



Called by God Elders' Training



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A SPIRITUALITY OF REMEMBRANCE: 2 TIMOTHY 1:3-14

A PRISONER AND A PASTOR

To help us consider what is being sown and watered in our lives; and the foundation we are building on – let's join the conversation between a prisoner (Paul) and a pastor (Timothy).

Paul is writing to the young pastor Timothy. In 2 Timothy 1:3-14, Paul provides wonderful insights for us to reflect on our practices and growth as leaders.

Paul's words show a key spiritual practice from the Old Testament:

“The Old Testament can be summed up in one word: remember.” (Abraham Joshua Heschel)

Throughout the Old Testament, the prophets constantly called Israel to remember the Exodus; to remember the covenant with God; to remember God's saving acts. Paul continues that spiritual practice . . .

Remember

Let's remember the significant people God has placed in our lives (2 Tim 1:3-5)

³ I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. ⁴ Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. ⁵ I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.

Remember to thank God (v 3)

Paul begins by thanking God – and this is the lens through which he sees life. “Lack of gratitude is the first step to idolatry”¹:

Rom 1:21

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.



¹ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (NICNT), (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1995), 408

- ◆ Remember to pray for others (v 3)



“It is also Paul’s habit not only to note that he thanks God *for* his friends, but also (a) that he does so *regularly* . . . and (b) that such thanksgiving is a regular part of his *praying* for them.”²

Remember those who pray for you (v 3)

Paul’s prayer habit of praying for others reminds us that we are the subject of people’s intercession.

People you are unaware of are praying for you. 😊

pray
FOR
you

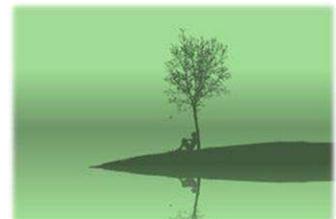
Let’s pray with gratitude (v 3)

1. Let’s begin by silently clearing our conscience
2. Let’s thank God for creating an unfolding and never–ending story of redemption
3. Let’s name people before God, for whom we are grateful for

- ◆ Remember those you miss – and your own loneliness (v 4)

Paul recalls the pain of parting with Timothy and his longing to be reunited with him. This adds the authenticity of our service and presence before God and others.

Remember those times when you were parted from those you love for a short or long time in the service of Christ. Remember too that there is joy embedded in the hoped–for reunion. Bear in mind that we can experience loneliness at home too due to leadership demands and being preoccupied by ministry.



² Fee, *Philippians*, 80. Emphasis in original.

In silence – let's hold in our hearts those whom our heart aches to see again.

Paul recalls Timothy's tears: what do you most recall about the one(s) you miss?

◆ *Remember those who modelled and passed the faith onto you (v 5)*

Along with his ancestors, Paul recalls the faith of Timothy's mother (Eunice) and grandmother (Lois). Given the date of the writing of 2 Timothy (AD 64–67); "ancestors" (definitely) and Lois (probably) pre-date Jesus. Let's remember the stories of God's people in your church, community, city, and country.



Let's honour the people God has placed in our lives

Hebrews 11 helps us with a way to do this.

It begins with two words:

- “By faith . . .”
- Then names the person
- Then gives a brief testimony of their significance

For example: (Heb 11:20-24)

²⁰ By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future.

²¹ By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.

²² By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones.

²³ By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.

²⁴ By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

Let's follow the pattern of Hebrews 11. On the sheets of paper write:

- By faith . . .
- Then write the name a person who has significantly influenced you
- Then write a brief sentence saying why or how they have influenced you

Let's remember the gifts and graces God has placed in our lives (2 Tim 1:6-7)

⁶ For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. ⁷ For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

Let's remember the gifts and graces God has placed in our lives (2 Tim 1:8-10)

⁸ So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. ⁹ He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, ¹⁰ but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

◆ Remember suffering is no surprise (v 8)

Paul's message echoes the Servant Songs in Isaiah (Isa 42:1-9; 49:1-7; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12). "Suffering" is not a result of the call: suffering *is* the call!



Know too the cost of leadership. The best ministry advice I ever received was from my Session Clerk (Phyllis Brock) at Papakura East Presbyterian Church:

"Leaders do not always get to tell their story."

My Session Clerk's wisdom is complemented with this memorable quote:

"[King David] seemed to understand something that few of even the wisest men of his day understood. Something which even in our day . . . fewer understand.

And what was that?

God did not have, but wanted very much to have, men and women who would live in pain. God wanted a broken vessel."³

◆ Remember the nature of ministry (vv 9)

The world does not need *your* ministry: the world needs Jesus's ministry.



He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. (v 9)

We are called to fulfil the purpose of God in our own generation (Acts 13:36).

³ Gene Edwards, *A Tale of Three Kings* (Tyndale: 1980, 1992), 10.

Remember the timelessness of God's grace and work (vv 9-10)

Past (before the beginning of time); present (revealed through the appearing of our Saviour); future (Jesus brought life and immortality). We live and minister in time and space within the timelessness and spaciousness of God presence and God's work.

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Let's talk: someone you know aspires to Christian leadership (lay or ordained).

Remember and reflect on your own leadership journey.

From your relationship with Jesus

– what is one thing you believe they need to nurture?

From your knowledge of Scripture

– what is one thing you believe they need to commit to?

From your experience as a leader

– what is one thing you believe they need to be aware of?

Let's remember who we are in Christ and what we are entrusted with

(2 Tim 1:11-14)

¹¹ And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. ¹² That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.

¹³ What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴ Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

- ◆ *Remember who you are in Christ; who you believe in and what he promises (vv 11-12)*

Paul uses three words to describe how he serves Christ: herald, apostle, and teacher. Paul takes the gospel very personally – when he refers to the gospel, he calls it “my” gospel (Rom 1:1-6; 16:25-27). His identity in Christ is the means by which life is understood and preserved. Elsewhere Paul writes:



As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. (Eph 4:1)

Within this – Paul knows God deeply and entrusts to him all that he holds dear (Matt 5:19-21); knowing God will guard it until the end of the age.

- ◆ *Remember the sound teaching, things you have received and upon which your ministry is built (v 13)*



We recall the fundamentals of the faith that we learnt. Our understanding of God and the Scriptures rest on these foundations.

Finish this sentence by adding *three words* to describe the ministry Jesus has called you to:

“And of this gospel I was appointed a . . .”

What do you need to entrust to God to guard until that Day?

