kind of beginning to understand church more as doing life together.*

A number of ministers spoke about collegiality, or its lack, as being influential for their life and growth. There is contrast in the stories – and a range of collegial spaces.

*The [parish] team I'm part of is very supportive and encouraging. They are very forward focused and very positive. I'm really fortunate that there is a very significant internal commitment to be encouraging to one another here. We celebrate a lot and go out and eat and drink together. I don't feel at all isolated or unsupported, so I don't seek much other support beyond that.*

*Well-being is a big deal because it affects productivity. Where do we go? It all sounds beautiful in our eldership books – they are the people who are supposed to look after us – but they are in the same boat as you are. It's almost like a vicious circle. It probably needs a revamp.*

*[Some] people tend not to attend Presbytery retreats...or the gathering...but they've had months and months of notification. What I think it comes down to is a distancing from the Presbytery and wanting to do their own thing. I put some of it down to vulnerability. When one is not secure with how they are exercising ministry or not going well in the parish, rather than seeking help they stay away from colleagues.*

*Younger ones haven't experienced regular meetings of Presbytery and the collegiality we enjoyed in earlier days. We might as well be Baptists focusing only on our own congregation. The Presbytery is this big nebulous thing, which has nothing to do with my day-to-day life other than if I want to apply for building consent or have something the Book of Order says must go to this nebulous body...When things are optional to a minister they won't gather. They're too busy and further isolate themselves.*

*I'm part of a group of recent graduates from Otago/Southland (five or six years of us) and we meet every quarter for a whole day. We're all very supportive and on the phone to each other from time to time, which is good. We put a letter together re the synod/presbytery merger and, all of a sudden, they realised we're a third of the ministers. We've all been trained through the internship model. They realised we are now a block and we talk to each other and pray about the future together because we're still going to be there in twenty years' time.*

*I lot of people can't identify with the minister and what they are grappling with, which is why I think ministers should get together to talk about it. Listening, not trying to solve another's problem but doing fellowship together. That helps mould and shape us and provide us as resources to each other as well. Having larger Presbyteries has done damage to collegiality.*

*One of my personal growth areas needs to be spiritual discipline. Time is part of it. But I know that my own spiritual disciplines are not quite matching my preaching. One of the ways is keeping on contact with other ministers. I had a fantastic accountability group when in Dunedin. Almost peer supervision. Pray together. Laugh together. Cry together. Only six of us. Here it's a little bit harder because of the distances between Presbyterian congregations but we get together once a quarter.*

*Collegial friendship with other ministers. That's something I have found really hard to nurture, actually. Maybe that is partly me. I wonder if it is theological perspective as much as anything. Goodness me, I'm probably as screwed up and as dysfunctional as the next person, but I try and reach out, make contact, engage in conversation, leave the door open, exchange. More often than not my experience has been that people don't want to walk through that door, but some do. Probably the best collegial relationship I have is with a young Baptist pastor near to us geographically.*

*Minister's association meets once a term. In the area we have Presbyterian Catholic, Anglican, Inspire, New Life. It was interesting at first, the meetings were just ghastly but gradually it's changed...We [now] have a common basis of understanding and accountability.*

*The real big support in town is the ministers' association. It's great. We meet every month for lunch together.*

There's a shadow side to leadership for every leader, and often it is shaded by a combination of factors. Some of those particularly mentioned in terms of personal struggle are below. Others can be gleaned from responses across this report.

*Bullying is a problem and abuse is a problem too. We don't see it as bullying but we've got a finance committee that is saying there aren't the resources to give to a certain idea, so then the minister goes to the parish council who say, "Well, if we don't have the money..." Other people are given a freedom and a budget to do things. The worship team is. Youth ministry is. But rarely have I as a minister got a budget.*

*One of my really big learning experiences was as moderator. There were all sorts of conflict situations, pressures, stressors, but one of the ongoing ones was that there was a parish dissolved before my time. We did the tidying up. One person was very very angry for dissolving the congregation then selling their precious church, so I had a huge learning experience in conflict. It hit the newspapers.*

*They wanted us to change and grow the children's ministry and youth ministry. Last year it was the strongest ministry that we had at the church. When I thought that everything was fine and started to concentrate on other things, one dynamic changed, which was adding a teacher that had been from the past. She came and refused to do anything that we'd put in place. It ended up that she left, the assistant left, and I lost more than half of the Sunday School. They were part of a group that was very open and wanted to move away from the traditional way of doing things...but they wanted it done their way and they didn't want to hear anything else.*

*One thing I have been asked to do is work in pastoral resolution committees. They can be extremely challenging pastoral situations. That's been the most taxing, stressful, and the most demanding of wisdom of all the things that I have done. Wider church work, rather than my local parish ministry role. [How are you helped to process that?] It was suggested I go and have a drink with friends or see a movie. How long has this been a stressful situation? Six months. When resolution finally comes I have to find my own way of recovering, which sorts out people who have spiritual and psychological resilience and those who don't. These situations could be quite damaging for some people.*

*I'm struggling with family things. I've got two boys that don't connect with this parish. First work place was great – lots of young ones. First training internship was the exact opposite – small church. Through our training we sat down and listened to some stories from ministers and their kids. There were a few disaster stories, so we were aware that there is a price as a family. We accept the cost, but wonder should it be this way? Others have said, "Oh his boys don't go to church." They're aware of it.*

*Changing parishes, which was inevitable in some ways, [was challenging]. I've had enough of this. The move coincided with my kids being teenagers, which broke up their schooling. I like my work. I finally figured out what I wanted to do when I grew up, but the hardest thing is not the work. It's what it's manifested in my most important relationships. One of the biggest*

*challenges is that you think you're going to find a parish where you will live and it never really happens. My wife has struggled as well. She feels called, but it's not easy. And then there are the expectations to live with - the praise. There's a lot of celebration that we've come and you think that's lovely but you don't know how I feel inside...One of the hardest things is being real enough. Loneliness of ministry is a real thing.*

*When I came [here] it was very much a missional mindset. I started on ¾ time. I came to a parish where I was the youngest person. I am no longer. When I looked out and the next age group was 65+ it was tough in the first year. I ended up with depression and it was pretty nasty.*

*I got close to burnout two years ago, but it was building up over time...I struggled to take time off, struggled to take study leave...I accrued by maximum study leave and 60 days of annual leave. Reflecting back on what was causing stress, a lot was people not respecting the physical plant, which I found demoralising. I would often have to clean up after others. And then staff management in terms of volunteers. People say they will do it and they don't.*

*The pressure of responsibility for growth is one of the things I have to keep my head about. That's a tangible and intangible. There is a sense of loneliness and isolation. I do feel support in the wider church but not locally. Sometimes I hear about things that are happening in bigger cities and I feel aww...*

*Sometimes I want to quit. It's like in front of you there is a sea or ocean and you are throwing a stone. It has been very difficult. And from time to time I'm asking, "Why am I here?"*

*I need a peer-group mentoring model, in a pioneering sense. (I use that word uncomfortably). It's very very lonely. Feeling not so isolated but having someone who can ask the hard questions [would be great].*

*Personally, I've found it challenging that regional NZ is more isolated. You're quite isolated from colleagues and conversations, just in terms of what's happening, wanting a theological conversation with someone. Even in terms of finding a supervisor. It's difficult to find a person distant enough from my own context. Sometimes I might need to do supervision around Presbytery work! Resources for the church in regional NZ are nowhere near what they are when I was based in urban areas.*

*There are more mental health issues among ministers. Also, people not coping with the pressure, at times, of ministry. Young people come out of lively congregations and then they might go to a rural parish with older people who sing certain hymns. How do you support them to negotiate the difference?*

*[Here there is a] very aging congregation. There is no internet so I'm not able to prepare sermons. That's why I live and work away. When I go to the parish it's mainly for community work. Some of them know each other very well and have lived there all their lives. I'm a kind of stranger...A challenge is the isolation. I'm a team person. I work best with people. I'm on my own in the office. I could go a whole day without seeing anyone if I didn't try. I don't think that's a good model. I could do a little bit with the minister in the next-door parish, but they have been a minister for a long time and are naturally more of a lone ranger.*

*Coming into this school, the chaplain has no leadership position and there's no leadership potential within the structure of this school. I got trained thinking I'd be a valued leader, if not sole then part of the team of leaders – pastoral leading definitely. It's been very hard to work*

*out the disconnect and why do I feel like everything I am doing feels peripheral?...I am viewed as a provider of services. When I was interviewed we talked a lot about being engaged with pastoral care but in fact the structures for pastoral care have not been opened to me. I'm excluded from all the conversations when pastoral care is engaged with. [And] I do no teaching. Religious Education is being done by trained teachers, though not trained in RE.*

*Negotiating the complexities of being an associate minister is challenging. Sometimes it's quite simple, you do the extra stuff...I feel like I've been floating for three years. Sometimes I love that because it gives me freedom to try new things, but then it's difficult because I don't know where I'm meant to be...Presbyteries and churches need to talk about what the roles are and have some clarity around who does what and how they do it.*

*There's been a number of times when I've thought, "Oh, I'll flag it, this is too frustrating." What I think is a real shame is that I know a handful of other ministers in their 30s no longer in parish ministry. I think what a waste. Why is it that we are allowing these leaders to get shafted by unhealthy churches and situations? Why is it that we are losing some of our best young ones? Why aren't they hanging around? The reality is that for a number of them, "I just got shat on," "I just got crucified for all the wrong reasons." Are we going to keep running this thing where we have some really capable people who don't have the patience to be dragged through the mud by toxic leadership?...Part of the call is to work with broken people, and you're broken yourself, but I see a lot of people who are really gifted who were in local ministry and no longer are...and I think, "Gee, we could really use you out here." What it's going to take to keep these people?*

It is sobering to note that nine of the speakers above are ministers who have graduated since 2008. Either they are not up for this (and I would say from my conversations with them that that is simply not the case – they are deeply committed ministers and capable people) or wider culture is in urgent need of change.

The “professional isolation” lying within this data, and which was also heard in theme two, was clearly heard by KCML faculty members. For one, the situation was “stark to the point of crisis.” Another faculty member began to wonder about how we could be resourcing into that.

We hear the issues around isolation and we hear the issues around capacity to deal with the emergency pastoral care scenarios or at-risk type care. It seems to me that one of the pieces around both those is around resourcefulness. Are we educating our people into being resourceful people? They don't have all the answers. They don't have all the expertise. They don't have the experience. They're not twenty years down the track and they're not necessarily trained in skills and they're often isolated geographically. [Can they] find the resources they need to address the dilemmas and challenges they face?

