

# **MISSED CALLS:**

## **Examining candidacy for ordained ministry in the PCANZ through Northern Presbytery**

**A report submitted to the Council of Northern Presbytery**

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>COA</b>	Council of Assembly
<b>KCML</b>	Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership
<b>LOM</b>	Local Ordained Ministry
<b>LSC</b>	Leadership Sub-Committee
<b>NAW</b>	National Assessment Workgroup
<b>NOM</b>	National Ordained Ministry
<b>PCANZ</b>	Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand
<b>TELT</b>	Theological Education and Leadership Training

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION: The Issue

“Decline” is a word which is often used today to describe the church in New Zealand. It is not only used in reference to religious affiliation, congregation membership, and worship attendance, it involves clergy as well. This report is a response to the growing concern of the latter; especially with respect to the declining recruitment number for ordained ministry in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand (PCANZ) through the Northern Presbytery.

This concern was brought to the attention of Northern Presbytery Council towards the end of 2020. Correspondence by Rev Dr Emma Keown, an assessor of the National Assessment Workgroup (NAW), conveyed deep distress of the candidacy process for nationally ordained ministry (NOM) as being “incredibly restrictive.” At its heart is the perceived consequence of missed opportunities by those who unsuccessfully engage with candidacy for ordained ministry. Hence the title of this report. But “Missed Calls” is not just about missed opportunities of these individuals in terms of their sense of call to such a vocation; rather, they are potential losses for the future of ministry within Northern Presbytery and PCANZ.

Rev Dr Keown first points out that the restrictive process is very drawn-out. A candidate usually makes an application for ordained ministry the year before presbytery assessment in October the following year. If successful at presbytery assessment, the candidate moves onto national assessment in May the following year. If successful at national assessment and, if already attaining the required foundational academic theological requirements (an undergraduate degree in theology from an approved institution), the candidate can enter the Internship programme through the Knox Centre for Ministry & Leadership (KCML) at the beginning of the following year. From the time of application and through the assessment processes takes nearly two years. The Internship programme is also two years, making this pathway potentially four years. If, however, the candidate has not completed the theological foundation studies, this must be completed before beginning the Internship programme. Fulltime foundation studies can potentially take three or four years to complete. When adding these years to the assessment and internship periods, the whole process can take seven or, potentially, eight years. Rev Dr Keown argues that not only is this a very lengthy avenue to ordained ministry, but it is also “not flexible enough” adding years to what could be a “simple process if expediated well.”

Second, she sees the process as being very costly in more ways than one. For candidates who undertake their foundation studies before applying for ministry, they have to bear the tuition fees themselves. If partway through their studies when successful at national assessment, there is no guarantee that the rest of their tuition fees will be covered by the national church. With respect to the internship programme, there is a cost to the family of the candidate if they have to relocate to where the internship is done. This means employment and school challenges for spouse and children. Some internships can involve two different placements within the two-year

programme and, therefore, can compound pressures on the candidate and family. Rev Dr Keown's fear is that such pressures might make it "almost impossible for candidates to continue with the process." There is also the financial cost to parishes who take on an intern. For parishes within the Auckland region, housing is undoubtedly very expensive. Rev Dr Keown's view is that the cost of our current process is "generally too high in multiple ways, but especially for the candidates themselves." In sum, she posits that the loss of potential good leaders for ministry is because the NOM pathway "system is not working."

To suggest that the assessment process is somehow 'broken' deserves closer scrutiny. Perhaps it is pertinent to ask what is meant by the "system" or process "not working"? Does it apply to different aspects of the process such as the application requirements, presbytery assessment, national assessment, foundational studies, internship programme, or the whole lot? Is the system deemed broken because candidates are unsuccessful?

With respect to the last question, it is not unusual for candidates to be unsuccessful in their application for ministry. For a very long time in the PCANZ, some candidates have been unsuccessful for various reasons or have withdrawn of their own accord at different stages of their candidacy. This has not been a point of concern for presbyteries or for the PCANZ in the past. So why is it a concern now? Or is there an issue with those who administer the process (presbytery candidate conveners and assessors)? Discerning the suitability and readiness, or not, of a candidate for ministry training is the responsibility of assessors at both presbytery and national levels. Rev Dr Keown clearly acknowledges in her report that the assessment team "do a great job." If applicants are deemed unsuitable or not ready for ministry training, then does that necessarily mean the process is failing or broken? Not necessarily. It might indicate the opposite; that the process actually works because assessors are doing their job well. It might also reflect how well or under-prepared candidates are rather than the effectiveness or lack thereof of the assessment process and personnel.

Rev Dr Keown's report clearly conveys concerns from one who is part of the assessment process – an assessor of NAW. But as asked above, do concerns about failings apply to respective or all aspects of the process? Rev Dr Keown's request is that Presbytery Council "seriously look at the whole process."