What is one of the best things you have been taught about God?

Above all trust in the slow work of God.

We are quite naturally impatient in everything
to reach the end without delay.

We should like to skip the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on the way to something
unknown, something new.

And yet it is the law of all progress
that it is made by passing through
some stages of instability –
and that it may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you.

Your ideas mature gradually – let them grow,
let them shape themselves, without undue haste.

Don't try and force them on,
as though you could be today what time
(that is to say, grace and circumstances
acting on your own good will)
will make of you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit
gradually forming within you will be.

Give Our Lord the benefit of believing
that his hand is leading you,
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
in suspense, and incomplete.

(Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J.)⁴

⁴ Michael Harter SJ (ed), *Hearts on Fire: praying with Jesuits* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Resources, 1993), 58.

CALLED BY GOD

EXODUS 3:1-15

¹Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. ³ So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.”

⁴ When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!”

And Moses said, “Here I am.”

⁵ “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” ⁶ Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

⁷ The LORD said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. ⁸ So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. ⁹ And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰ So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

¹² And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”

¹³ Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

¹⁴ God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

¹⁵ God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.’

“This is my name forever,
the name you shall call me
from generation to generation.

EXODUS 3:1-15

The story begins in obscurity. Moses is literally and metaphorically distant from where God's mission will be played out (v 1a–b).



The story begins in mystery. Moses is literally and unwittingly on the mountain of God (v 1c).



Moses sees a bush burning yet it is not being consumed. He went aside to see this curious sight (vv 1–3). God has a way of gaining our attention.



This incident in Moses's life rests on the divine declaration that God sees, hears, and knows the suffering of the Israelites (v 7); this is the basis by which Moses is sent.



This story is peppered with revelation concerning the name of God (vv 6, 13–15). The name given is both familiar (v 6) and new (v 14).



This story foreshadows a similar yet fuller encounter thousands of years later (Luke 24:13-35). Disciples walking to an obscure place (v 13), experience their hearts burning (v 32), realise that God is present in suffering in utterly unimagined ways (v 26), and they come to a new place of revelation (vv 27 & 31) within the community (vv 33-35).

As an elder or minister; in what ways does Exodus 3 describe your call and ministry?

What does it mean for you (as an elder or minister) that the symbol for the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand (PCANZ) is the Burning Bush of Exodus 3?

The Call of Matthew/The Call of You

Luke 5:27-32

²⁷ After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. “Follow me,” Jesus said to him, ²⁸ and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.

²⁹ Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. ³⁰ But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”

³¹ Jesus answered them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”



(The Calling of Saint Matthew – Caravaggio, 1599–1600)

THE PAINTING⁵

- ◆ The painting is divided into two unequal halves; the left is a horizontal rectangle (life as it was in Caravaggio's day) and the right is a vertical rectangle (life as it was in Jesus's day). The five at the table are dressed in rich clothing of the day, while Jesus and Peter are in simple 1st century Palestinian clothing. Here, Caravaggio is illustrating that Jesus and his call span all ages, times, and generations. Jesus's outstretched hand bridges the two contexts.
- ◆ Caravaggio used an artistic technique of his day to utilise the interplay of light and dark; he used it to convey spiritual truths concerning inner darkness and inner light. On the left are five men illuminated by light that comes from somewhere other than the window; it is divine in nature and is illuminating the darkness. Matthew's face is illuminated by the light, as is Jesus's hand emphasised by the red sleeve.
- ◆ The five men represent the stages of life: from young, middle-aged, to elderly. Their attention and focus to what is taking place in the room is varied and instructive. Those on the right, including Matthew, are aware of Jesus's presence. The two men on the left are totally engrossed in the revenue generated by the taxes they have extracted from the community. They are oblivious that the Light of the World has entered the room.
- ◆ Jesus and Peter are emerging from the darkness; Jesus is in the darkest part of the room. He is almost hidden in the dark. A faint halo identifies him. His hand of invitation and call is positioned under the cross of the window. Jesus's feet are tending to face in the direction of leaving the room.
- ◆ Matthew's gaze is transfixed on Jesus; the objects, people, and gains of his trade on/at the table are now secondary. Matthew is yet to obey the call; the painting captures the moment of first hearing the call of Christ. We see him at the moment of decision amid the play of light and darkness. Indeed the moment-in-time, just before Matthew's decision, is emphasised in that his right hand is frozen over the table, still holding some of the money. His left-hand meanwhile is pointing to himself as he absorbs the invitation and challenge of Christ.
- ◆ As Jesus points, Matthew is unsure if Jesus means him or the other two younger men on his left. Matthew is pointing to himself; "Who, me?" He is astonished. The two younger men are in different states of interest and response. The one with his back to the viewer has one hand on the bench he is seated on, as if he is about to stand and follow. The angle of his sword directs our eye back towards Matthew; perhaps by way of reminder insofar that we know what Matthew decides to do.

⁵ The observations of Caravaggio's *The Calling of Saint Matthew* and the questions under the section "Reflection" are quoted and paraphrased from Juliet Benner, *Contemplative Vision: A Guide to Christian Art and Prayer* (Intervarsity Press: Downers Grove, 2011), 122–132.

REFLECTION ON JESUS'S CALL TO YOU

As you consider your ministry as an elder in Jesus's church – reflect on these questions (based on Caravaggio's painting on Matthew's call) to discern God's work, encouragement and challenge to you:

- ◆ What have you been preoccupied with when Jesus enters your “dark room”? Where has your focus been? What is on your table in front of you that engrosses you? Have you even noticed Jesus's presence?

- ◆ What is it like for you to consider the full light of God shining upon you? What is illuminated when God's light falls on your life? Is God's light welcomed or repelled?

- ◆ What is it like to hear the voice of Jesus calling you to be with him and to continue to journey with him?

- ◆ Of the five different postures at the table, which one best represents you currently? Why?

- ◆ In what way are you like Matthew as Caravaggio depicts him: “Who, me?” Why?

- ◆ Is there anything that keeps you from deciding to follow Jesus? What would you have to abandon to more fully follow Jesus?

- ◆ How aware of you of Jesus's voice and presence amid your present circumstances – calling you to be transformed? How do you respond?