Supervision, of course, is a consistent way to ensure ministers are supported in and guided through the tough times (as well as the good). Of the fifty-five ministers interviewed, forty-three offered information or were asked directly about supervision. Of those forty-three, thirty-nine are in regular supervision (two of those being spiritual direction). One quarter of thirty-nine are with supervisors from other denominations or supervisors who are not Christian. A number have prioritised people with professional skills beyond the ministry. Two ministers are in training themselves to be spiritual directors. Four are currently between supervisors and struggling to find someone suitable.

Some ministers did say that they would, however, also appreciate collegial mentoring. A Samoan minister noted that he has never been mentored in ministry. The gift of supervisors for some is that

they come with an independent perspective, and the relationship is professional, but mentoring from someone further experienced would add “a sounding board.”

The following words from one of the interviewees provide an excellent segueway into a consideration of what kind of further investment into our leaders would be helpful.

*If we are going to treat our ministers as staff. Our trained ministers are by far the best resource that we have. Then how do we ensure they are giving of their best? If you go to an Assembly level they're not handling that. Presbytery level we can't afford it. National church can't afford it. We've got to rethink how we make the most of this expertise we have in ways that care for it.*

*I feel well supported but none of us really have enough expertise...We're just so busy. We're limited by our own knowledge. But if we could have some greater input it might lift us and take some of the burden off us. As soon as we have to plan something else it just feels tiring. But if someone were to say [for example] we're offering a seminar on this day in your area. Yes please!*

*Leadership development is a big one for experienced ministers. Training people up. Ministers who have been around for a while, if they are pulling their weight in the Presbytery tend to be very very busy people. And that doesn't necessarily help long-term. You're seeing just in front of you at times. The importance of having disciplines in place that create space to do the long-term leadership development, which you know needs to be done but you never quite get to it and that, of course, can be a bit of a spiral.*

*Accessing good training after KCML has been quite tough. Ministers get study leave, but whenever we try to go it's a real chore. You can only apply to study fund once every six years. Anything conference or university related seems so hard...The best travel fund is not going to last forever. So how do we get access to international people? St Johns, Wellington, and KCML have done good stuff but getting access to further is really hard.*

*We learned good stuff at KCML but it's a bit of a reality check when you head into the trenches...I wonder if there's a bit of a disconnection if thinkers are not connected to grassroots context? Do it and then teach it. The appeal of moving out of ministry and having input. There's a lot of people in positions who have got experience from years ago, but skilled people do put into practice what they do. There's the challenges to connect back. What does it look like? How do we do this?*

*LOMs develop in context. As LOM and as NOM a lot of learning about a parish context is done on the ground...I've often thought that if you are going to teach more and more in context there needs to be some kind of structured program...Up until recently LOMs have only just found their place in the national church structure and been accorded some opportunities, some support, some acknowledgement.*

*For ministers coming in from other denominations, probably a more intentional mentoring process by Presbytery – and maybe there are Presbyteries who do that (there were colleagues who were helpful) – but it would be helpful. It wasn't structured mentoring. There was a six-month period while waiting for ordination approval when I was answerable to the interim minister and deliberate mentoring up to then happened, but after that I was on my own.*

There is a clear request being made for input, and a desire expressed to grow in the practice of ministry through interaction with skilled practitioners.

For schools' chaplains two investments would be appreciated – into teaching registration and global connections.

*I have operated for a time on a limited authority to teach. It would be really good to figure out how to get people like myself who don't have a formal teaching qualification to get formally registered. I know that involves more than just the Church, obviously. A while ago I completed a Graduate Diploma for Teachers in Christian Education, and I did that being promised that it would lead to registration, but they didn't even look at it.*

*Maybe a little bit of support in what is happening globally in terms of Christian education, religious education. Four years I got to go to America for a schools' conference. I know the schools allow a certain amount for professional development but if the church could be doing that as well – even monetary support [– that would be great.]*

Particular areas of experience create challenge that can inform the kind of professional development that ministry leaders are looking for. They also raise questions for how we are doing church. These include the need to be supporting minority-culture leaders, developing rural leaders, and empowering teams of volunteers in times of complexity and change.

*I think especially for those minority [culture] candidates becoming ministers, teaching how to empower yourself at a local level. [Negotiating cultural difference, power, etc] That's significant. None of the lecturers or studies really did that for me but I'm learning through experience now. You need only one person who believes in you and supports you.*

*I would love to hear or see more stuff on rural ministry. Getting a team of rural ministers who are doing a reasonable job in rural ministry together who can tell their stories. Each environment is different. [For me it would be] the ability to hear about doing effective ministry particularly in the South Island. To see/hear of things in action and know what others are doing. Also, in terms of theology and wrestling with questions in a rural context.*

*Leadership is getting more complex. From my experience when a congregation gets down to a certain size the ability to think of change is very difficult. Where does the impetus in imagination come from when you have a congregation of 30 people over the age of 75? I have experienced transition across several roles over my ministry and currently am in a situation employing multiple staff. We're not a huge congregation but we employ 30 people [in community initiatives]. The whole relational issue, in terms of maintaining the culture of the place becomes far more critical than in a more operational-focused office environment where relationships are defined by legal contracts. Even though all people have contracts those pale into insignificance when it comes to developing and fostering a sense of a specific culture, so it's the more subtle questions about the culture we want to encourage and develop in this context. You become, as the minister, the person in charge, the embodiment of the cultural values of the organisation and you're at the forefront of that, so it's quite a different role that you are playing.*

*Strong leadership [is needed] with the challenges that we're facing. Patience. Transition and merging and someone who can lead that. Taking a group of people through change...I've come into an older congregation wondering what happened. "We had a great ministry into the community and lots of young people." I've come to help them decide what's the next step...I like a challenge so it kinda fits me. I'm okay with adapting but it's not easy. You get flack. Trying to weave your way through expectations. People who want to regurgitate the past, and*

*cut and paste the past into the future...Can I handle the tension and expectations and frustration, and celebrate the highlights? It's a confidence thing.*

*In church, the mind-change and shift takes longer than what many of us might like. Here the thinking is that we need to be encouraging our current members to see that they are investing in the next thing, and that would be whatever the church is going to look like. It might not necessarily look like what they've got now, [or had], so helping them think through that so they become allies in the talk...I have to keep telling myself that it's about relationships first and then give it time.*

*This is one of the challenges. You see it afresh when you are an interim moderator. An older congregation. You're expecting them to do some blue-sky thinking, but they can't. The skills that we need are change management.*

*I would really like to learn about change management...In the same way I'd like to learn more about conflict management because conflict comes with change often, too.*

*I've had colleagues coming to me [regarding] strategic planning...I've done a lot of planning in my previous life, but it hasn't really translated that well into a church. So, identifying thought leaders and resource people in those areas would be quite useful. And it needs to be hands on, but we need help with change management.*

*It would be great to have an outside person, a mentor who's been there, done that, and well known. To have someone who could help a minister take change conversations further, who has mana in the PCANZ or locally among the people. To have that accountability for a while. And the whole change management process could be useful for lay people to be looking at. How do we prepare lay people to help engage in change?*

*Often people will go to a leadership conference and say, "That's great what you are doing, but how are we supposed to do this? How are we supposed to go back home and change the thinking of our whole leadership team and find the resources, the financial and human resources to make this stuff happen?" So often all that happens is that you end up coming away with a sense of your own inability to do what some other church is doing. Going to a workshop isn't enough. People are frustrated; they've not been able to bring the change back into their own parish.*

*Three or four years ago Mark Johnston did a missional leadership course talking about technical and adaptive change. I almost felt the adaptive piece had fallen in the too-hard basket. At the time, I didn't need any more input necessarily, but ongoing support to keep that in focus when it was something that at that point was beyond me [would be good.] It's a long process and long-term accountability is needed.*

A minister who has been involved in change processes had this to say:

*When I look at the places that have worked, when rationalising resources, going into a hub mentality, maybe selling buildings, you need strong resilient leadership. You've got to be able to take the "no's" because when you are managing change you will get one heck of a lot of opposition. Driving something through while taking the "no's" and somehow bringing everyone together are skills [needed].*

While a more recent graduate minister observed:

*At KCML we did a paper on congregational leadership and missional church expressions but it takes a certain kind of personality to understand and lead that sort of change. Often what happens is you get a bunch of us trying to do this stuff and we just don't have the nous and it just crashes and burns. The National Selection process usually looks for the humble, good character, willing to learn, open-minded type of person, which is good, but you can have someone like that who still doesn't have nous for doing things differently, for how to bring people with you and how to lead change.*

One of the interviewees who has been involved in the Ministry Development Review as a reviewer reflected on the importance of vision for leadership and the church.

*The key areas for me are always going to be, 'Who are you in terms of your context?' Who are you becoming? What is your compelling vision? Are you heading towards that? What is your compelling vision that the last 2, 3, 5 years in this parish is leading you to?...In terms of your own parish's compelling vision, where are you and how far have you gone towards that end? A lot of people don't even have a vision, don't even have an idea so they're just floundering, or they don't have the resources or the people. If you don't have a compelling vision, then you're in trouble. We're in trouble as a church.*

The interviewees went on, beyond talk of their own empowerment to also talk about the need to be empowering others – their questions, convictions, and experience.

*Even though I complain about the fact that they want me [as minister] to do everything, there's something quite easy about that. It's really clear what my role is and it's easy to do it yourself. Getting people to step up, encouraging them, empowering others to lead has been hard.*

*The culture of Presbyterianism has changed with the emphasis on leadership. An example of the place of the minister in the parish, the best one I use, is a school board. The principal sits on the school board, has no greater voice. It is the board's role to set direction for the school with the input of the principal. Outside of that it's the principal's job to bring it into being. There's your governance-management split but the minister straddles both like the principal does. One of the parishes I was in I went in after a long-standing minister of 19-20 years. He said, "Jump!" and they jumped. I went in and asked, "What do you want to do? What are we going to do?" And they said, "Just tell us!" It didn't end well there for me. But we are a team working together and how do we do change in that environment? I think people do believe that the minister is the professional here. John Piper has a book, Brothers, We Are Not Professionals Here. A bit fundamentalist for me but an interesting read. Would create an interesting topic. Who am I? What is my role here?*

*Culture plays a huge part when it comes to how church is done. It has been a settler model where the authority sits at the session level and it is between the elders and the pastor and it is the latter who does most of the work and most of the communication between church and society in general. Whereas I'm very much a team player. People are identified, released and equipped to go out and do things so it's not just the session doing the bulk of the work or the pastor, it is actually the church...Historically what the pastor said, went. You jump ten feet, you jump ten feet. Or they resisted. I would say there was a broken relationship between pastor and elders. There's a lot of power given to an elder from a governance point but when it comes to being hands on and leading ministries – these people are really good, they are mature and capable – they've never been put in that role previously. I would say "Because you are on*

*session, you have to lead.” Where some of them have struggled is that I take it a step further and say, “While you are leading ministry team your role is to identify, train, equip and release people under you, [not to do it all yourself]” ...There’s no upskilling for people to lead the church beyond their [tenure]. So often I see churches stagnate or fall over because once the pastor’s left, or the few that are leading, it just falls over. It’s crazy. The ideal is that you have an elder not leading but overseeing a team leader. There are layers of leadership and it’s all about upskilling. In my observation, if you have a leader in a position of authority who is threatened in any way because someone else may be seen as more skilled in an area, they end up controlling instead of releasing that person.*

*I’ve uncovered all these different people that nobody ever knew did things in the past and they have gifts in things. They were never given an opportunity.*

*We need to recognise that people bring their own strength and spirituality, their own values to mission. I am not the most important cog in the situation. My task is to facilitate the faith of that person, to work as a facilitator rather than to be the all-important cog...My task is to support the resources people come with and facilitate those rather than replace them. Being less rather than more.*

However, empowering others involves a set of leadership skills. These include accountability, feedback, delegation and encouragement.

