

COMMON GROUND



Uniting Congregations
OF AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

Co - Chairs of UCANZ

Serving as Co-Chairs of the Standing Committee of Uniting Congregations of Aotearoa New Zealand (UCANZ) is both a privilege and a responsibility we value deeply. This year, Johanna Warren stepped into the role of Co-Chair, and has found it a joy to serve alongside Hana Popea Dell, together with Andrew Howley - our Executive Officer, and Andrew Doubleday - our Ministry Facilitator. We are grateful for the wisdom, experience, and shared commitment that shape our work. Hana has been involved in Uniting parishes since 2005 and brings long-standing experience in ecumenical leadership and cooperative ministry. Over the years, she has developed a deep appreciation for the distinctive strengths each denomination offers particularly in ministry, leadership, governance, finance, and property stewardship. She believes these differences are gifts which, when shared with mutual respect and trust, enrich partnerships and strengthen our common mission. As Paul reminds us, "There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit... For just as the body is one and has many members" (1 Corinthians 12:4,12). This vision continues to shape our commitment to unity in diversity.

Johanna is Presbyterian and currently worships at St John's Golden Church in Whangārei, a co-operating parish. While her direct experience with UCANZ leadership is more recent, ecumenism has long been close to her heart. Having worshipped in a co-operating parish prior to ministry training, she values deeply the richness that comes from our combined heritages and shared gospel. She brings a willingness to listen, to learn, and to engage thoughtfully with the opportunities and challenges of cooperative ministry.

The Standing Committee is a wise and diverse group drawn from many contexts. We are always open to hearing your concerns, questions, and ideas. We hold to Jesus' prayer "that they may all be one" (John 17:21), trusting that the life of the Spirit binds us together even as our histories and settings differ. Together, we remain committed to walking alongside you, strengthening unity in Christ, and supporting vibrant uniting communities throughout Aotearoa New Zealand.

Your friends in Christ - Hana & Johanna [co-chairs]

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How big is your Church?

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Rev Andrew Howley, UCANZ Executive Officer — Feb 24, 2026

When I was first ordained, people would often ask me, “How big is your church?”

For many of us, that question brings a quiet sense of dread. We know the numbers are not what they once were.

We know the building is not as full as we might hope. In many places across Aotearoa New Zealand, congregations are ageing or declining. So, when someone asks how big the church is, it can feel less like curiosity and more like an evaluation.

We instinctively answer by counting heads.

On most Sundays, many of our churches feel small, local, perhaps even like family. We think about attendance, the parish roll, the budget, the number of volunteers we can rely on. The Church can feel fragile, even marginal, in a society that no longer assumes faith as the norm.

But Scripture invites us to answer that question differently.

In Ephesians 4:4-6 we hear:

“there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.” (NRSVUE) The Church, in its deepest sense, is not defined by geography or weekly numbers. It is defined by belonging to Christ.

Reformed theology has often distinguished between the visible Church - what we can see, count, organise and worry about - and the invisible Church, the whole company of those whom Christ gathers to himself across time and space. On a Sunday morning, what we see may be modest. But what Christ is building is immeasurable.

That means as congregations in Aotearoa New Zealand we are never as isolated or small in the ways we sometimes imagine. When someone is baptised here, they are baptised into the same body as Christians in Rome, Nairobi, Seoul, São Paulo, and in villages and cities across the Pacific. One baptism. One faith. One Lord.

That includes the Church expressed in different cultures within this land - Māori and Pākehā, longstanding congregations and newer migrant fellowships - all drawn into one body through Christ. Our unity is not uniformity. It is shared belonging.

In the past year, the global nature of the Church has been visible in refreshing ways. 1700 years after the Council of Nicaea, Christians across traditions marked the anniversary of the Nicene Creed. When we stand and say those ancient words, we join a living confession shared across centuries and cultures.

That matters, especially as we carry uncertainty. We live with war and rumours of war. We see powerful nations asserting themselves with little regard for smaller countries or the rule of law. We feel the pressure of political polarisation and the rise of Christian nationalism, which shrinks the Church to fit one culture or one agenda.