AN APPEALING MINISTRY VS AN APPALLING MINISTRY

1 Peter 5:1–4

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ’s sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: ² Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; ³ not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

Peter holds up two contrasting kinds of ministries as elders; an appealing ministry and an appalling ministry:

An Appealing Ministry

Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be (v 2)

- ◆ To shepherd God’s flock because you are willing – is to say, “I’m God’s.”

not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve (v 2)

- ◆ To shepherd God’s flock because you are eager to serve – is to say, “I’m yours.”

not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock (v 3)

- ◆ To shepherd God’s flock because you are an example – is to say, “I’m Christ’s.”

Which of these ministry characteristics captures the essence of your call as an elder?

Which one(s) need to deepen?

An Appalling Ministry

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be (v 2)

- ◆ To shepherd God's flock out of a sense of obligation – is to say, “God owes me.”

not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve (v 2)

- ◆ To shepherd God's flock out of a sense of greed – is to say, “I owe it to myself.”

not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock (v 3)

- ◆ To shepherd God's flock out of a sense of control – is to say, “You owe me.”

As an elder, which one(s) of these temptations do you need to guard against?

The Inescapable Pattern of Ministry

Note the pattern of Christian discipleship and leadership: **suffering** and then **glory** (c.f. Luke 24:24–27).

*To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's **sufferings** who also will share in the glory to be revealed (v 1)*

[The ministry of an elder: shepherding, serving, being an example vv 2–3]

*And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of **glory** that will never fade away. (v 4)*

What kind of suffering have you experienced or expect to experience as an elder?

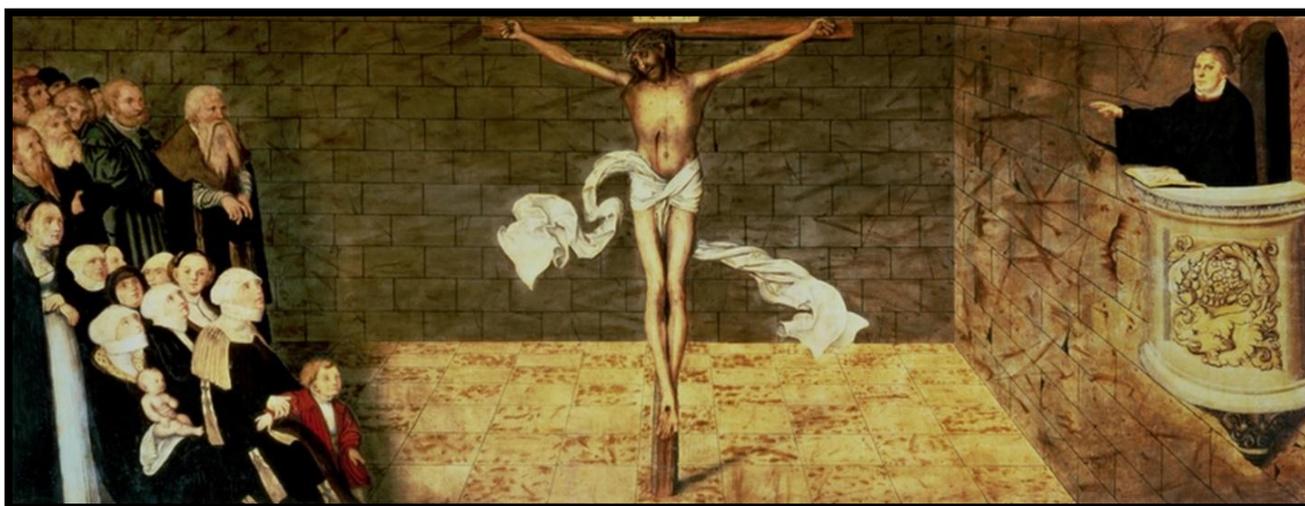
PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED

(Reformed and Reforming)⁶

Rev Dr Jordan Redding and Rev Dr Jason Goroncy

While all Christians want to trace their history back to Jesus Christ and the early church, each denominational tribe will also identify a particular genesis and key characteristics that define them. Presbyterians trace their history back to John Calvin (1509–1564) in Geneva and to John Knox (c. 1514–1572) in Scotland. But what are the defining traits of Reformed and Presbyterian theology?

Here are some “family traits” of what it means to be part of the Reformed church.



(Lucas Cranach (c 1472–1553) altarpiece in the City Church in Wittenberg. Martin Luther is preaching by bearing witness to Christ. The congregation is looking at Christ not Luther.)

1) Always begin anew at the beginning: Jesus Christ

Being Reformed is not so much about espousing certain doctrines or sharing a particular interpretation of the Bible but is rather about being occupied in a certain kind of project: the project of renewing the faith according to the Word of God. Michael Jinkins puts it this way:

⁶ This section is entirely based on work created by Rev Dr Jason Goroncy who was Dean of Studies at Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership (KCML) 2007–2014; and Rev Dr Jordan Redding who was adjunct lecturer in “Presbyterian and Reformed Christianity” at KCML 2022–2023. This section consists of extracts of Jason’s and Jordan’s work. I have taken the essence of what these two fine theologians and ministers have created.

The Reformed project concerned not so much with defining and defending such things as the uniqueness of a Reformed tradition as it is with recovering, in each generation, Christian faith as God's calling of humanity to new life in Jesus Christ.

This project reflects John Calvin's own commitment to "renew the ancient form of the church." He never wanted to start his own denomination, but to call the Church back to scripture.

Karl Barth, the greatest Reformed theologian of the twentieth century, picked up Calvin's commitment to renew the church according to the Word. In his words, in all theological study, we are "always to begin anew at the beginning." And that beginning point, for Barth, is always a living person – Jesus Christ.

For those responsibly engaged in the Reformed project, the fundamental question is not:

- ◆ What can the Reformed tradition do to ensure that it has a future?'

Or even worse:

- ◆ How can we guarantee the survival of the Presbyterian Church?

Rather, the questions with which to begin are these:

- ◆ Who is Jesus Christ?
- ◆ Where is Jesus Christ?
- ◆ What is Jesus up to?

And

- ◆ What is Jesus calling us to participate in?

The Reformed project is not a commitment first and foremost to grow the church or ensure its own survival. It is a commitment to Jesus Christ. As PCANZ continues to decline in size, there can be a temptation to focus on church survival and relevance. In an effort to make the church "relevant", there is a trend of turning to insights derived from sociology and psychology [and business] rather than theology.

2) Give glory to God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth

The Shorter Catechism famously opens with the question, what is the chief end of man? The answer: To glorify God and to enjoy him forever. Reformed theology has tended to focus on the Sovereignty of God as the Creator of all heaven and earth. Confessions, such as the Westminster Confession, stress the majesty, holiness, freedom and providence of God who sustains, rules and redeems the world in loving freedom.