*One of the things needed is clear accountability, regular appraisal. In the Presbyterian Church we haven’t like this idea of hierarchy. It all depends how you run the “hierarchy,” of course. I don’t think it should be a dominating thing, but you do need clear lines of accountability. In a team environment, I think that’s really important.*

*How do we encourage and deliberately select risk-takers?*

*I’m in my late 50s. I’ve really got to look at succession planning. I need to bring on new people into leadership – younger people. I have resistance from some of the older ones. With the older ones, when it becomes about identity, I’ve got a problem. The missional thing is to pass the baton after you’ve run well.*

*We need strategic thinkers – nationally, regionally, locally. On my Parish Council I have a lot of pastoral people. It would be great if there were futuristic people. We want to get there, how are we going to do it? Which moves into visioning – a word I don’t really like. How to gather people who meet a range of giftings?*

While most ministers are grappling with empowering lay leadership, a few ministers are leading team ministry. They bring a unique set of questions and situations for resourcing.

*When I came here I was the only minister. I’m now one of four pastors. That’s a new challenge for me. “What’s the role of a team leader in a Presbyterian system?” My different pastors have different expectations. If we are going to keep some cohesion that becomes important. I see myself as a conductor. I need to be growing my skills to be effective in leading them. Pastoring the pastors. That’s a work in progress.*

*We have a large staff, \$2million turnover, and I take 4 services a week. It’s very hard to find comparable congregations or people facing the same kind of challenges. I just don’t have the resources or the time and energy to [find them.] Some feeding thing that says, “Look, we think you would find some value talking to the ministry teams in these three other similar contexts,” [would be valuable]. But I think simply bringing us together without doing some prior*

*investigation into the challenges we're facing can be a waste of time. I'd be really interested to meet with others in similar situations and talk about positive experiences and other things. A lot of the conversations we get into at the moment are so negative about loss and failure and decline. I find those conversations almost intolerable now.*

This minister also suggested that more helpful than grouping and resourcing via an identity-by-geography model would be identity-by-ministry-context for churches facing similar challenges. (There may be others who would say similarly from other settings, for example, rural South Island parishes).

Another minister continued...

*I'm in a different position than a lot of other Pressy churches because we're getting close to 300 a week now on a Sunday. Congregation has got 602 as part of our church family. But from where I'm at there's not too much of how to lead a larger congregation and how to develop other leaders and that kind of stuff. There's just nothing. No vehicle for anyone who's at the stage that we are at...It would be nice to sit down and have a coffee at some stage with someone to talk about things and have a chat about how it works. Doesn't have to be Presbyterian but having people on tap to brainstorm with would be useful.*

*Management of a multi-staff office. I never got trained in that. I've basically learned on the hoof. There's outfits like Willow Creek. They run as a Chief Executive and a board, but that's an American business model. It's not necessarily the best one. I try and run what I call a DNA model – flat management – where everyone carries the DNA. My job is to make you flower, rather than a strong authoritarian leadership style.*

*My reflection and that of a colleague was that we walked into parishes with multiple staffing and one thing we noted was a lack of preparation around hiring, firing, managing and supervising staff...I can see in the future the management of teams being an issue.*

A number of ministers wanted to speak about the significant place that management of buildings, people, finances, and compliance has in their day-to-day lives. Society in general is becoming more regulated and it is impacting on churches. As communities shrink in number, but also conversely as they grow in size, more of this responsibility is resting on the shoulders of ordained leaders. This situation does beg the question, again, for the PCANZ of what role the ordained leader?

*Dealing with finances and property is an area that our training really overlooked. Perhaps because it is thought that is what ministers don't do...It would be super helpful to have training in running a not-for-profit. Even if you get into a place and don't have to do that. Just knowing what to look for. How to know what to deal with, or to move things forward, or even what to look for?*

*I'm left with a small group and there is a gap in training – basic management skills. With the best will in the world we are often the only professional person in the congregation. We are expected to know everything but sometimes not everything is available to get information.*

*Most of my issues in the last while – apart from dealing with bullying – have been compliance stuff. If I could just do my sermon, rock up on a Sunday, go visiting. But instead I'm doing job descriptions, health and safety, all sorts of things.*

*There is such a need for us to evolve in regards to finances, employment and compliance.*

*As the years roll by compliance issues have become crazy. The parish councils don't realise that they are liable. I'm sorting out a health and safety officer tomorrow. Big parishes can have full-time secretaries, but small parish ministers generally are jack of all trades...When you go into ministry you don't expect in a million years to be doing this stuff. Once upon a time a church could have a treasurer who could count to ten. These days you almost need an accountant because you've got GST, ACC, tax, Charities Commission. The face of the church has changed in administrative perspective over the years. Where I am I've also discovered that neither of our employees have job descriptions, so we are in breach of employment law. When you haven't got skilled people to keep an eye on all this, it comes back to the minister.*

One minister had this to say.

*I'm not sure that we as a wider church are aware that we are consuming the time resources of critical leaders in what I see are the wrong things, which is increasing layers of bureaucracy and the maintenance of the machine. I'm often frustrated because I'm spending time on those sorts of things when I would rather be out sharing the gospel and bringing people into the kingdom of God and undertaking more coalface pastoral kind of things. I am finding myself caught up in things that have nothing to do with the gospel. Primarily I am a follower of Jesus and the church has conferred on me the responsibility of leading a group of people who are also followers of Jesus, but that doesn't seem to be the priority.*

Surprising in the data were the number of interviewees who mentioned building projects either currently in progress or recently experienced – 10 out of the 55, or 18%. Earthquake compliance is only part of the reason.

*The biggest challenge is that my role here became something that wasn't expected, and that was very much the guide of a big building project, ongoing. Property development for mission.*

*We've got a big church building project on the go at the moment. That always comes with a few challenges, [including finding] people with the right skills for the right jobs. Having said that, you [as minister] do get dragged into it because you're kind of the face of a lot of the stuff. You need to be in at certain times. That takes a bit of time out of your week.*

*Project management. I have a team. I've got a project manager, but it does take away from my time here, including seeking volunteers...I did go to a project management course a few years ago.*

*At the moment we're embarking on major building projects. The amount of work beyond! Sunday mornings are easy. Because of the scope of the project there's an awful lot of research we are doing as to what we can do, how we can fund it, and what resource consent is needed. We don't have anything concrete yet to offer to the congregations so people start stories and they get concerned because, oh we're going to bulldoze this or that...And we're in a small town so the [news]paper is still interested in us.*

*Our buildings were in total decay. I got involved in a lot of stuff that wasn't my job but you're Johnny-on-the-spot so you go with it. Looking at the last two years, I started to decline into a kind of burnout. I prided myself in being on top of those things. I think I've got reasonably good self-care. I'm not a workaholic. I think it was the additional tasks that were really the domain of the board of managers and property and finance but realistically neglected over a quarter of a century. The building is not a nice place to be. I'm quite visual. When I'm in an environment that is unpleasant it affects me.*

In hearing the various realities for ordained leadership, as expressed in the words above, one of the KCML faculty offered the following observation, drawn from not all, but most.

We have a model of gathering, a form of gathering as community which I think is in serious trouble as the only basic model of church. The model is based around Sunday and certain kinds of activity...What the leaders are expressing are attempts to keep that model running, which is having huge implications for them. So, 'specially in a struggling parish, the expectation is the minister perform on Sunday, keep the whole parish model and its constituent parts ticking over and running. The minister is in a performance bind and the performance bind is because they're actually being asked to function in a model which probably in its current form isn't actually working for them. It's mis-matched with where the congregation is at and where it probably needs to go.

Where it needs to go, but firstly why, will be the subject of the fifth and final theme.

### The issues

The interviews suggest that in relation to leading effectively, a number of issues are at play. These include:

- expectations
- spiritual resilience
- loneliness/isolation
- lack of a professional development strategy
- negotiating change
- finding focus – what is the main thing?

### Educational strategy

Each ministry leader has a unique set of circumstances to work in and through. This creates a certain professional isolation, but it seems a number of things are aggravating that sense of isolation for many of our ministers – geography, congregational expectations and capacity issues, and the realities of leading in complex and changing times. Further support in growing spiritual resilience and self-care was a request from some. Resourcing in collegially supportive spaces, offering opportunity to gather in diversity while also being mindful of resourcing into context commonalities like rural leadership, minority-culture leadership, and leading large churches, and doing so in ways that are flexible, emerge as needs.

And we should not forget that amongst us are many who have experience others could benefit from.

So KCML could

- develop possibilities for offering one-on-one leadership mentoring in a range of areas, and facilitate the connecting of interested parties
- offer peer-group guided short-courses/retreats – face to face or online – for ministers to grow collegiality, accountability, and inspiration and to help combat the sense of professional isolation
- resource via identity-by context rather than identity-by-geography into large churches, rural churches, ethnic/multicultural churches
- grow living libraries, tapping into a range of expertise

- have a part-time faculty position where a minister skilled in a particular area contributes coaching and/or small group mentoring and/or specialist lectures/material, drawing directly from their experience across a period of study leave. They would be funded for study leave and for some teaching (thus leave would be for a slightly longer period). This would bring up-to-date contextual expertise into the teaching mix. Perhaps the opportunity could be open to one-two ministers per year?
- work with other bodies within the church to review the role of ministers/teaching elders. What should our expectations be?
- explore possibilities for supporting lay leadership education that partner in ways that empower all

## Theme 5: Reframing/Rethinking current forms of Church

According to the 2015 annual figures for PCANZ 48% of members were 65 and over, while only 7% were under 25.<sup>16</sup>

In 2015 approximately 29% of ministers in placement were 65 years of age or older (with 73% over the age of 50).<sup>17</sup>

I have not been able to find out how many parishes support full-time ministry; in 2016 about 33% of all parishes were lay led.<sup>18</sup>

Over time Presbyteries have been responding to change by encouraging union with other denominations, and/or gathering churches together to create team ministries. In the south, Local Ministry Teams are becoming more common.