There are challenges to this request. First is the extent of presbytery responsibility. If the concern is about failings at the presbytery level with regard to how applications and assessment are handled, then a review of personnel and practices is possible for presbytery. It should be noted, however, that the application requirements, assessment, and candidate convener procedures are all informed by the NAW processes. NAW operates under the auspices of the Leadership Sub-Committee (LSC) of Council of Assembly (COA) as does the ministry training programme through KCML. All of these components are related in providing a pathway towards ordained ministry. Therefore, any review or changes to the assessment process and ministry training must involve NAW and KCML and is ultimately a responsibility of the LSC and COA. To this point, Rev Dr Keown concedes that Presbytery convey these concerns with COA to be addressed at the national level of PCANZ as a "matter of urgency."

So, what is the real issue for Northern Presbytery? The need to address some of the above concerns has a bearing on the number of future ministers. Not only are the current processes seen as restrictive for ministry candidates who enter it, Rev Dr Keown fears that they are also discouraging and unattractive to prospective candidates. She claims that “too many future ministers are walking away because the actual system is unrealistic.” Moreover, some candidates consider “they would be better off going into other denominational systems and processes, even going overseas.” Her distress is that unless positive steps are taken to improve the processes towards ordained ministry, the ramifications would likely result in a very real shortage of ministers as well as candidates coming through to assessment. She contends, that this does not necessarily mean “lowering standards” of process requirements, rather “making it possible for people to begin the process in the first place.” The inference is that there are possibly fewer people applying for ordained ministry. If this is the case, then the real issue may not be any fault in the current candidacy process towards ordained ministry. Instead, it could very well be the lack of candidates that are entering it.

The process begins at the local congregation level, but it is at the presbytery level where any application for ministry candidacy is officially recognised. While a person may have his/her sense of call and application for ministry discerned and endorsed by the appropriate people in the congregation, it is the presbytery (primarily through the Candidate Convener) that receives and decides whether the application requirements are satisfactory to begin the process. The level of engagement between congregations (parishioners and ministers) and presbytery about ministry candidacy is perhaps the gauge of how many people are contemplating ordained ministry as a vocation. The heart of this study wants to know how well or poorly Northern Presbytery is doing regarding ministry recruitment.

The concerns raised by Rev Dr Keown have implications for Northern Presbytery. They challenge Northern Presbytery to examine the status of ministry within its bounds with respect to the sufficiency of ministers, but more so candidates for ministry. To assist that endeavour, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

- **Is there a shortage of ministers in Northern Presbytery?**
- **Is there a decline of candidates for ministry from Northern Presbytery?**
- **If so, what factors contribute to the decline of candidates?**
- **What can be done to encourage more people to consider applying for ordained ministry?**

To gain a greater appreciation of the issues raised, chapter 2 considers a literature review of clergy shortage and recruitment within the context of the wider church. Examining the experiences of other churches as well as some of the research done in this area may provide a broader understanding of the concerns presented already and how they have impacted other Christian traditions in different contexts.

Following that, chapter 3 seeks to clarify the clergy and candidate status within PCANZ and Northern Presbytery. It will show how similar or dissimilar the issues are reflected in both contexts. Comparing them to other denominations may also provide some insights of what is happening in the broader New Zealand setting. It will

show whether this is an issue particular to PCANZ and Northern Presbytery or whether it permeates other traditions.

Chapter 4 presents the methodology of this research and the assessment of it. In essence, a qualitative approach is adopted which incorporates strategies of both interviews with respondents involving parishioners, ministers, and those who have served as candidate conveners for Northern Presbytery. Another strategy is assessing questionnaire data amongst parishioners and ministers. Both strategies are used to enhance an understanding of people's experiences with respect to their involvement with ministry candidacy in Northern Presbytery.

Chapters 5 and 6 look at the experiences of parishioners, ministers, and Northern Presbytery candidate conveners to gain a perspective of what factors contribute to people's decisions about ordained ministry as a vocation in the PCANZ through Northern Presbytery. Instead of parishioners who were successful in the candidacy process, this study focuses on those who either contemplated applying for ministry, but then decided not to, those who applied but later withdrew from the process, and those who applied and were unsuccessful. As ones who have been through the candidacy process themselves, observing the role that ministers play in the candidacy process is important to evaluate the extent of their influence upon the journey of candidates. These are attempts to examine perceptions and practices that have a bearing on ministry recruitment in Northern Presbytery.

Lastly, chapter 7 explores prospects of what might be an appropriate response to the ministry recruitment challenges within Northern Presbytery. Instead of trying to seek changes to the candidacy processes, which are under the auspices of NAW and LSC, the proposals are aimed at what can possibly be done at the presbytery level. Northern Presbytery can consider implementing these, if it so wishes, as a way of hopefully improving its candidacy numbers. The hope is that they may also be a helpful resource for other presbyteries in the PCANZ.