At its best . . . the emphasis on God's sovereign rule over all of creation and society means that Reformed Christianity has readily acknowledged that this world matters to God and to God's people. God upholds and sustains all things. A crucial part of our human response is to be faithful stewards of God's creation. No part of it can simply be given up on.

For the Reformed, creation is "the theatre of God's glory" in which there is no secular. Everything is sacred. Everything blessed. For this reason, Presbyterian churches are not consecrated, nor do we have consecrated graveyards. We have always been nervous about separating out the holy because, in Christ, the ordinary world has become holy. His temple was the living room and the public square.

Covenantal theology

In the Reformed understanding, God creates the world and humanity in order to be in relationship with it. We are not simply to glorify God. We are also to enjoy him forever. God's determination to be in loving relationship with humankind is summed up in the word "covenant". Covenant is the reason for creation.

The doctrine of God

The emphasis on giving glory to God through Jesus Christ alone has meant that the Reformed tradition has tended to focus on the doctrine of God. To always begin again at the beginning, means to begin all our theological efforts from God's divine self-disclosure in Jesus Christ.

Sabbath Observance

Alongside a Calvinist work ethic, Presbyterians were known for their strict observance of sabbath rest. Sabbath breaking was sternly denounced, at times verging on the ridiculous.⁷

⁷ "Many farmers, for instance, needed to take their milk from the farm to the factory every day, or else risk it spoiling. One reporter for the Presbyterian *Outlook*, advised farmers to not take that risk, for Sunday milk delivery was a sin 'on a with prostitution and the opium trade.'" Quoting James B. Torrance, *A Critique of 'Federal' Theology in the light of the Gospel: Was John Calvin a 'federal' theologian?* Victoria: BBS, 1997. Pg 76.

Strict observance of the sabbath, however, had its merits. Space was enshrined in the week rhythm to “give glory to God and enjoy him”. It was also about providing space for people and the earth to rest.

3) Priority of prayer and worship and the centrality of the Word

Word, Font, and Table

In the Reformed understanding, worship is primarily a corporate act. The indispensable centre of such gathering is the Ministry of the Word i.e. the ministry of the living God, who determines to speak to us in loving freedom, revealing and making himself available to us. The Reformed generally believe that the loci of such speech is the pulpit, the font, and the table. They direct us “always anew to the beginning”: to Jesus Christ, God’s Word made flesh.

Through the sacraments, the Word “becomes” flesh among us. They are tangible symbols that point to the real presence of the risen Christ with us by the Spirit.

Discipline and discipleship

In worship, the community is formed by the living Word as it “becomes flesh” among us, taking root in our lives by the Spirit.

Calvin is often criticised for his rather dictatorial leadership style and his introduction of public “discipline”. While the criticism is certainly valid, it is important to see the underlying drive behind Calvin’s emphasis on discipline. Discipline shares the same root as the word discipleship. For Calvin, the goal of discipline was the restoration and reconciliation of individuals back into the body of Christ. As God’s Word takes root among us, Calvin believed, our lives are to be conformed to him.

Suspicion of idolatry

In the Reformed tradition, the central elements of corporate worship are prayer, proclamation, and the sacraments. Everything detracting attention from these essentials was to be removed from worship.

Everything in Reformed worship is intended to orient the community to Jesus Christ, who is the sole source of salvation. Often though, this single-minded focus has resulted in the impoverishment of Presbyterian worship. We have focused on the oral content but have understated other senses like sight, touch, smell and taste. Often liturgical renewal through the integration of art and music has been slow to catch on. The Reformed tradition has often struggled to take root in indigenous cultures because of an inherent suspicion of culture and art.

4) Authority of scripture

For the Reformed, Holy Scripture is the Supreme Standard of faith and life and the final authority.

Today, the PCANZ continues to be deeply divided on certain issues. Both sides in a debate will appeal to the authority of scripture. Until we address the issue of hermeneutics (i.e. that we all read and interpret differently), the appeal to scripture alone will continue to be a source of division and schism.

Subordinate standards are intended to help us interpret scripture faithfully. . . . But if our interpretation of scripture is restricted to the interpretation to a particular subordinate standard It raises the question of generation, which century, which culture gives us the “norm” for interpreting scripture? 16th century Geneva? 17th century Scotland? 21st century Aotearoa? 1st century Israel?

5) A confessional faith

The problem of interpreting scripture faithfully gets to the heart of a fundamental tension in the Reformed tradition. We are a confessional faith (like, for example, the Lutheran Church). That is, Reformed Churches have formulated confessions of faith to affirm and to give account of the truth of the gospel. There has never been one single Reformed confession. The tension lies in how much weight we grant to the historic confessions of faith as “subordinate standards”. For the Presbyterian tradition, the Westminster Confession and the Shorter and Larger Catechisms would fall into the category of historic, even foundational, confessional documents that have an authoritative status (as subordinate standards).

Confessions continue to hold value for our identity today. But that can also be abused, employed legalistically and dogmatically. The way to meet this abuse is not to reject confessions but to see them as living documents. This too, is a deeply Reformed instinct. Confessions are, in the words of Pierre Maury, “given by the Holy Spirit out of the pressure of a living, historical situation.”⁸ The work of confessing Jesus Christ as Lord is a task never finished. Every generation must confess anew what it means to confess Jesus Christ in their day and age.

⁸ Quoted in Alan P. F. Sell, *A Reformed, Evangelical, Catholic Theology: The Contribution of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 1875-1982* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 76-77.

For the PCANZ, the Kupu Whakapono and Commentary is particular to our context in Aotearoa New Zealand, and is one of our subordinate standards.

A pilgrim people

We are a pilgrim church; a church “on the way”; ever being reformed according to the Word of God. This formula (*ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*) can easily be misused to legitimise change for change’s sake. Nevertheless, the dictum stands for an important characteristic of Reformed churches – openness to new insights gained through living intercourse with the Bible. True reform is always the result of listening to God’s Word in the light of a changing situation; a Word which is leading us forward into God’s future, which is breaking into our present.

Calvin never wanted to found his own denomination. He wanted to reform the one Church of Jesus Christ. Our confessional tradition should always acknowledge that it is transient: like temporary markers on the way towards God’s coming day when denominations won’t exist because we are reconciled together in God.