Against that, the global Church offers a different witness. It reminds us that Christ cannot be claimed by any nation. Nor denomination. The Body of Christ is larger than any political movement, older than any modern state, and more enduring than any moment of crisis.

So how big is your church?

If you measure only what you can see on a Sunday morning, it may seem modest or even insignificant. But if you measure it by baptism, by shared confession, by communion with believers across denominations, across your town or city, around the world and across time, it is vast.

Your church stretches back many centuries and across every continent. It includes the persecuted and the powerful, the confident and the doubting. It is held together not by culture or politics, but by Christ.

That is the true size of the Church.

Testimony Lyn Stobie – Hokitika Union Parish

Lyn shared her faith last year at the PCANZ General Assembly. This is an abridged version.

Tena koutou katoa.

Where I come from has influenced who I am, my spirituality. The West Coast of the South Island, bound by sea, is my home. My parents met near a body of water, in the Marlborough Sounds, at a Bible Class event.

Now I live within sight and sound of the Tasman Sea and the Hokitika River. I seek out the beach and river mouth when I need to reenergise seeing something of the depth and power of God in the strong tides and God's goodness in the expansiveness of I and and mountains, sea and sky.

In my childhood, my youth and early adulthood I had experiences which formed me as a Christian. Bible stories - some I just loved, Busy Bees – where the message was others need our help and care, Easter Camps – engaging body, heart and mind and giving a sense of the breadth of the body of Christ.

As part of seeking independence I distanced myself from my family tradition of being involved in a parish yet later a prompting brought me and my husband back to the Coast.

Experiencing summer in Europe we were parched. A rare shower of rain came. We leapt out of our van to soak it up and felt immense relief. This pointed us back to NZ and later, a further prompting brought me back to our parish.

I have been engrossed in children's programmes, women's groups, as an elder and Session Clerk, and in the last eleven years in supporting our Local Shared Ministry.

Significant along the way was the chance to join a group of Anglicans in their 'Calling and Caring' course and continuing with them on a four year adventure in 'Education for Ministry' where praying and worshipping together, learning together partly about our individual beliefs, growing together - was a wonderful gift.

Our minister of 30 plus years, John Drylie, had a way of presenting faith that made sense to me and he modelled a life of generosity and support for all around him.

Inspiration/irrigation came when a Sister of Mercy advertised around the churches, a group that would share what she had been studying. It has sharpened my awareness of our Creator God who is Love, my sense of connectedness to all creation and reflected on spirituality understood from the perspective of modern sciences.

Our celebrating community also gives me energy and drains it! Somehow I found myself on the Worship Team and monthly I am challenged to lead a service but as I am stretched, I learn and grow.

I am unsure of the future but I am confident in the Spirit of Love who has borne me thus far. The hymn below speaks to me of my journey..

Nga mihi.

Hymn To Celebrate: Rev John Drylie. Tune: Ode to Joy

Celebrate the Coast of Beauty
Place where we are called to live;
Lakes still fed by crystal waters,
Shoreline clad by fern and tree.
We rejoice in nature's freedom,
Giving us the space to be
People of the open places,
Drawn to live in harmony.

Celebrate the place we live in,
Take the time to stand and see;
Pause a while in all that rushing,
Is that what life's meant to be?
Listen to the sound of silence
Skyline bathed with hues of red,
We're embraced by God's creation,
Body, spirit, both are fed.

Hear the West Coast tell its story,
Images rise from the land;
Tales of woe and tales of glory
Crafted by the people's hand.
Past and present, join together
Waves of ice and foaming sea,
Bush lined lake and jagged mountain
Whisper words of eternity.

What shall be the message we can
Write for people yet to come?
Tell them that this is the place
That God created for their home.
Send a call to those of the future;
All are stewards of the earth.
Celebrate this land of treasure.
Here God brings new hope to birth.



Election year pondering...

It's election year. Democracy relies on people contributing views in the marketplace of ideas.

Contributing ideas from a Christian perspective is a way we can help our country move towards God's vision called the kingdom of heaven or the reign of God.

