

Moderator's Farewell Speech

Moderator, commissioners, friends.

I have had a fantastic time. It has been a huge privilege being Moderator. I have enjoyed it immensely and I pray, Ray, that it might be even more fulfilling for you.

I didn't plan to be Moderator full-time but I am extremely grateful that it worked out that way. I know that hasn't been possible for others but it has allowed me to focus more, to spend longer with people and to visit some of the more remote places in the country.

It has been very interesting meeting with the other heads of churches, as one of them, meeting political leaders and engaging with a different set of issues. It has been fascinating being alongside Te Aka Puaho, at Waitangi, for example, but also for the passing of the moderatorship from Millie to Wayne.

But, in many ways, the most satisfying aspect of the job has been being at the grassroots. I have really appreciated worshipping with churches around the country or spending an evening together discussing the mission of the church. I have been blessed by going to Kaukapakapa and Hunterville and Takaka and Twizel. I think I have had some sort of contact with most Presbyterian or Cooperating parishes in New Zealand and I have loved that.

It has also been a blessing visiting Pacific Island parishes, the Synod AGM and fono gatherings – and today to be at the funeral of Kenape Faletose. It was a privilege to be present when 11 Korean congregations joined the PCANZ, to build some links with the Asian Council and to visit Myanmar and Korea.

The disaster in Christchurch has been the biggest event of these last two years for our whole country. I want to honour the people who have been faithful followers of Jesus Christ in the midst of the heart-ache and confusion; who in their caring and witness have been lights in the darkness. I want to honour too the Christchurch Presbytery for grasping the nettle of saying, "Let's make no assumptions about where churches will be rebuilt. Let's stand back and be strategic about our mission" – even though that process has been painful for everyone.

Throughout the country, it has been a joy meeting so many people and seeing the church in action – at the grassroots. I also must thank people for the wonderful hospitality and warm friendship that has been offered everywhere. In the last two years I have put on about 9kg. I also want to thank all those who have prayed for me. I am extremely grateful for that support.

I also thank Zona Pearce for taking a lot of the administrative load off me by making many of the arrangements. I also want to thank my wife Chris and my family because while you may think they have benefited from seeing less of me, I know that there has been a price for them to pay.

My main regret is that I have not spent more time with our national staff. They are hard-working and skilled people and I wish now that I had made a point of having more contact with them.

One of the privileges, of course, is getting something of a bird's eye view of our church. Much of what I have seen has been hugely encouraging.

I think our church has gone through something of a revolution in the last few years. It is a different beast today than it was only a short time ago. The biggest indicator of that, I think, is in the fact that

we used to spend most of our time fighting each other. Now the conversations and the energy are about the mission of the church. Churches are grappling with questions of how to engage with their communities. And then there is the question of how do we be distinctively Christian. How do we go beyond serving so that it becomes Christian mission?

These are challenging questions in challenging times. Some churches are doing superb work. They are intentional about what they are doing. They are innovative. They invest their resources into mission and they are seeing results.

It is great seeing Presbyterian Youth Ministries, Kids Friendly and KCL resourcing the leadership in our parishes. It has been fantastic to witness life in the church.

But it is not all positive. I wish I could carry on being positive and say that everything is good. Some things about our church worry me greatly.

There are still many churches that are declining and probably dying. In some of those churches I have met wonderfully faithful people who work hard to provide worship because they love Jesus. There are some too who have a heart for mission but are not seeing results. I feel for those churches that are very faithful but finding it hard.

However, some churches are more like a club in which people have cared for each other over many years and they value that enormously, but now they are simply sad that their club membership is declining. Often it is not apparent to me that they have a sense of mission.

I believe the biggest one of the distinguishing features of churches that feel they have a future is that they understand their mission.

When I listen to stories about the fights being fought in our churches, they are often over the most trivial things and I think, "Really? Is that what it is about? Is our mission really to preserve the building? Is Jesus worried about whether the service starts at 10 or 10:30? Jesus must weep over petty power struggles. Don't we have to lift our eyes above the trivia and see the big mission that Jesus has called us to – the mission that takes us out into the world with good news?"

Churches that feel involved in Jesus' mission are generally optimistic about their future. It might not be easy. Our mission field is very difficult. But they are rising to the challenge and know that they are called to something worthwhile.

It does seem to me that, in many areas of the life of our church, we are less than clear. I think we are less than clear about some very fundamental questions:

1. **Who are we - as Christians?** What does it mean to be a Christian? What does it mean to have faith? How do Christians live?
2. **Who's are we?** What does it mean that our father is the Lord God Almighty? Do we know the power and the presence of God? Do we know the mind of God on the issues we face?
3. **What are we about?** What is our mission? What are we here for? How do all the things we *could* list as our mission fit together? Are we clear about our core business?

If we are not clear then we will not be focused and our church will be weak. We need to get back to a biblical understanding and to prayer, seeking God's mind. Without that, we will be weak but also we will be increasingly secular.

Already, many statements made by church bodies (not necessarily Presbyterian but bodies that we

relate to) are not distinctively Christian There is a drift towards being secular. We need to be clear about what makes us distinctive. We need to stand up as followers of Jesus and we need to proclaim Jesus as the Saviour of the world. Political reforms, educational programmes and so on all have their place, but ultimately the Saviour is Jesus. We need to tell a hurting world about Jesus, not a secular message. Let's, like the angels at His birth, proclaim that there is a Saviour: Jesus.

Lack of clarity around some basic questions is largely a leadership issue. To be honest, I think there is a lack of leadership at many levels throughout our church - in our parishes, at presbytery level and nationally.

I also think it is hard to be a leader within the Presbyterian Church because we are ambivalent about leadership. We struggle to trust people and to let leaders lead. That might be a conversation for another time but it is one of the things that hamstring our church, in my opinion.

Moderator, I have tried to avoid using the D-word. But I can't control myself any longer! I think we suffer from not having been very good at making disciples – at bringing people to faith in Jesus and then growing them to Christ-like maturity. Many of our people have only the same Sunday School theology they had sixty years ago. Biblical literacy amongst New Zealand Christians is frightening. Hence the lack of clarity around basic questions.

We haven't been very good at growing people to maturity in their character – Christ-likeness – and so we see pettiness in our churches –self-centredness when Jesus has said that dying to ourselves is fundamental to discipleship.

We haven't been all that good at growing people so that they live as citizens of the Kingdom of God, and they model God's better way, reflecting the concerns of the King for the poor and those who suffer injustice, the care of His creation, righteousness, and with God's heart for people's salvation. We haven't disciplined them.

Moderator, It is my firm belief that God intends His church to be a multiplying missionary movement with every member a missionary. Sometimes I fear we look more like a rest home than a multiplying missionary movement. When Jesus called those first fishermen to be disciples, He said, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of people." In other words, "Become my disciple and I will turn you into a disciple-maker." We have been chosen to bear fruit that will last but many of our members are passive.

There are wonderful examples around the country of Presbyterian parishes following Jesus' model. But at the same time, there are many that are a long way from that. But that is the challenge. That is what mission is about. God has called us to be part of this church at this time in history. We can change the future. What will the future of the PCANZ look like? Will our generation – make disciples of Jesus Christ?

It is a great privilege being part of this movement. It is also a great challenge. My prayer is that God will clarify for us who we are and who's we are and what our mission is. I pray that we might be Holy Spirit empowered Jesus-followers excited about serving Him and bringing glory to God. And that we will experience the power of God's presence and the presence of His power.

It is an exciting time to be His people. It is an exciting time to be His church.

My heart-felt thanks to you all. May God bless you.

- Peter Cheyne