6) A broad tradition

Both culturally and theologically, the Reformed tradition is – at its best – a broad tradition, captive to neither ethnic nor cultural boundaries, nor to either left or the right of the theological spectrum. The Reformed believe that the politicising of the body of Christ along lines which limit the love and availability of God are a scandal against the Table of the Lord.

We are undoubtedly a broad church – and it is not easy to encompass such a broad range of beliefs. . . . For some, therefore, our broad tradition is a problem and uneasy marriage. For others, it points to the profound unity we have in Christ, articulated in Galatians 3 (“There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus”). In him we are being reconciled to one another, breaking the barriers of difference that divide us. Around the Table of Christ, the ‘other’ is not our enemy but represents God’s radical invitation to open-ended life, to dialogue, to prayer, to repentance, to growth, to transformation, to love, and to relationships characterised by mutuality, creativity, openness, trust and presence. In the other there is a promise that we will encounter the living Christ, our fellow human being, awakening to our own prejudices and blind spots.

7) Ecumenical spirit

Precisely because the Reformed tradition has always understated its denominational distinctiveness and emphasised its commitment above all to scripture alone, it is a tradition with a deeply ecumenical spirit. . . . The roots of this ecumenical vision, of course, go back through Calvin whose commitment to the unity of the body of Christ was lived out within the reality of an already fragmented church. Calvin's thinking about the nature of Christian community, his willingness to mediate controversial matters such as the Lord's Supper, and his tireless efforts to build bridges at every level of ecclesial life, stand as an abiding challenge to us. Calvin challenges us to not be resigned to how things are between churches but to seek to understand the causes of continuing separation and, in accordance with scripture, to strive toward visible unity by engaging in concrete ecumenical efforts.

8) Style of polity (processes etc)

Reformed churches generally devote much attention to the structures of the church, because they believe the structures say something theological about the church, about the nature of ministry, and about the God who calls us and shapes our life. In his *Institutes*, Calvin made the attempt to propose an order of ministry that was in harmony with the directions set out in the Bible. He identified four ministries deemed necessary for the life of the church:

- ◆ Pastors to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments;
- ◆ Elders to assist the pastors and conform the community to the Word through the exercise of discipline;
- ◆ Deacons to look after administrative aspects and care for the poor; and
- ◆ Doctors or teachers, responsible for the pure teaching of the church.

Calvin developed a pattern of church polity that was recognisably presbyterian. He vested governing authority primarily in elected laypersons known as elders, which is where the word presbyterian comes from (the Greek word *presbyteriou* means 'council of elders'). Together with ministers of Word and Sacrament (sometimes called 'teaching elders' or 'pastors'), ruling elders exercise leadership, government, and discipline. They have responsibility for the life of a particular congregation as well as the church at large, including ecumenical relationships.

9) *Emphasis on education*

One of the greatest gifts of the Reformed project is its commitment to the life of the mind in the services of God. From the first, Reformed Christians have sought to advance the best thinking in the face of superficiality, superstition, bad religion, social reactivity, and anxiety. As expressions of confidence that Christian faith and the promotion of knowledge go hand-in-hand, the Reformed project established the first programs of universal education, founding universities, graduate schools, and teaching hospitals as it moved across the world.⁹

[There is] a growing suspicion of academia and theology as if it is removed, elitist and irrelevant or, worse, threatening and destructive to the Christian faith. However, it is worth asking what will become of our Christian faith if we fail to ask the tough, deep, and critical questions about life; if we abandon the curiosity that is unafraid to cast out from the shallows; if we ignore life's profound mysteries, complexities, and insoluble riddles.

10) *Church, state, society*

While Reformed churches have stressed their autonomy from the State, they have also often seen their witness extending to the whole of society. Calvin was not just concerned with reforming the church but with reforming society through education and social welfare reform. He had a vision of the church at the centre of society in order to orient society to God's life-giving Word. As we have seen, Reformed Christianity emphasised the sovereignty of God over all realms of life, not just the church. Often, Calvin intervened with the civil magistrate of Geneva to advocate for justice and the protection of the poor.

Which of these “family traits” do you feel at home with? Which do you feel distant from?

⁹ Michael Jenkins, *The Church Transforming: What's Next for the Reformed Project?* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 34.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A PRESBYTERIAN ELDER?

Overview of PCANZ¹⁰

Like other Christians, Presbyterians have a range of styles of worship. Some are more formal and liturgical; others informal and spontaneous. Different music expresses the faith of different cultures and generations.

Presbyterians have long been marked by a commitment to education, an appreciation of thoughtful preaching, and the involvement of elders in the governance of the Church at a congregational, regional and national level. The word “Presbyterian” relates to the Greek word *presbuteros*, usually translated as elders, and both ministers and elders were seen as presbyters of different kinds sharing in ministry. This means that the way we are organised and make decisions helps define the sort of Christians we are.

One dictionary definition of Presbyterianism is “a church governed by elders of equal rank.”

Each congregation is led by the minister (teaching elder) and the (ruling) elders in partnership.

At the regional level, ministers and elders come together in presbyteries, and nationally every two years in a General Assembly.

Between meetings of the Assembly, the Council of Assembly handles issues that arise and works with the Assembly Executive Secretary and key national staff. The Council is made up people from different regions and groups, such as the Pacific Island Presbytery and the Council of Asian Congregations. We have a particular partnership with Māori, through Te Aka Puahou.

Presbyterianism provides checks and balances on processes and decision making. The different levels of structure and accountability mean that general consensus is needed before radical change can be enacted.

Our structure also gives individuals the opportunity for participation and involvement in the wider Church. Those serving as elders can go on presbytery, attend a General Assembly, and be nominated to serve on the Council of Assembly.¹¹

¹⁰ “Standing Out in Your Community: What does it mean to be Presbyterian?” https://www.presbyterian.org.nz/sites/default/files/for_parishes/standing_out_What_it_means_to_be_presbyterian.pdf accessed 14th August 2023. This section is a direct quote.

¹¹ “Standing Out in Your Community: What does it mean to be Presbyterian?”, 8.

Presbyterian Ministers and Elders: Biblical Basis¹²

It should also be noted that church polity is necessary for the church's ongoing life. Often our rules and regulations, our systems and structures, are treated with suspicion and frustration – red tape preventing the free movement of the Spirit! However, not even the New Testament was spared from the need for institutional structure. The first apostles expected that Jesus would return soon. When he didn't, and the first generation of apostles began to pass away, the early church needed to work out how it was going to organise and maintain its life indefinitely. The new churches planted by Paul and the other apostles soon needed structures to enable stability, support, and growth.