The living Christ influences how followers vote, the values we promote and the questions we ask. It is a way we seek to participate in the reign of God. This article aims to help us shape questions of political aspirants.

It concerns tax.

Tax figures prominently in the story of Jesus' birth. Luke 2 in the Authorised Version states – “And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.” Tax is named at the start of talk of Jesus. No wonder it has become an issue Christians discuss.

World church bodies like the World Council of Churches, the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the World Methodist Council have been promoting tax justice through The Zacchaeus Tax Campaign. It calls for a global tax and economic system that acts like Zacchaeus, the tax collector in the New Testament.

They have produced a toolkit: Zac Tax Toolkit*. They state: “a fair tax policy – in today's predominantly capitalist societies – is not only a very effective leverage to fight or reduce poverty, inequality and ecological destruction. Social and ecological tax justice is also indispensable for the functioning of democracy at the national level, and for the equal and peaceful coexistence of the international community at the regional and global level. ... tax injustice is one major part of the compelling story about why poverty persists in a world of plenty.”

The statement from the church bodies calls for steps to be taken. The first is: “We call for the enactment of progressive wealth taxes at global and national levels to curb the growing concentration of wealth in the hands of an increasingly powerful few, hand-in-hand with increased public spending to stamp out poverty.” Another is: “We urgently call for progressive carbon and pollution taxes at different levels to protect our only planetary home.”

In 2004, I participated in a world church meeting about such issues in Accra in Ghana. I suggested that perhaps a way forward was to engage world bodies that had views different from our own. I had in mind talking with people like Mike Moore, New Zealander, who had been Director General of the World Trade Organization. The suggestion was supported by wealthy countries of the North.

Churches of the South strongly opposed the suggestion, speaking from their painful experience of disempowering poverty in a deeply unequal world. It challenged me to reflect on what I could do as a brother in Christ, in solidarity. Perhaps a question is - How do our aspiring representatives envisage a tax system that reduces inequality and enables climate justice?

*<https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/publications/zactax-toolkit>

Kerry Enright

After 43 years of diverse ministry, Kerry Enright recently retired to Alexandra. Ministry included service in Presbyterian and Union congregations, ten years as the Presbyterian Church's Assembly Executive Secretary and seven years leading the Uniting Church in Australia's international agency UnitingWorld. The Uniting Church has a strong commitment to justice including tax justice. Alongside Pacific churches, UnitingWorld advocated for just trade policies as Australia and New Zealand put pressure on Pacific nations to adopt neo-liberal approaches. Kerry's theological study and international involvement, including in Accra, strengthened his belief that the gospel offers a way of living that values creation and benefits all people rather than only people who are privileged. It is that belief that leads him to advocate for economic policies, including in relation to tax, that enable the flourishing of which Jesus speaks.



Oversight

An explanation of the procedures: Chapter 2

Rev Andrew Howley, UCANZ Executive Officer

Within a Cooperative Venture of the Uniting Churches of Aotearoa New Zealand, oversight of a local church is shared. It is important to state this clearly: no partner church is dominant, and no single partner “owns” oversight of the congregation.

In earlier years, language was sometimes used that implied one church exercised “oversight” over the others. That terminology no longer reflects the theological and practical reality of Cooperative Ventures. Today, the emphasis is firmly on partnership, mutual accountability, and collaboration. All partners share responsibility for nurturing the life, mission, governance, and sustainability of the local church.

Shared Responsibility

In a Cooperative Venture, each partner church — through its councils, ministers, and regional or national bodies — carries responsibility for supporting the congregation. Oversight is not hierarchical; it is relational. Decisions affecting mission, property, finance, leadership, or strategic direction are made through consultation. No major step should be taken unilaterally.

Partnership requires ongoing communication, transparency, and goodwill. It assumes that each partner brings particular strengths, traditions, and resources that enrich the whole.

The Role of the Convening Partner

To ensure good order, one partner serves for a time as the Convening Partner. This role rotates, normally every three years, to reflect balance and shared responsibility.