These and many other realities – and a deep awareness that things need to change – led interviewees to ponder current forms and realities of Church, share questions they are asking, and wonder about the future.<sup>19</sup>

### From the interviews

The last theme opened with a comment from an interviewee that we are in a “hinge of history.” A feature of that (as noted already) is that we end up with contrasts in people’s expectations, experiences and understandings of what it is to be church today. Tensions can shut down conversations or inspire them. In the meantime, as two interviewees noted, we are left with Andrew Norton’s question of whether we will be people who will build monuments, manage the present, or join movements.<sup>20</sup>

*I think we live in the past as a Church and so we are out of step with our culture and our society in so many ways as an institution. Most of the people in my congregation are not out of step with society. They go to work. They engage in a whole range of ways. Somehow, we get together as a community and we’ve got these inherited ways of doing things, these patterns that we are stuck in. Partly it’s a spiritual thing of being able to let go and say, “Yeah, let’s explore something new.” Partly it’s a leadership thing in that I know how to do it this way, so that’s how I do it – the minister and elders who’ve been doing this for twenty years, and so you couldn’t conceive of church without a women’s ministry that runs like this, for example. We need spaces and forums to be having conversations about who we truly are and [to ask] What does it mean to be church here? To be the people of God in this place?*

*A real passion of mine is how and why we do church, whether that’s a 10am Sunday morning worship service or other ways of exploring our community life of faith together. That’s*

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.presbyterian.org.nz/for-parishes/church-statistics/statistics-2015> Note: That statistic is for members. No doubt there will be others who would not count as members.

<sup>17</sup> Calculated from [http://presbyterian.org.nz/sites/public\\_files/cpt/2015/15-11-09\\_2015\\_Annual\\_Report\\_with\\_EY\\_sign\\_off.pdf](http://presbyterian.org.nz/sites/public_files/cpt/2015/15-11-09_2015_Annual_Report_with_EY_sign_off.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> A figure calculated from the 2016 Parish directory.

<sup>19</sup> When Church appears with a capital “C”, it is referring to the PCANZ. Small “c” is the church in general or local church communities.

<sup>20</sup> Andrew Norton, “Monuments, Management and Movements,” *Candour* 2 July 2015 <https://candour.presbyterian.org.nz/2015/07/02/monuments-management-and-movements/> (cited 25 September 2017).

*something I'm really passionate about...In the church context those people are few and far between. [Where is the] imagination about what the church could look like? Not everyone is on the same page as me. Maybe there's just not the hunger for it here...*

*Most of our people are dechurched people. With everybody we connect with on our journey all have expectations of what church should be, even if they didn't like church!...It takes time to get clarity around culture. We just have hunches or discontent and you can't build a community on discontent. We need Christ as our guide to lead the formation of authentic community...[and ask] "What does faith look like in my workplace?" and "How do I love my neighbour?"*

*[The church is] supposed to progress and change and grow but we get stuck and society leaves us behind. You can be longing for what was but you need to know what's actually going on out there. Helpful are examples of churches doing this. This is what faith community could look like. This is what some people are doing. And some practical thing about how can you set things up where you are. What would it take to establish something and how can we work together on this? [Include] local stories, but also some from overseas that are possible here. How could you structure church with its leadership, its finance, without being prescriptive? I often think people wonder how to deal with things – the sacred cows and finances, etc. People hear great stories and are told to change but have no idea of what they could do in their setting to begin.*

*The critical gap is one of innovation and encouragement to look at different models and ways of developing and the kind of encouragement and support that's needed to create a more innovative learning environment. We're so bereft of ideas and the kind of mechanisms that allow people to try something new. People are captured by their environment so much. The economic models for ministry are really problematic. There is a need for people to engage with positive experiences with other models and managing change.*

*Buildings reflect who we are at that point on the journey. There's a danger of making a big monument of who we are as a church. There's a certain appeal in building a monument. Your ego really likes it. Look what I've achieved!...We had a day retreat where we reflected on what we'd achieved in the year. I sent the elders out and asked them to come back and report on what they'd been praying. People read Philippians, Colossians, Jesus washing the disciples' feet, the woman at the well. Together there was a sense of being called to embrace vulnerability and move out of a position of strength to the side, rather than being in a client-provider relationship. And then a few months later our church burns down, and we suddenly are not the providers, which we are really good at doing, but the recipients where we are needing to accept hospitality rather than give hospitality. These are spiritual postures. They require a certain intellectual shift as well. It challenges our faith and our theology because for so long we have had this provider mentality, but we're discovering God in the midst of received hospitality. And this is part of the journey the church is going on now that we're no longer in a dominant position in society.*

*[We need to be] developing a way of thinking about church in the times that we face. Nobody knows what the future is going to look like. How do we live as the church and respond to that unknowable future?*

*There is an impulse to revert to what we know. Courageous leadership is going into the unknown.*

*It would be helpful for all of us to have some help in guiding groups of people into something where they don't know where they are going. Into the new.*

*We tend to want answers and I think that perhaps the Church – head office role – wants to provide answers, so we get into this situation where we think there is an answer and people feel pressured to provide one when there isn't one. Perhaps something we need is not more booklets on how to make a strategic plan but how to live with uncertainty. What does the fact of uncertainty mean for how we live? It's a pastoral question, a missional question, a theological question. To acknowledge that we are in a period of uncertainty doesn't mean you do nothing.*

*For us, the younger people, there's a real sense that we just need to get on and do something. Choosing to do nothing is a decision as well and we've been choosing that for too long as a Church. We might screw it up but it's looking pretty bleak from where I'm sitting now by doing nothing, so we might as well have a go.*

There were further observations.

*A lot of people think that if only we did whatever magic rescue we had in the 1960s. And others are like, How do we become the church in this day and age and more community facing? It's more around age but it's also about mindset.*

*[We need] to encourage people to understand the church as an active thing. There are people who do do active roles, like treasurer or doing the readings, but so much of it is structured around Sunday morning. It's like everything is weighted toward that. There is a real gap in understanding that church is a community you are part of for all of the week. That's it's the foundation of your life...We have this stuff that is packaged by so much institutionalism that is hard to stomach. And it's really passive, isn't it? You go to church and it's mostly just the minister up the front.*

*[Someone I spoke with] noted that church is like a play where the people up the front are going the spiritual thing and we're observing, which is exactly why the Reformation arrived. I used to call it "the game" but "play" is a better word. Yes, we are engaged but we are passive.*

*I'm interested in the creation of communities within the community and how they are linked and connected, how they are held by the Spirit rather than a convenience or social club. Social club mentality runs deep here.*

*Attractional mindset is a huge challenge. In one particular parish, the elders were praying. I was very naughty (and I probably won't do it again) but I fed back to them their prayers. "Essentially, you're asking God to bring us a fifty-seater bus. Where were your prayers about us going out into the harvest and us going out as missionaries?" They were not happy with me at all.*

*I've said it time and time again that their work in the community is missional. They mourn that people don't come in.*

*I really do think there are very few laity able to think strategically about what needs to happen. The people that are able to do that are already doing that. We do have quite a bit of resource tied up in property so perhaps we could release some of that...But the biggest challenge is engaging the ordinary church members in mission.*

*We're not really a cutting-edge kind of Church. We're more a maintenance kind of Church. We don't know ourselves...All the chaplaincies I've done...I don't know if the Church really knows that it needs to be responsive...It is spending so much of its energy and time on buildings...The buildings are meant to be tools for love, but they're just things people end up having to maintain...It's just selfish what it ends up being...We've inherited all these really awesome philosophies and welfare systems but I don't think we know how to be innovative with what we do well. I feel as if we've really lost the spark, the spark that inspired people to come across the world. Maybe it's due to people's tiredness, because there's so few people doing so much work that they don't get what they need. Because they're so busy trying to maintain buildings, and desperately trying to hold onto the few sheep that they have.*

*All the traditional churches are wrestling with not having resources. Well, they've got resources but they're in the wrong places for them to do what they want to do.*

*We have these young interns. Looking at the church they're going into, there's so many places with elderly folk sitting on quite a bit of property resource. I was in a church the other day – 30 people in a church that seats 700 with \$8million in the bank. That's just a crime in terms of the way that they are tying up resource that should be released for the next generation. The question there becomes either revival or some kind of rationalisation of resources. Hope is for revival but we need those ministers who are attuned to what God is doing and really open to the leading of the Holy Spirit. I have a real passion for the younger generation. We need to grab young leaders. But the Builder generation have a huge responsibility to be prepared to make changes to resource it. I've been really disappointed in a number in the Builder generation and some in the Boomers who are incredibly resistant to change and just want things to go back to the way they were. I'd love to get ahead of the game instead of waiting for churches to fall over, and to make changes before we have to.*

*As a wider church, we talk a lot about "missional" but I actually don't think we expect it. We don't set ourselves up for that in terms of planning and moving into new areas. I don't think we make a good job of recognising positive deviance. We don't necessarily highlight the good stories....There needs to be a change in expectation. Even dealing with church property trust deeds and stuff...people are not thinking in terms of how we grow this sucker...The system needs to be shifted around. Doing things the same way isn't going to change the way it's going.*

*Change management is a big challenge...No matter what you are trying to do it needs to be managed well. There's a lot of distrust between parish and Presbytery, Presbytery and national church. We need to repair all that stuff. That means have people who can manage change and can relate to people well during change.*

*I worked in a large church where all our growth was transfer growth. The impact on the wider body was that we had all these smaller churches just getting smaller and feeling more of a failure and wishing they were more like that church. Yet deep down they knew, hang on, this can't be all there is. We've created a church culture in New Zealand where, if you do church this way you'll grow, and it works 'cause we've proved it and heaps of others do it as well. If you do church that way, you shrink and die. And if you're in that [smaller] context you feel terrible and guilty and a failure and all this stuff. We make each other feel this way.*

*We've known for decades that the demographic change was going to come and we're in the thick of it now. That faithful post-war generation and the ones who went through the war – still often pulling their weight in many parishes around the country – are the dying generation.*

*We're building with different materials. People connect in different ways...But we're negotiated leadership in that setting so we're all on a tentative footing...Useful models for understanding ministry might be helpful. Not just one but a number.*

*For me one of the burning issues is how do you turn a church around? How do you get a church back to health and growth? People are uncomfortable with growth. "Ooooh, we don't want to be focused on numbers!" But numerically and growth in depth. It would be really interesting – and, I think, relevant – for most churches to workshop and hear stories about churches that have come back from the brink. What are the lessons we can learn from them that are transferable?*

*PressGo. The type of stuff they do needs to be far more publicised and celebrated. Three years ago there was an event in Wellington where people came and shared what they were doing around Fresh Expressions. That's extremely empowering to ministers, especially those isolated from the cities. I experienced huge ideas.*

*We're developing a website around leadership. We're hoping to put up information including how to operate a multisite church with a hub, managing transitions, [and] change management.<sup>21</sup>*

Meanwhile in rural settings there are similar engaged reflections on the move from monuments to movements.