This growing need for institutional form is a key issue in the pastoral epistles and in the book of Acts. We see a shift in language from spirit-led vocations – apostles, teachers, preachers, servers etc. – to institutional offices: elders, deacons, bishops. The introduction of new institutional offices does not supersede the ministry of the Spirit, but rather is intended to create an organisational framework by which the ministry of Spirit can thrive. This is consistent with Paul's own belief that "God is not a God of disorder but of peace" and therefore "everything should be done decently and in order."¹³ The ministry of the Spirit is for the building up of the community and therefore giftings are to be exercised in an orderly way that enables the participation and building-up of the whole body.

The high priesthood of Christ and the priesthood of all believers

The early Reformers were concerned about emphasising the immediate revelation to all believers through the scriptures and by the illuminating power of the Spirit. . . . For this reason, they emphasised the priesthood of all believers through the waters of baptism, by which the Church participates in the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

In other words, the Reformers dismantled the hierarchy and the elevation and separation of the priesthood above the laity. Jesus Christ is the high priest, who ministers directly to the church by Word and Spirit.

¹² Rev Dr Jordan Redding, "Introduction to Reformed and Presbyterian Identity", KCML lecture notes, 2022–2023. This section is all Jordan's work.

¹³ 1 Cor 14:33, 40.

A functional view ministry

Consequently, the ordained clergy were not called priests, denoting a separate priestly class set apart from the laity. Presbyterian polity has always held a functional view of ministry. That is to say, clergy are ordained to fulfil particular functions that the Church has deemed central to its life. God speaks directly to the whole people of God through the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. Therefore, ordained clergy are set aside to do these tasks as part of the laity, in the midst of the people, fulfilling roles in a representational way on behalf of the whole body. They are not more special or more holy. There is only one priestly calling and that is the calling of the whole people of God through baptism into the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. . . . To reflect the belief that clergy are not above the laity but part of it, Presbyterians have always stressed the joint governance by elders and ministers: lay and ordained together.

Elders and Ministers

The early Reformers noted that in the New Testament “elders” or “presbyters” were appointed to govern and provide spiritual oversight for the early churches. They pointed to verses like 1 Timothy 5:17 to suggest that some elders have been set aside to “labour in preaching and teaching”. On this basis, Presbyterians have distinguished between lay “ruling elders” and ordained “teaching elders”. There is some debate as to whether this distinction is the most accurate reading of scripture.

Regardless, the point Presbyterians want to make is that the teaching and ruling elders together govern the church and fulfil the ministry of the Word. Calvin emphasised not only that the Word should be preached but also that it should take it in the community. In this way the “ruling elders” are part of the ministry of the Word.

The minister preaches and administers the sacraments, while the elders are responsible for the discipleship and spiritual nourishment of the people in conformity to the Word.

Bishops

While some churches interpret the office of “bishop” as a separate office in the church with responsibility for regional oversight over the “presbyters”, Presbyterians saw the term “elder” and “bishop” as more or less the same. The word “bishop”, *episcopos*, referred specifically to the oversight function of the eldership.

For this reason, Presbyterian polity does not include bishops. Instead, the oversight role is fulfilled collectively by the gathering of elders. In that sense we do have bishops: corporate bishops, or Presbyteries.

The highest “bishop” is the national gathering of elders, known as the General Assembly.

It should be noted that Presbyterian polity is not entirely democratic or flat. While congregational members do have a vote over certain key matters, Presbyterian churches are not ruled by “the people” but by elders. We do have a hierarchy, not of individuals, but of courts: church councils, presbyteries, and general assemblies.

These courts have an oversight function by providing mutual support and holding one another accountable.

Deacons

Alongside, elders and ministers, Presbyterians also ordain deacons. Deacons are identified in the church as people set aside for a ministry of service and care to the poor. Because the elders couldn’t do everything, they ordained deacons to this work so that they could focus on spiritual leadership.

Today, most presbyterian churches in New Zealand don’t have deacons. There are some, though, who continue to have Deacons’ Courts. Deacons within the presbyterian system, very quickly took on a role managing the finance and property of a congregation.

The ministry of deacon also has to do with the ministry of the Word. In Presbyterian worship, the ministry of the Word leads to the ministry of response to the Word. Both the ministry of the Word and the ministry of response to the Word come together around the Lord’s table. Traditionally at the Communion meal, the gifts of God in bread and wine are joined with the gifts of the people (our offerings of food and money) as the people are drawn to participate in the abundant love and generosity of the triune God.

Strengths and weaknesses of Presbyterian polity

One of Presbyterianism's greatest strengths is the emphasis on collective discernment and oversight by the Presbyters of the church. The conciliar structure provides good support and accountability, while no one person holds too much power or influence. This emphasis on communal discernment says something important about who God is and who we are:

1. It seeks to reflect that, in Christ, God has come among as a fellow human being. The living Christ comes to us through one another. Communal discernment, at its best, embodies the relational and incarnational presence of the triune God. To be Christian is to belong to community. Presbyterians take this seriously through supporting one another and holding one another accountable to God's Word – at a local, regional, and national level.

2. Presbyterianism is a safeguard against human sin. We all have our blind spots and weaknesses. The Presbyterian system has developed to ensure that no one person has too much power. Our tradition upholds the collective wisdom of generations of Christians, seeking to be faithful to God in their time and place.

Practices are tried and tested and, in many ways, protected against the whims of an individual or a passing trend. It is by no means an infallible system. As we've seen, Presbyterian history has frequently demonstrated significant blind spots.

These are two of its greatest strengths.

Perhaps the greatest weakness is that Presbyterianism is, by its very nature, conservative. Often prospective change gets weighed down in endless committee meetings, votes, policies and procedures. Our extra safeguards mean we lack the flexibility of a congregational or an episcopal system. Within a time of rapid change and institutional decline – like now – our polity can be frustratingly slow to navigate and move.

A person who is totally unfamiliar with the Presbyterian church begins to worship at your church. They learn that you are an elder. They say, "I come from a church which had a pastor who was in-charge and made all the decisions alone. What's an 'elder' and why do you think it's Biblical?"