The Convening Partner does not exercise superior authority. Rather, it:

- Coordinates meetings and consultation among partners.
- Ensures regular review of the local church.
- Facilitates communication with any Regional Forum or national body.
- Manages agreed financial assessments.
- Handles complaints in the first instance (while recognising that ministerial discipline remains with the minister’s own church).

The Convening Partner’s role is administrative and coordinating, not controlling. Its authority arises from the agreement of the partners, not from institutional dominance.

The Role of Participating Partners

Participating Partners remain fully engaged in the life of the Cooperative Venture. They:

- Maintain active contact with the congregation and minister.
- Attend partnership meetings.
- Provide continuity when the Convening role rotates.
- Share resources and encourage engagement with the wider church.

Participation is not passive. Even when not convening, each partner retains responsibility for the health and direction of the congregation.

The Role of the Appointing Partner

When a minister is appointed, one partner acts as the Appointing Partner, following its own church’s appointment procedures. However, this does not diminish the involvement of others. All partners must be consulted, and agreement is required before an appointment is confirmed.

The Appointing Partner oversees:

- Preparation of the parish profile.
- Interviews and necessary checks.
- Induction arrangements involving all partners.
- Ministry reviews toward the end of the term.

Again, this is a coordinating function carried out on behalf of the partnership, not an assertion of control.

Collaboration as the Governing Principle

At every level — governance, finance, mission planning, property decisions, and ministry support — collaboration is essential. Regular meetings of partners should occur at least annually. Where Regional Forums exist, they are consulted in key discussions. Where they do not, the national office may assist.

The theological foundation of Cooperative Ventures is ecumenical commitment: churches working together in shared witness. That commitment requires humility, trust, and a willingness to listen across traditions.

Conclusion

A Cooperative Venture is not a merger in which one church absorbs another, nor is it a hierarchy with a lead denomination exercising oversight. It is a covenantal partnership.

The language of “oversight by one partner” belongs to an earlier period and does not adequately express the current understanding. The contemporary framework is clear: oversight is shared; leadership rotates; appointments require consultation; and mission is undertaken together.

Partnership and collaboration are not optional features — they are the defining characteristics of a Cooperative Venture.

The Two Andrew's Contact Us...

Rev Andrew Doubleday - Ministry Facilitator

3+ years in the role of Ministry Facilitator has given me a love and appreciation for CVs (Co-operative Ventures).

I had 31 years in Parish ministry. If faced with the choice, serving in a CV would have been an option I likely would have preferred to avoid. Just as many do today.

That would have been a mistake.

There is a richness that CVs offer, that one rarely finds in a 'pure' denominational setting. It is true that there are the added complication of 'serving more than one master'.

There are also choices in being able to 'cherry pick' the best from each of the traditions represented in a CV, as well as a freedom in being able to create new ones. There is less of an expectation that things can be done in only one way.

Some will express the concern that there is a 'danger' that a CV will become more 'congregational'. This cannot be denied. Yet it brings with it the possibility that the church will fit more appropriately with the needs and culture of the community in which it is placed, and more fully reflect the gifts, skills, and passions of the people who form the church.

It has been my joy to dip into various congregations around the country, experience something of their life, hear of the challenges they face, and reflect with them on the possibilities on how they might move forward.

Andrew Doubleday, March 2026

(Andrew Doubleday lives in Lincoln, Canterbury)



Rev Andrew Howley - Executive Officer

Andrew Howley in addition to the Executive officer is also the Parish minister of the Alexandra Clyde Lauder Union Parish.

He has served on the UCANZ standing committee as an elected member and also as a co-chair. Throughout his faith journey he has always seen himself as an ecumenical christian. Though with strong Presbyterian roots, having been the son of the Sunday school teacher.

He has worked as a children's worker, community based youth worker, painter and decorator, and has worked for the Salvation Army community and family services.



The Andrew's share the ministry of the UCANZ office and are assisted by our financial contractor the Diocese of Waiapu. They can assist parishes with a range of issues and are able to support via Zoom or by arrangement by in person visits. They are both available to lead services upon occasion, and welcome invites to your parish celebrations. We also welcome your articles to contribute to "Common Ground" our new quarterly publication.

To Contact the Andrew's

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