*There's a real desire but we need to recognise that we are missing opportunity in rural settings by not resourcing them enough...I think we accept defeat too easily.*

*Coming in to a smaller, older, more rural congregation has been tough. They've seen it all, done it all, heard it all. They've checked out. It's very difficult in that space to bring significant change. [What about] harnessing the newly retired or Baby Boomers coming to retirement age, or young families? Could a vision be sold to them? The Jehovah's Witnesses – not perhaps the best example! – send about 5 or 6 families in when they start a new Kingdom Hall. They're committed. And that's a question for us. How committed are we? Would we have teachers or nurses willing to move in, as a group, as an intentional plan? It's replanting. It's collaborative.*

This has, in fact, happened in a small town further south, though the vision was somewhat broader and initiated independently.

*One young couple arrived at Easter last year and was on Council by August. [They were part of a] group of friends from Dunedin [who] scattered themselves across the churches. They're all in their early 30s. They worship in different churches but come together for Bible study. There's a real sense among younger people of being a lot more kingdom minded rather than denominationally minded. That's how we get our Light Party to work so well and the Christmas service. They said, "You guys love God, don't you? Well, why aren't you working together?"*

At the opposite end of the country a minister and their community are prioritising depth as their growth strategy. They are asking deep questions of what it means to be church. Given the first theme of this report it's an important, and brave, vision.

*In the last year, I've done a lot of studying of the ancient world of Jesus. There are so many things that we don't know and definitely that the lay people don't know. Why we do certain*

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<sup>21</sup> At the time of interviewing the website was not yet up and running.

*things. We've been exploring a lot of things but we're in a space where it's a place where they come to be fed. I invite discussion like in the old synagogues. I share my thoughts and then I open it up for discussion. That happens to work into a smaller church model. We've moved into a space of trying to do three things really well: teaching, corporate prayer, and community. We don't have the time and resources to run all these programs but we want people to come into a space where people are fed and healed and made whole in a big way. That doesn't necessarily support a performance-driven model, which a lot of people wanted. That created huge frustrations for me – stick with this and lose some people or do this and keep other people. Right now it's just the basic things.*

This story of the minister and congregation choosing to concentrate the minister's role on a few things, rather than many, creates an excellent segueway into a question this report has already raised. What role ordination?

*In Lynne Barb's final lecture, she talked about the fact that there is a whole lot of ministers now who have always been working on the cliff edge. In these times when the church is significantly changing and diminishing, for many of us that's all we've known. It's quite a different experience from those ministering even twenty years ago when numbers were bigger. At the moment it feels like there are two things we need to do. We need to continue to be the church in the way our people understand it to be because that's what they've known. But we also need to create a new way of being the church and that's really challenging to have the energy and capacity to do both. It's a huge expectation.*

Some ministers reflected on the tension embedded in this expectation.

*There's a real sense that we are trained to do the missional stuff quite well but there are no settings in which we can do it. We get called to jobs that are still stuck in a traditional sense and they're the ones that fund us. So, I have a very community-facing ministry. I'm embedded in all sorts of community groups and part of the life of the community in a big way. Some of the older people are like, "I don't even know if this stuff's going to work. I don't know why you are bothering. Just focus on Sunday." Which hasn't had the results anyway...If you're not out in the community people don't know the church exists anymore...I'm not alone in this but a lot of people find it a real hard thing to get their head around because they've been doing church for eighty years in a way that has been faithful church for them.*

*We need to revisit...what our ordination vows mean...because this gets thrown up in my face all the time. Ordained to the word (which people interpret as the pulpit) and to the sacrament (which is the altar or communion table) and then of course the pastoral (which is house visitation). It has confined us. You are employed and your vow is to the pulpit and communion table inside the four walls. The only thing you do outside is house visiting...I've been told that many times. A complaint was laid because I was told I have been violating my ordination vows because I'm out there amongst the scumbags.*

*My understanding of ministry and the ministry that we were taught is really different from how the congregation understands the church to be. Often when groups of women would pray every week they would pray for "\_\_\_\_ as she ministers among us." For me that just highlighted that actually I was viewed as the minister to serve them and look after them and give them a nice service on Sunday. This is a much older congregation. 42% were over 80 and 50% over 75. They just wanted things to be nice and vibrant without it costing them too much. It was habit and routine. A Jesus Club. It wasn't that much different to the bowling club, 'cause you know*

*people go and visit their bowling club friends when they are in hospital...As I talk with my colleagues – and we’ve talked about this a lot – they certainly agree that how we understand church is very different from how our congregations understand church.*

*There seems to be a culture within our church that ministers will solve everything and do everything. So what comes with that is that you end up spending a lot of time troubleshooting, where you go from one problem to the next and solve that and solve that and solve that. And you’re not having time to sit back and ask questions and say, “Why are we doing this? What is the best way to do that?” Having a look at the big picture, well I guess that’s a strength I bring, but I don’t often have the space and opportunity to get to use those skills because of what I’m doing day-to-day, week-to-week. I read recently a book by Jonathan Boston where he talks about a presentative bias in our governance and position making where we focus on what presents itself, rather than taking the 5, 10, 20-year view on things. And I think we have that same challenge within our Presbyteries as well.*

(Age is the presenting factor influencing some Presbytery decisions. One minister noted:

*The [Otago] Synod-Presbytery merger, we’ve got to get it right, but a lot of people have a 10-year mind frame because they’re in their 70s and 80s making these decisions, but most of us will hopefully still be around [and have to live with them].*

Who **should** be making such decisions for the future? We’ll consider this soon.)

Meanwhile a younger minister mused on the combination of reluctant elders and ministers gifted in the traditional skills of preaching and pastoring but not in leading change. The former raises questions of resourcing – Who should be receiving education, what kind, and in what way? The latter raises the question, What kind of leaders do we need to be looking for going forward? And, going further, again What is the role of the ordained minister and how can the PCANZ support that? Lying within that is the question, can a National Assessment workgroup made up of leaders chosen for earlier priorities discern leaders for a reforming church?

*Many churches are hamstrung because all the training goes into the teaching elder/minister but none goes into the rest of the elders, who are, of course, volunteers, so when young ministers come into a church they’re greeted with an eldership or wider leadership team, many of whom are going to make life difficult for them for various reasons, including that they just want to return to the good old days. They don’t want to try anything different or modern. Change is greeted with hostility. [And then] you get ministers who come out who are great pastors and great preachers, but when it comes to leading change, helping leaders think differently, providing strategic leadership and having the skills to look at a community and say, “Here are the needs, here’s how we can do things differently, here’s how we can meet the needs of our people, here’s how we can draw them in,” that’s a different kind of skill set. So, you get very well-meaning ministers coming out of training who are heading to churches that are dying anyway. At best we can keep those people happy but are we growing, are we reforming? I don’t know. I don’t think so.*

Mindful of all of this, what might ordination and the role of the minister therefore look like into the future? Reframing current forms in the area of leadership, this was a repeated consideration.

*The future of the church in fifteen years will be very different. The role of ministers will need to change significantly from what it has been. There is a decreasing pool of ministers and a decreasing pool of congregations that can support full-time ministry as well. So there needs to*

*be a shift in how we work. We need to become a resource. Not just troubleshooting issue after issue in one local context but actually becoming a resource or ministers working across different contexts as resourcing for people on the ground. Learning skills on how to do the resourcing and how to do the training and how to encourage and equip people rather than just going and doing it yourself. My training was a lot around how to do it yourself – how to put together a good worship service, how to write and deliver a good sermon, how to do good pastoral care. It was not so much about how to teach others to do pastoral care or help others develop the skills to preach.*

*We need to recover the idea of NOMs as teaching elders, not as ministers. The reality is that there's heaps of gatherings of the people of God in all sorts of places, which might go from six people in a draughty old building, to innovative groups...I think that we need to be more able to recognise ministry and then figure out the best way to ensure that it is accountable and kept up to date. We need to have an educative system that allows ministry with a small "m" to be in the hands of lots of different people.*

*We have elders who can do communion, and elders allowed to do baptisms. We probably need people who can do Christian funerals and weddings...We have to look after people and do the other work [but] it may be that we need to be thinking creatively around that.*

*[As time goes on] more and more churches will be lay led. We don't need clergy-centric churches because that has resulted in where we are. Our role, as ordained, I see is more around coaching. In the institution, you have to be "in" to affect things. It helps and it is something of a boy's club. But I'm absolutely passionate about the need for any kind of leadership model that is nurturing a community, whether ordained or not. I get ordination, but we need to be thinking differently.*

*Some of the healthiest churches are led by lay people. We've spent all this time studying theology in books and in classrooms and yet it's often non-ordained that are doing things and connecting with people better.*

*I believe in the priesthood of all believers. We talk the talk of Reformation but we look like the 13<sup>th</sup> century church if we prioritise the worship leader or preacher as mediator. There's no participation. Sit and passively observe the action of the holy men and women up the front. We need to be empowering the laity, releasing people into their particular calling with no distinctions between people according to the work they do. Theologically it is sound when we think of the body metaphor and the different giftings.*

*I have a lot of questions about ordination. Our theology says we are not "set apart." We are just given a particular role. The way we work out that role and the way I've been taught to work that out is an inherited model, which was developed in a time and a place where it was good and the right thing and fruitful. But the Reformed Church is always reforming and so the way we work out that call in the next season, I believe, needs to be different.*

One minister told a story of grappling with all of this – the tension between past and future, the role of the minister and the leadership of the elders and other laypeople.<sup>22</sup> It appeared under the last

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<sup>22</sup> I am reminded of two blogs on *Candour* by Darryl Tempero, called "Ecclesiastical Memes," regarding the names we call ourselves by. See 30 March 2017, on "clergy," <https://candour.presbyterian.org.nz/2017/03/30/ecclesiastical-memes-iv-darryl-tempero/> and 6 April, 2017, on "lay," <https://candour.presbyterian.org.nz/2017/04/06/ecclesiastical-memes-v/>.

theme – Leadership – on page 54 and described a context where the minister empowers the elders who are empowering the laity.