MINISTERS AND ELDERS IN THE PCANZ

In Chapter Six (Ministers and Elders) and Chapter Seven (Church Council) of the Book of Order (BOO), there are a number of sections which helpfully describe and summarise the ministry of ministers and elders; and the gathering of church councils, Sessions, Board of Managers etc.

Please note: the following are extracts from the Book of Order. It is important to read the whole context. I have only included extracts to highlight key aspects; not to inadvertently take things out of context. Please refer to the full chapters.

Minister	Elder
<p>6.1 Background</p> <p>(3) In the Presbyterian tradition the minister is responsible for preaching and teaching the Word and administering the sacraments. In this tradition, the minister¹⁴ is understood as the guardian of the Gospel and along with the elders is concerned with the spiritual rule and pastoral oversight of congregations, leadership in mission and the government of the Church through its courts.</p>	
<p>6.2 Nature of office of minister</p> <p>A minister</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) exercises an independent office in the service of Jesus Christ for the safeguarding of Christ's sovereignty over the Church, and (b) exercises this office in a collegial relationship with all the ministers of the Church. 	<p>6.9 Nature of office of elder</p> <p>(1) An elder</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) exercises a spiritual office in the Church, (b) exercises leadership in mission, (c) participates in the spiritual rule and pastoral oversight of a congregation, and (d) participates in the government of the Church through its courts.

¹⁴ "Ordained ministers of word and sacrament have, following the Presbyterian tradition, been known as 'ministers', and as 'ministers of word and sacrament' and as 'teaching elders'. References to ordained ministers in this Book of Order are made only to the single term 'minister'. BOO 6.1 (2), pg 28.

Minister	Elder
<p>6.3 Functions of a minister</p> <p>(1) The calling of a minister includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) leadership in worship, (b) leadership in mission, (c) pastoral care, and (d) spiritual nurture. 	<p>6.10 Functions of an elder</p> <p>(1) The calling of an elder includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) leadership in worship, (b) leadership in mission, (c) pastoral care and oversight of the congregation, and (d) spiritual nurture.
<p>6.4 Leadership in worship</p> <p>A minister exercises leadership in worship when he or she</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) preaches the Word, (b) ensures that the Scriptures are read, (c) presides at the sacraments, (d) conducts public worship, (e) oversees hymns and music for services of worship, (f) informs the church council if someone other than the incumbent minister is to preach on any particular Sunday, (g) ensures that associated administrative tasks are undertaken. 	<p>6.11 Leadership in worship</p> <p>An elder exercises leadership in worship when he or she</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) preaches the Word according to his or her gifts under the authority of the minister, (b) assists in the celebration of the sacraments under the authority of the minister, (c) presides at the celebration of communion if he or she is authorised to administer the sacraments, (d) baptises if he or she is authorised to administer the sacraments.

Minister	Elder
<p>6.5 Leadership in mission</p> <p>A minister exercises leadership in mission when he or she</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) encourages the congregation to exercise its role in God’s mission, including teaching, guiding and assisting members in playing their part, (b) discerns and promotes contemporary ways of communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ, (c) serves God in collegial relationship with the ministers of the Church, (d) under the authority of the church council, proclaims salvation and new life in Christ, baptising and bringing applicants into membership, (e) under the authority of the church council, ordains elders and deacons, (f) under the authority of the presbytery, participates in the ordination of ministers, (g) observes the discipline and government of the Church, (h) participates in the courts of the Church, (i) ensures that associated administrative tasks are undertaken. 	<p>6.12 Leadership in mission</p> <p>An elder exercises leadership in mission when he or she</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) exercises leadership within the congregation, (b) observes the discipline and government of the Church, and (c) participates in the courts of the Church as required.

Minister	Elder
<p>6.6 Pastoral care</p> <p>A minister exercises pastoral care when he or she provides and assists in making provision for care and support for the congregation and wider community.</p>	<p>6.13 Pastoral care and oversight of the congregation</p> <p>An elder provides spiritual nurture, pastoral care and oversight of the congregation when he or she</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) provides pastoral care, (b) makes arrangements for baptism and membership.
<p>6.7 Spiritual nurture</p> <p>A minister exercises spiritual nurture when he or she</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) exercises spiritual leadership, (b) teaches and provides spiritual guidance, (c) nurtures applicants for baptism and membership, (d) ensures that associated administrative tasks are undertaken. 	<p>6.14 Spiritual nurture</p> <p>If suitably qualified, and under the direction of the minister, an elder may provide spiritual guidance including the nurture of applicants for baptism and membership.</p>
<p>6.8 Responsibility of minister</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) A minister who has been appointed to a congregation has ultimate responsibility for the conduct of worship and sacraments. (2) A minister is responsible for nurturing and practising his or her own spiritual life and for undertaking ministry development in accordance with supplementary provisions. (3) Although a minister is appointed to work within a specific ministry, the minister is responsible to the presbytery. (4) Ordination to the office of minister does not automatically grant the minister full membership in the courts of presbytery or the General Assembly. (5) A minister may solemnize marriage only between a man and a woman. 	<p>6.15 Responsibilities of elders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) An elder is responsible to the church council for the performance of his or her duties. (2) An elder is responsible for nurturing and practising his or her own spiritual life and for undertaking such eldership formation as may be encouraged by the minister or church council.

What do you find affirming? What do you find surprising?

ELDERS AND MINISTERS: PARTNERS IN MINISTRY

1. Clergy and Laity: wisdom from the Very Rev Dr Graham Redding¹⁵

There is a need, I think, to clarify the role of pastoral ministry. In order to fulfill its mission the Church needs persons who are publicly and continually responsible for pointing to its fundamental dependence on Jesus Christ, and thereby provide, within a multiplicity of gifts and callings, a focus of its unity. The ministry of Word and Sacrament serves this function.

The World Council of Churches document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982), puts it this way:

As Christ chose and sent apostles, Christ continues through the Holy Spirit to choose and call persons into ordained ministry. As heralds and ambassadors, ordained ministers are representatives of Jesus Christ to the community, and proclaim his message of reconciliation. As leaders and teachers they call the community to submit to the authority of Jesus Christ, the teacher and prophet, in whom law and prophets were fulfilled. As pastors, under Jesus Christ the chief shepherd, they assemble and guide the dispersed people of God, in anticipation of the coming Kingdom.

Understood in this way, ordained ministry has a strongly missional mandate without detracting from its core tasks of proclaiming, presiding and pastoring.