Such a movement in the nature of what an ordained person does will need to answer the following questions around reframing and rethinking current forms:

*We are suffering from an insidious and silent leadership crisis in the Church. But if I try and up the ante in terms of teaching and mentoring, what am I not going to do in order to make space for this? What am I not going to do at a local parish context in order to invest in parish leadership? Do I stop preaching? Do I do less pastoral work? Leadership at local level is a passion of mine but it is a matter of resource and time.*

There is a very practical piece in the midst of all this. While it may be that full-time ordained ministry roles remain available for some, for many others ministry leadership will be – if it is not already – bivocational. This will require of individuals, parishes, Presbyteries and Synods, and the national church quite different ways of being.

*In my observation, I guess to a lesser extent LOMs and certainly those in part-time ministry roles, sometimes those in church structures conveniently forget that we have responsibilities outside of our church responsibilities and we just don't have the time resource to invest that they expect of us. There's a whole range of challenges being bivocational. It's going to become normative and my observation is that in the mind of those in Presbyteries that isn't the case yet. They haven't made that adjustment in their minds when it comes to interim moderator roles, etc. I'm supposed to be 15 hours in my local church, but really I'm full-time, and I'm full-time in my job. When it comes to Presbytery asking me to do other things, like interim moderator, working groups etc etc it can work out that I'm actually working longer hours for Presbytery than I'm paid to work in my local setting.*

Some are already prepared and thinking – finding a place in movement. A few full-time ministers have done or are undergoing training in spiritual direction (though that is not a money-spinner), professional supervision or counselling. Others have careers they brought with them, alongside ministry. In the case of one, the parish sees their work as the missional piece to what they do.

*I've been with the church 10 years now. The leadership is totally onboard with [me being bivocational]...They said "we appreciate that we live in the real world, we want someone out there using all of his[/her] skills. What we want from you is your leadership ability and your teaching ability. So as long as you do those two things we release you to go and to the other stuff." I've got an awesome groups of leaders. They've got a real missional heart...I wouldn't be able to do what I do without their support.*

There is the conviction that all ministers should be trained and encouraged to think bivocationally – for their sake but also for the sake of the church.

*Part of my theological training [overseas] was that you had to do various courses in a typical Bachelor of Arts type of course. You had to do one course that was mandatory as an add on to your theological studies. So that meant you did philosophy or psychology etc in addition to your theological studies. I looked at my context and there were a lot of changes. I realised that in order for me to be very effective I'm going to have to develop some skills that will serve me well in the real world...What's the skill that is going to help me the most?... When I came to NZ I looked at the context. The global scene. Everything is changing. Church numbers are going down. Spirituality is going up. There is a real openness with truth and a real hunger for it. We*

*need to be able to engage this from a place not of fear but of sharing. And I needed to safeguard myself because my role is in a small congregation – which is the scene of where the church is at – I need skills that will help me during and potentially beyond this role. Which is when I started studying counselling...Responsible educators would be aware that the scene is changing. Tentmaker model needs to be considered moving forward. We're going to have to start thinking about what skills can we develop that have real market value in the real world but turn our ministers into missionaries while doing that.*

It is important to acknowledge that talk of the cliff, and of the future place and work of the clergy, is difficult for those who, especially recently, have been ordained. Wherever the conversations go, they will need to be inclusive and sensitive.

*Regarding what the future of the church is going to look like, some people have suggested that it's going to rely less and less upon trained, full-time clergy. Straight away for me as a minister it's like, "Well, that's cool, but what does that mean for me in my line of work? Do I need to go and get another job now?" Some people would say the future of the church is in smaller house church models, run by part-time clergy or led by lay people and, again, that's wonderful, but where does it put me?...I've often questioned whether I'll have much of a future doing this in this form. I still believe I'm called to be a pastor in some shape or form but whether it's as a paid Presbyterian minister I don't know.*

One minister had a thought to offer regarding a movement that is inclusive and sensitive.

*Do we need to rethink what it means to be Presbyterian? I think we do. And there's a "however" in there. The "however" is What role, then, does the ordained minister take? Somehow we need to build up the elders without dissing the ordained ministers. Yes, we need to rethink what it means to be Presbyterian, but in a way that builds up both/and. It's not an either/or. This requires maturity – emotional maturity as well as spiritual maturity. We need to be able to say, "our elders are gifted and we need to upskill them and realise them into ministry AND we need to do the same for our ordained ministers so that we are happily working together as a real team."*

If the nature of leadership into the future – in particular ordained leadership – is going to be questioned and discussed and reframed because the context evokes it, then, as the above quote indicates, we need to ask whether we need to rethink what it means to be Presbyterian – another kind of founding story. A number of ministers spoke to this out of a range of realities and from a number of perspectives. The overall sense was "yes."

*I'm dealing with another parish as interim moderator...It's 90kms away so it's not the easiest to just pop in and see. Basically, it is babysitting them until they perhaps can call another minister. The reality is that most of the time now there is no end in sight. Our rules and systems haven't really caught up with the reality. 50% of our parishes [in our Presbytery] are vacant and that's going to increase significantly in the next five years as 65% of ministers are 60 years plus.*

*Our model is collegial support, so what can that be looking like now?...We've got to hold onto what it is to be Presbyterian but find out how to be that in a way that's more adaptive. In a way that is fleet-footed. At the moment we're tied down with trying to follow regulations; we need to be able to more quickly address the situations we find ourselves in.*

*The Book of Order was written for an age that we're now not in.*

*We've lost quite a lot of what I would consider to be the core values of Presbyterianism. And I'm not talking dogma and doctrine. Respect for diversity. Life-long learning. The understanding that you gather to discuss in the presence of the Holy Spirit. The way decisions are made – that you listen and hear. Recently I was talking with another church minister who didn't know that you don't go to other meetings as a representative of your congregation. You go to listen. You don't go having been told what to say. I am concerned by the way some congregations but also some ministers have made Presbyterians quite narrow and quite shallow. Diminished role of the eldership is crucial, but I also think that the way the elder has been defined isn't quite right anymore. It's the reformed and reforming.*

*It's the mindshift of the older session/governance model in thinking that they are the ones who have got it right and if we want to get new people into church they've got to come into church as it is, rather than wrestling with what church might look like for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I've been in three parishes with councils rather than session + board of managers...When the church becomes small it seems to have been prudent for them to combine and create parish council, [but] I think that is unhelpful for the church moving ahead. The loudest voices have been the property or management voices, so that's all the meetings become, with no future thought.*

One minister observed

*Some of our Presbyterian heritage, which has a clear "belonging to the community," "not belonging to the community," like a members' roll (that is, you're a member or you're not a member), is actually a barrier to mission. It creates a them/us thing. Even in a liberal church like this one there is still deep down a kind of them/us and it's part of our Presbyterian roots...It's like a big club.*

Meanwhile

*"Elders-for-life" identity – the biggest mistake ever. Something needs to be done there. Identity is almost an entitlement. "You will do what I say, after all, I am an elder." And also the identity that's linked to how we did church 20, 30 years ago. We call ourselves a reforming church. That group is Reformed – this is how we've always done it.*

*We realised that we needed to bring on the next generation. We formed an executive – and governance group – and then elders could step off, but I couldn't tell them to go...I've got people who won't go. They're not really elder material. For the Presbyterian Church, this "elders-for-life" is a joke. They should get rid of it...You get young ministers and elders who've been there for years and years. Some of the elders, I reckon, think, "We'll outlast the minister." It cripples the church. The name "Presbyterian" means "elder" but they need to do something about it.*

KCML faculty members offered the following thoughts:

*We're now ordaining people for context-specific, time-specific ministries, in other words as LOMs. Why don't we have a category for LOM eldership? In other words, you're only ordained as an elder for that specific context, for that particular period of time. It seems strange that we have these old notions that don't bare any relationship to reality on the ground.*

*But I wonder to what extent the term "elder" is a barrier in itself? One of the issues is the age of elders. I've heard of people in their 30s who've been told they have to wait a few years because they are not experienced enough. Does the term "elder" act as an exclusionary kind*

of thing? Younger people perhaps wonder how could I imagine myself being an “elder”? That’s an interesting question in terms of our ecclesiology.

Another minister mused further...

*I’ve heard stories of ministers going in and pretty quickly the session decides whether they like them or not and whether they’re going to make their life uncomfortable and difficult and try to move them along. Why do we give so much power to people who we don’t have very much accountability or training for?...I think a lot of the things that aren’t working in the Presbyterian Church are because you have well-meaning incompetent people in roles where you need specialised leadership. I say that with all due respect. I appreciate people who are willing to do a job that no one else wants to do but at the same time it’s incredibly frustrating and it’s killing a lot of churches. You hear a lot of little churches; they just don’t have the skills in leadership. So you might visit their session and listen to the type of conversations they’re having. Their theo-logic for the decisions they’re making is just terrible. I’ve visited a couple of these sessions and you’re just shaking your head saying, “No wonder they’re nearly gone if this is the way people are operating and thinking and behaving.” It’s just no wonder. There’s too many people in the church who...aren’t being challenged or stretched or trained.*

*The National Church as a whole worries me sometimes about the calibre of people put in quite pivotal positions. Our Presbytery has had a tradition of putting retired ministers in as moderator and in other roles but they have been leading us back, not forward. It’s quite hard on active ministers because they are all really busy but now we’re getting really good new people coming in and a lot more energy. Our Presbytery gatherings are becoming more collegial and relational. It’s just a whole different mindset. The odd retired minister can get it but a lot of them just don’t. They go back to what they knew as the right way to do things. They see that being broken down and they are nervous and unsure about it but actually it has to change.*

So, there is a need to be reforming rules and ways of doing things, training and equipping across the church for all roles, and finding a way to work from Presbyterian values fleet-footedly.

And then, from another angle

*Elders tend to be from a core of people who are moving between churches and even denominations. They are still thinking like their denomination and have little comprehension of what makes Presbyterians Presbyterian.*

*My parish council ask questions about roles and function. Why do we meet like this? [Those struggling with identity] are a bit younger. Some come from Baptist/Pentecostal backgrounds.*

*A lot of the members of the Presbyterian Church do not have a strong Presbyterian background. Our ministers too.*

*It seems we have a whole lot of ministers with no idea of the value of Presbytery. They don’t understand basic elder-minister teamwork. The essential nature of the church is where clergy and lay get together and make the decisions and discern and pray and talk and meet. I think that’s a strength.*

*One of the hardest things is to get congregations to see they are part of something much bigger. It’s very hard to get people to be Presbytery elders, for example.*

*I often have young ministers ringing me wanting to know how to conduct congregational meetings. It's Presbyterian polity they don't always have a grasp of. They come from other backgrounds and don't understand the reasons why. They think it's just in the Book of Order so something we have to do, but there are good reasons why. It would be good to have that explained a bit more. Most people don't want to do something because they are supposed to. They want to do something because they know why.*

*[We need to] go back to the Reformation story – theology but also ecclesiology. Why do we organise the way we organise? What are the strengths of that? Why get back to it?*

*I believe the church needs a deliberate culture change...I go to General Assembly and think, "What a waste of my time." I feel the same about Presbytery. All we are doing is keeping this ship going. We need to discover how we can be set free from this commitment to an institution that is only there to help us serve God and help us be part of the mission of God.*

From KCML faculty:

We have become fixated on Presbyterianism being a certain kind of structure, an order, and we've lost the sense in which Presbyterianism is about a set of values and practices. That's something we need to hear. How do we make it really explicit that it's not about the Book of Order? The Book of Order is just the outcome and the frame. It's a particular instantiation of particular practices and values. But what's really core is the history that results in the certain kinds of practices and values, which can be used in a number of different ways. We seem to have become fixated on the fact that they look exactly like a set of rules and regulations in the Book of Order and we've lost touch between the form and, if you like, the meaning.

What is the distinctive offering of the Presbyterian Church to the church universal and how do we own and share and celebrate that? Who are we? What are we?

And how do we go back to our values and re-inhabit our values, and not just values on their own, explicitly, but values that inform practice? The practices and values have to be connected. You can make all sorts of statements about values but unless they are embodied in practices they don't mean anything. They're just words.

Interestingly, one parish is working on Presbyterian values-into-practices as a way of nurturing unity in a very culturally diverse context. Might this offer one answer?

*To gain a sense of identity together, in this diverse community I push the Presbyterian thing. We are one in Christ, certainly, but beyond that I'm pushing Presbyterianism more than I would normally. It's a unifying factor for internationals...[and] an identifying fact and within that there are certain ways of being, which starts building unity. Eldership, it's not about me. A lot of our people come from Pentecostal or Baptist expressions so the Presbyterian way is quite different. The leadership is spread. I [as minister] have virtually no power. I have influence. Some of the emphases in our worship – the central place of the word of God, sovereignty of God, it's not about us but about what God's doing in our lives (eg in Presbyterian baptism it's all about what God has done).*

Another minister reflected

*This year we've had two amazing [Presbytery] events. The first was conversionary for me. The second was incredibly heart-y. What did we do? Well, the first one...focused on the experience of women in the church...People spoke authentically of their experience. We dealt with*

*theology... We had a young person who spoke of her experience. Not many of us would have left that event having not shed a tear or two... The next one... was simply to thank four ministers who were leaving our region. The way it was done was so warm and affective... We had the Bible open. It was very well prepared. And I thought, you know this is what for me the Presbyterian church was – well prepared, heart-y, very good theology, bible open reflecting together, conversational, genuine, not pretending, not vacuous. Genuine and authentic and utterly real. We were touching the magma. So, if we can be doing that...*

There is a generational reality, which needs to be factored in when thinking about identity.

*There is so much within the Presbyterian tradition that we love, but more and more people are less and less interested in the denominational titles and allegiances, although they are thankful for those traditions and still happy to be considered part of the Presbyterian Church. They're not anti, but it means less to people. Certainly, our older folk are more likely to call themselves Presbyterian and go to a Presbyterian Church if on holiday. But my generation [in their 30s], we always grew up doing inter-church things, whether it was a camp or a combined service, so we always had a broader exposure to different expressions of the Christian faith. Young people are looking for a place to serve, a place to grow, a place to belong. If this church was to close tomorrow they wouldn't head to the nearest Presbyterian.*

And this leads us to the final topic of this theme, which concerns the place of the younger generations within the Presbyterian Church, in the church generally, and in leadership in particular.

*We have 40 younger people (under 50). We did a SWAT analysis and all this stuff came out. They have no voice. Some of them are single mothers. Some of them are on the dole. What are we going to do to make some radical, creative, innovative changes that don't excluded the elderly but also don't exclude the younger ones? How does it look when you look with their eyes?*

*One of the biggest challenges facing the church is that we need to green the church. People are really struggling to face that fully. At the end of the day we don't have a lot of middle aged people in our churches. We have even less youth and children. When our elderly pass on, the middle agers right now, I'm not sure that we realise there aren't that many of us. Who's going to be the elders on our Council? Who will be running the show? As a church we need to be putting a massive emphasis into future proofing our leadership and congregations. Jill Kayser and KidsFriendly is doing great creating that lifecycle, but for the 10-15 years into the future when the 18 year old is 30 we need to have those people connecting into our communities of faith. A lot of our programs don't engage with adults very well. When was the last time you saw adult baptisms in any of our Presbyterian churches? I would suggest it's a very limited number. We probably see more baptisms of babies and children. It would be great if we could see more confirmations. I think we could go back to our theology of baptism and say, "actually confirmations are the outworking of those promises we made as congregations." If we're not seeing those then we're not fulfilling our promises and it shows because these young people from our youth groups are not sticking around... Kevin Ward's parabola shows that there's only a certain point where an organisation can reenergize itself before it gets too low in resources and energy to stop decline. I'd say we are there at that tipping point. We haven't let our young people have enough ownership of the church and that's why they've left. We dropped the ball on youth ministry about 20 years ago. Bible Class movement was great for a while but as society started secularising we didn't prioritise youth ministry. You could count culturally on people to go to church but that vanished. Rather than engage young people as human beings*

*and take their thoughts seriously and give them chances to be involved I think we stuck with our old model of “teach them stuff and they’ll stay,” and we lost them. Youth work is changing and I think now is recovering more of that relationally. Greening the leadership in our church and allowing them to walk alongside – if they won’t let go at least let them walk alongside. But how many of our congregations would say now we’ve got 10, 12 or 14 people in their mid-30s to take on leadership? It’s a multifaceted problem and I think Presbyteries need to take a lot of leadership and actually say, “Look, we realise we’re going to have to highlight some strategic parishes and places to consciously grow this greenage.” Other places may not be able to enter into that, and that’s going to be some hard decisions because we can’t resource everyone the same way. We need to identify our key leaders and let them get into it. It’s big but you’ve got to be thinking, “in the next twenty years, what’s happening?”*

*Most of our ministers now are in the upper age group, like in their 60s. They’re looking forward to retirement so we haven’t got a crop of ministers that can connect with young people. I’m struggling myself. Where is the [Church] going?*

*We’re in such an interesting time, a changing and transitional time. I go to gatherings whether they be block courses [Otago] or presbytery gatherings a couple of times a year and I just see that wherever you are looking there is a generation of leadership who are still holding onto the reigns and there is an emerging generation of emerging generation of passionate, skilled, and increasingly experienced people – many of whom have come through PYM and so are already connected with each other – and I don’t feel like they’re given room to move. So, when I think about what is needed, I think the experience of that emerging generation is mostly underestimated already. That’s a bit harsh but...the last time we popped into General Assembly I looked at the under 45 generation and thought there’s some amazing quality people but they’re not in any roles and some are in their 40s now. They’re going to be there when the Builders generation are dead, which is in 10 years time, and the Boomers generation are retired. The Boomers are making all these decisions and the next generations – X, Y, Millenials – are going to pick up the tab and they’re going to have to work with these decisions that are being made right now. I think they need to share stories. I need to learn all the time but the learning is going to be meaningless if I don’t feel like I’m on a team and that we are empowered and enabled...Most of the people I know in our generation and under, most people know they’ve got something to learn. What they are really craving is that they are part of a team and cared for and someone has set them up to keep learning. It’s not information transfer I need. It’s feeling that I am on a team with a group of people and the leadership are looking to empower and enable the team and we can be the body of Christ for NZ. We gather as Presbyterians and we argue about details. Details do need to be taken care of but...PYM has grown over the last 10-15 years because there’s been such a relational approach to what people have done and so people are on board. They’re proactive about building relationships. We should never underestimate it because it makes a big difference.*

## The issues

The interviews suggest that in relation to reframing and rethinking current forms of Church, a number of issues are at play. These include:

- a Church ill-fitted to contours of contemporary life
- formalism vs Presbyterian values & practices
- notions of ordination/ministry
- elders-for-life
- unskilled leadership
- power/protectionism/control

Observations:

- an urgent need for intentional succession planning at all levels of the PCANZ
- need to explore implications of and resourcing for bi-vocational ministry

## Educational strategy

The data of this theme lays at challenge at everyone's door. As we look to the future, Who will we need to be? What structures and support will best empower ministry leaders and their communities? How can we intentionally engage in succession planning?

There is much here for national leadership to hear. What can KCML be doing?

Already KCML's Strategic Plan recognises the need to be experimenting in new forms of church. New Mission Seedlings focus on growing practices locally that will enable agile, contextually-relevant initiatives in the long term and create collaborative spaces for cultivating a range of leadership skills across different kinds of ministry leaders.

In the context of this research into life-long learning, KCML could, further:

- support reforming initiatives across the PCANZ by gathering historical knowledge (values) to inform new or reclaimed practices, and feeding innovation from international and local sources into conversations
- offer specific, identified opportunities for the education of lay leaders in ways that empower them **together with** ordained and via pedagogy that looks to empower others by empowering them
- explore options for interns of bivocational training and review processes toward supporting current ministers seeking professional development in fields other than theology
- strengthen links with more recent alumni and PYM in order to hear concerns, offer support, and advocate (for effective and timely succession)

## Summary of the themes and issues

Theme	Issues
Reconversion to founding stories	focus on church form vs experience of Jesus Sunday school-sized faith a lack of confidence in the gospel theology/God knowledge that is too small lack of Bible knowledge
Living together as communities of God's people	bad behaviour/toxic cultures lack of imagination lack of capacity in spiritual discernment inability to listen 21 <sup>st</sup> century pastoral issues multi-committed lifestyles a demanding infrastructure risk-averse
Understanding and engaging context	do we believe the gospel is for all, and the church is a sign and instrument? sacred/secular divide introversion inability to listen fear of the other/siloing bicultural, then multicultural gaps generational chasm
Leading effectively	expectations spiritual resilience loneliness/isolation lack of a PD strategy negotiating change finding focus – what is the main thing?
Reframing/Rethinking current forms of Church	a Church ill-fitted to contours of contemporary life formalism vs Presbyterian values & practices notions of ordination/ministry elders-for-life power/protectionism/control

## Learning strategies

A number of interviewees made comments on what they would appreciate professional development in. Some offered comments and others offered ideas about how conceptually or practically that could work.