The second ministry-related issue might be referred to as the professionalization of ministry. One of the biggest problems afflicting the church is the perception that there exist two classes of ministry: the clergy, who through their training and remuneration have become a kind of *professional* Christian or minister; and the laity, who are the *amateurs*. This perception is reinforced at Presbyteries and General Assemblies, which tend to be dominated by the Ministers.

The distinction between clergy and laity might be convenient, but it is a distortion of the New Testament teaching that the '*kleros*' are part of the '*laos*' (the whole people of God), not a separate, elite group.

As either an elder or a minister; how would you describe your relationship and sense of collegiality with each other?

¹⁵ Very Rev Dr Graham Redding, Moderatorial Reflections, 1st October 2010.

2. Clergy and Laity: wisdom from Rev Mark Chapman¹⁶

I went into the congregation believing that I was to lead the congregation to God's new future! I was to be the saviour, the chosen one whom people would be inspired by, and follow. Because I was the man! Nobody was interested!

Seven years later I was sitting in the office of a retired Presbyterian minister who was on staff at [Robert] Schuller's Church in LA [USA] pouring my heart out to this wonderful gentleman about the fact that nobody loved me and nobody wanted to do anything and follow all my wonderful plans for their future! This gentle man of God, explained to me using First Nations language, that I was not followed, because I was not the leader/chief. I was only the medicine man. Oh. He went on to explain that the tribe/congregation don't follow the medicine man, they follow the chiefs. The chiefs are those who hold the tribal knowledge. They know from generations of wisdom when it is time to move from A to B. The chiefs call on the medicine man to bless the journey and do his/ her little dance, but the tribe never follows the medicine man! Oh. Gingerly I asked, "How do I become a chief?" Answer: You have to learn the tribal history as well as the chiefs and/or you have to outlive them.

What is your response to this story?

3. Church Change and Growth: wisdom from Very Rev Dr Graham Redding¹⁷

Indeed, it could be said that equally problematic for the Church are the following (less obvious) factors:

- Biblical and theological illiteracy
- Historical amnesia and a loss of institutional memory
- Cultural conformity
- The increasing banality and trivialisation of worship
- A loss of confidence in the Gospel of Jesus Christ
- A muting of the more radical and costly demands of discipleship
- A diminished sense of the priesthood of all believers
- The displacement of biblical models of ministry and leadership by corporate models

¹⁶ Rev Mark Chapman, "The Clevedon Story", *Candour*, "Turn around churches: stories and reflections from churches that turned around death and decline" (Issue 5, 2012), 11.

¹⁷ Rev Rev Dr Graham Redding, Appendix 3: Theological Implications and Background Considerations in *Strategic Directions: Strategy Workgroup, July 2012*.

Pursuing church growth while ignoring these sorts of deeper concerns can become a something of a red herring. A discerning eye is necessary when it comes to talking about congregational growth as a strategic goal. Not all growth is of God.

Moreover, there is a need to distinguish between change and reform. The Reformation motto, “Always reformed and being reformed” suggests that the Church does not reform itself through a series of innovative changes; rather, it is in the process of being reformed by the Spirit in accordance with Scripture.

Change and innovation for their own sake engender weariness and confusion. Seventy years ago, T.S. Eliot had this to say about the Church’s tendency to lurch from one experimental change to the next:

- The endless cycle of idea and action,
- Endless invention, endless experiment,
- Brings knowledge of speech, but not of silence;
- Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.
- All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,
- All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,
- But nearness to death no nearer to God.

Which is the prior question? Is it, “What needs to change in order to grow the Presbyterian Church?” (A pragmatic, organisational question.) Or is it, “Based on our reading of both Scripture and context, what kind of Church is God calling into being?” (A theological, missional question.)

What do you agree with Graham about? What do you disagree with?

Why?

Some Factors Shaping Biblical Literacy (Dr Stephen Garner: Laidlaw College)

Scripture and preaching are two features of the PCANZ at its best. However, there is a crisis of Biblical literacy in the church and training institutions.

Look at these features of Christian discipleship which can erode people’s level of Biblical knowledge and experience.

Do any of these relate to your church?



Biblical Literacy

Biblical literacy refers to how well people know the content, shape, and core themes of the Bible. It may also include how comfortable they are at using that knowledge to shape their faith and life.

Here are a few things that can shape the level of Biblical literacy possessed individuals and communities.

01

Preaching & Worship (1)

The preaching and messages heard and songs sung in worship have become disconnected from Scripture. What is heard and sung are sound Scriptural, but lack the content and authority of Scripture. Scripture not read or heard in the context of worship.

02

Preaching & Worship (2)

The preaching and messages in church are aimed at creating an emotional reaction without a deeply visible Scriptural basis for those messages and how it's communicated. Outside of the experience of worship there is little to connect Scripture to.

03

Preaching & Worship (3)

The preaching and messages in church reinforce a particular status quo. Scripture and its content are subverted to achieve that. The Bible speaking truthfully and critically into that cultural context, and that of the church, is silenced or misrepresented.

04

Too Hard

Engaging with Scripture is seen as too hard and taking too much time. This can lead to overly simplistic engagement with the Bible and reading bits of the Bible out of context. Broader Biblical themes (e.g. forgiveness, justice) can get ignored or lost.

05

Confidence

Church leaders may have little or no training in prayerfully and thoughtfully reading Scripture, and if they do, they might not have continue to develop and resource that once they are leaders. They may not be confident reflecting deeply on Scripture.

06

Role Models

The relevance of Scripture in faith and life is best seen in good role models who faithfully live out the Christian life through loving God, loving neighbour, and loving their enemies. A lack of good examples to follow can undermine trust in the relevancy of Scripture for faith and life.

07

Experiences

The experience of people using Scripture in ways that have hurt or marginalised individuals and communities can shape whether people want to read and engage with the Bible. Positive experiences can increase a desire to go deeper into the Bible.

08

"Magic Book"

The Bible is seen as possessing a special power distinct from its content. Possessing a copy of the Bible conveys this power to a person without them reading it. Sometimes the Bible is only consulted as a "wise oracle" in moments of crisis.

09

Spiritual Practices

Spiritual practices that emphasise regular individual and communal reflection on Scripture such as following a guided reading plan, small groups, safe spaces to ask questions about the Bible, and prayerful meditation on Scripture can all help with feeling more confident with the Bible, its content, and core themes.

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If Scripture was your friend – how would you describe your relationship?