Very few were seeking further academic study. A number have already pursued postgraduate work themselves. A literal handful, or less, will be investigating this in the future. Most, except those on the eve of retirement, were, however, interested in having affordable opportunities on offer that they could plug into as one-offs, or short-term, or in their own time, face-to-face, online or in a mixture of modes. Some mentioned one-on-one mentoring or coaching, which conceivably could be longer-term, especially for those leading adaptive change processes.<sup>23</sup>

Money is, of course, a question. What can be offered “for free” (ie funded out of a pocket other than the individual minister’s or their parish) and what could be offered for a smaller, reasonable fee? Funding for formal university level study is a challenge. As one minister put it their “money can’t stretch that far.” From KCML’s angle, money is also a question. Where should their focus lie? What is being suggested here is a focus on educating the leaders, for to invest in them will hopefully be to invest in the wider PCANZ, being as they are our frontline educators.<sup>24</sup> Of course there is nothing to say that KCML could not educate alongside such leaders, or even host events open to everyone, just that this would probably not be the main focus.

There was a call for a place that, in its resourcing and amongst other possibilities, gathers local wisdom to share - case studies, opportunity for discussion, access to local experts who understand our contexts and can mentor a leader for a period. One thought is to establish a “Living library”, a notion one KCML faculty member is familiar with. Living libraries are where books = humans, and reading = conversation. An earlier footnote (8, attached to the Educational Strategy comments of the second theme) explains more.

A few comments are included below before a learning matrix that presents three initiatives, ideas for their delivery, and possible topics is offered, mindful of all contributions (and reading a little between the lines). At this point close detail, ie specifics of design, is not in view. More work and discussion will be required to determine that.

*Dialogue. I’d love to be in a group where you could talk [about theological] things and wrestle them through. Not being told. Deep dialogue. I’m an amateur theologian. To engage with deep issues would be really helpful, with like-minded people. Not about power and someone winning but trying to wrestle these things through with others and grapple as a hermeneutical community. The danger as a minister is I could be taken the wrong way because people like to be spoon fed. They can be black and white but I want them to grow.*

*[There is] a call for a reformed and reforming church. We need to do some serious work to find the answers [to big questions]. There’s a prophetic content with it. There needs to be faith with the academic pursuit because it’s the wisdom of God. I’m creating an environment where I create questions so I’m asking my congregation to engage. But it would be great if you could*

<sup>23</sup> “Adaptive change” refers not to problems to which there are easily obtainable solutions (known as “technical problems”) but to processes that are attempting to change values, attitudes and deep-seated behaviours. For more see Ronald Heifetz, Marty Linsky, and Alexander Groshov, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* (Cambridge: Harvard Business School, 2009).

<sup>24</sup> “Leaders” in this report could, arguably, be “ordained ministers,” but as the ordained ministers themselves argued for a wider understanding of leadership, “leader” should be heard in broad definition.

*get ministers to talk about such things with their congregations with the information they have. Apply it and test it. If these questions are in churches they can be tested if people are adults and mature enough. We need to get to the point of talking without fear. Talking with like-minded people to wrestle things through (recognising that some might give flack on certain topics).*

*I'd like to hear what contemporary stuff is going down in training for ministers. There must be new material. When I was training, it feels so long ago. I would love to have some kind of input that says, "This book has been really useful, read it, get together and discuss it with other ministers," so I don't have to sit down and do that work. The books I tend to read are those that someone else recommends.*

*There's so much material. I just haven't got the time to read through piles and piles of books. Sometimes I wonder if there was access to a really good reading list with types of books...You're doing a sermon once a week and you've got to deliver the goods. It takes a lot of creative juices...You really want some theological stuff – biblical theology – that you can turn into pastoral stuff.*

A request was made that someone be looking at resources and recommending them, but also that there was forum space where those who do read widely could recommend and evaluate materials.

*In-service training options and opportunities are good...If KCML could source best practice. Nowadays there are so many courses and programs for just about anything, but it's picking out what is best. If KCML could recommend something you'd know it's been well-researched, there is thought behind it, and it comes with approval. That would be really helpful.*

*In terms of how you would structure learning opportunities in the future...it's good to have something in your everyday but it's also good to be immersed in everything, go back to work and try stuff out, and return and be immersed with those people again to see how it went. An action-reflection model.*

For recommended, broad-brush learning initiatives in response see the table on the following page.

Recommended learning initiatives
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Theology</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Specialist teaching from an expert or panel of experts from overseas, nationally, local, Presbyterian, beyond.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Depth &amp; Breadth</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Offered nationally to individuals and church communities, and to Presbyteries/Synods</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Resourcing: Connection Hub<sup>25</sup></b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Collating resources and creating resources, making them available online</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Including establishing a Living Library</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Practices</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Teaching postures and dispositions for individuals and communities, learning to live differently</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Remain mindful of contextual issues eg pastoral, intercultural, generational, innovation, change etc</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Pedagogy = educating the educators/partnering with educators</p>

As conversation continues around the data – and further data is subsequently gained from workshops with KCML faculty, Presbyteries and Synods – these recommendations will be tested. A matrix will be developed around whatever broad initiatives are agreed on. It is anticipated that best options for delivery and possible topic ideas as suggested by the data and discerned in discussion will be added.

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<sup>25</sup> One Northern Presbytery minister noted that they are already on a very effective mailing list informing about PD opportunities so do not see KCML “necessarily being that hub.” Many others, however, do not seem to have such links and were saying they would appreciate KCML offering this. It would make sense for KCML to link to the links of others who are offering services like the Northern minister is cued into, rather than reinventing the wheel.

## Appendix I: Participant information sheet

### Participant Information Sheet Continuing Education: Advanced Leadership Development

You are invited to participate in an important piece of research that Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership has committed itself to.

As Rev Dr Steve Taylor travelled around the PCANZ in his first year as principal of KCML, engaging and listening, it became clear that there is a need to keep investing in accessible, grounded and timely continuing education options for our ordained ministers. So KCML has appointed a Thornton Blair Research Fellow: Christian Education to specifically research learning needs across the country in advanced leadership development and, from what is discovered, to design lifelong opportunities, informal and formal, to help resource leaders like you into the future. We are interested in what you would like to learn, what you know or suspect you need to learn, and in what form that could best happen.

I am the Thornton Blair Research Fellow. My name is Rosemary Dewerse. I am a Kiwi daughter of the manse and we served in Mangakino, Christchurch North, Waikaka Valley (Southland) and St Pauls Trinity Pacific (Christchurch) during my growing up. I have experience in mission and theological education in a range of contexts, including a Maori wananga, a seminary in Central Asia, and colleges in NZ. I also led some innovative post-graduate offerings for the Uniting Church in Australia. I am passionate about serving our leaders well.



#### **So the research question we are asking is:**

What are the knowledge, skill and personal development needs of experienced leaders in ministry across the PCANZ today and how might education for these be best delivered?

#### **Process**

We are beginning this research by interviewing a number of individuals randomly selected from the national list of ordained ministers. You have been chosen.

You have every right to say 'no' but we would be very grateful for a 'yes.'

#### ***What would it involve?***

- Responding positively to me (Rosemary)
- Formally giving your permission by signing a copy of the consent form. (Another option is to give your consent verbally when we begin the interview).
- Setting up a 20-minute phone or skype call with me at a mutually agreed time. (With your agreement this will be recorded).

#### ***What do we want to know?***

We would like to know your responses to the following questions:

1. In the last 2 years what have been the most challenging things you have had to tackle in your leadership role?
2. Looking ahead to the next 3-5 years what do you need to grow in
  - knowledge
  - skills
  - personal development?
3. According to the PCANZ Pastoral Code of Ethics, ministers commit to regular opportunities for spiritual growth and to seek to extend and enhance their knowledge. What does this currently include for you? How has this changed in the last 5, 10, 15 years?
4. If we could provide a menu of opportunities in ministry development what would be the best ways to offer them to you? (For example, informal/formal learning, home-based/away/mixed, guided independent study/mentored/peer group engagement, sessions over several months/day seminar or workshop or short conference/retreat etc).
5. Thinking about the church in general, what do you see are the gaps in
  - knowledge
  - skills
  - personal development?

As you can see from the last question we are also interested in the potential of helping resource the wider church, ordained and lay, so while we are first interested in what you need, we are also interested in your observations of what the church in general needs. Subsequent research will further investigate and seek to design for those.

***What will happen to the data from here?***

I will transcribe your material and start tracing emerging themes, while not losing the detail. A working group of KCML faculty will read and discuss the deidentified data as it is gathered. An advisory group made up of 2 members of KCML's Advisory Board, 2 members of the Leadership Subcommittee, and 1 external researcher will also reflect on the data.

There will then be a second round of research conducted in regional focus groups to which participants will be invited. It may be that these will also be open to any interested ordained ministers. As you will appreciate about 1/3 of ministers will be interviewed and we would like to give others the opportunity to contribute also.

You will have the option to receive a summary of the findings (see the Consent Form), which will then inform educational design – courses and opportunities available to you and your colleagues for your ongoing professional development.

**Ethics**

In this project we are committed to keeping whatever you offer us anonymous. No names will be written on any material that is used or published from this research. I will be the only person who can connect your name to your data. I will deidentify it for analysis. Your data will be kept on my password-protected computer until my contract finishes in November 2018, or before.

You have the right to stop the interview and to withdraw data during it without providing an explanation.

If you have any questions please ask. I look forward to hearing from you. And whatever your answer, thank you for considering this.

Dr Rosemary Dewerse      Email: [rosemary.dewerse@knoxcentre.ac.nz](mailto:rosemary.dewerse@knoxcentre.ac.nz)      Mobile: 0204 0687665

**Note:**

“What will happen to the data from here?” has changed in scope due to timing, availability, and practicality.

Data from the interviews has been transcribed.

A working group of KCML faculty has met four times to analyse and discuss the data.

An invitation was issued from Alpine Presbytery to run a workshop on October 7, 2017 and the opportunity has been taken to present the data, and to workshop it, seeking feedback from ordained and lay members.

Page 3 details the further process.

## Appendix II: Consent form



### Consent Form

**This form will be held for a period of five years**

**Project Question:** What are the knowledge, skill and personal development needs of experienced leaders in ministry across the PCANZ today and how might education for these be best delivered?

**Name of Researcher:** Rosemary Dewerse

I have received an explanation of the research, its nature and intent. I have had opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

- I agree to take part in this research
- I agree to the session being recorded
- I understand that I have the right to pull out from or to rescind comments during the course of an interview without needing to give a reason.
- I understand that the researcher will undertake to protect my identity as best they can. No names will be used in the publishing of results though my ethnicity may be recorded.
- I understand the data will be kept until the end of the researcher's contract in November 2018 on her password protected computer.
- I understand that all transcription will be undertaken by the researcher only and material will be de-identified.
- I wish/do not wish to receive a summary of the findings.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

APPROVED BY KCML

Date: April 2017