## CHAPETR 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW: Clergy and recruitment shortage

The decline of the PCANZ is a growing concern. Ramifications for a potential shortage of ministers and ministry candidates is part of it. To appreciate the challenges that Presbyterianism is facing in New Zealand, it would be beneficial to understand this phenomenon in light of the wider Christian Church. This chapter considers studies and experiences of some Christian denominations overseas with respect to the decline of clergy numbers and challenges to recruitment for ordained ministry.

While clergy shortage might be a relatively recent concern for the PCANZ, it seems to have been an issue for other traditions for quite some time. Within the Catholic Church in the United States, the work of Schoenherr and Young (1993) identified the declining numbers of priests while making bold predictions of its detriment for the future of the Catholic Church.<sup>1</sup> They showed that the US Diocesan priest population in 1965 was 35,070. By 1985, it had reduced by nearly twenty percent to 28,240. Using demographics, Schoenherr and Young predicted that by 2005, there would be, by a moderate estimation, 21,030 priests in active service. This showed a consistent downward trend foretelling a forty percent decline of priests since 1965. Reviewing and modifying their work in 1998, Young predicted that by 2015, the decline will be much worse (forty-six percent).<sup>2</sup> In 2005, sociological research on clergy and religious leaders in the United States found that Schoenherr and Young's predictions up to 2005 had "been borne out."<sup>3</sup> Schoenherr and Young's work showed that clergy shortage in the Catholic Church was real and predictable.

The obvious question is why is the decline in clergy numbers happening? It is expected that retirement, resignations, and death of clergy are contributing factors to their shortage. More distressing, however, was the paralleled decline of seminarians to the priesthood. In surveying Catholic college students in the U.S. to determine the main deterrents keeping men from becoming priests, Dean Hoge found that the celibacy requirement was the most important single deterrent.<sup>4</sup> If celibacy were made optional, Hoge believes that the number of seminarians would increase by about four times. He was also of the mind that more would be interested in priesthood if there was a fixed term of ten to fifteen years, rather than for life.<sup>5</sup> By end of the 1990s, the recruitment of new priests from seminaries only made up thirty to forty percent of the total number of priests who retired, resigned, or died.<sup>6</sup> Rather than a pessimistic view, a CARA Report in 2012 saw these figures as providing some optimism that the clergy

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<sup>1</sup> Richard A. Schoenherr and Lawrence A. Young, *Full Pews and Empty Altars: Demographics of the Priest Shortage in the United States Catholic Dioceses*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence A. Young, *Assessing and Updating*

<sup>3</sup> Dean R. Hoge, "Religious Leadership/Clergy," in *Handbook of Religion and Social Institutions*, ed. Helen Rose Ebaugh, University of Houston, Houston, Texas, pp. 373-390, 2000, p. 378.

<sup>4</sup> Hoge, D. R., *The future of Catholic leadership: Responses to the priest shortage*, Sheed & Ward, Kansas City, MO, 1987.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Hoge, "Religious Leadership/Clergy," p. 378.

shortage was being eased.<sup>7</sup> While this is encouraging, the report accepts that recruitment figures needed to be a lot higher to end the shortage. “It cannot be done with fewer than 500 diocesan ordinations per year. In fact, the Church needs more like 700 per year to establish stability in the numbers of U.S. diocesan priests overall.”<sup>8</sup>

The positivity for an increase of Catholic clergy in the U.S. context does not seem to be reflected in other places around the world. In Ireland, the situation is dire whereby one of its prestigious seminaries, Maynooth, that produced so many priests in the past, is now a shadow of its former glory.<sup>9</sup> As well as the celibacy issue, the rising secularity in Irish society and its disillusionment over sexual abuses and cover-ups by clergy have contributed to diminishing interest in the priesthood. Observations from the Vatican in 2020 show that the disinterest has spread throughout Europe and the Americas whereby numbers in minor seminaries for high-school-age individuals wishing to become priests has dropped for the third consecutive year everywhere except in Asia.<sup>10</sup> The overarching concern is that fewer and fewer people are making themselves available to serve as priests to their people.

Clergy shortage is not confined to the Catholic Church solely. In 1999, a news article by Condren and Raeke captured this increasingly troubling trend in other Christian denominations across the United States.<sup>11</sup> The denominations include the Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church USA, Assemblies of God, United Church of Christ, Lutheran Church, and American Baptist Churches, to name some. The article describes the clergy shortage as a “Catholic Church dilemma now spreading to Protestantism.” The shortage means that many congregations will be unable to attract educated, experienced pastors with much needed skills. In some cases, smaller congregations may eventually have to depend entirely on lay leadership, close, or merge with other congregations. Such worries are exemplified in the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church which found that fourteen percent of the denomination's 6,100 congregations were seeking pastors and an additional eleven percent also lacked pastors but were not attempting to fill the positions. Taken together, it means that nearly a quarter (1,464) of these congregations would be without a pastor until the vacancies were settled. The reasons for clergy decline in such denominations are also varied.

But a parallel dilemma is the lack of new clergy. Condren and Raeke identified that the number of newly trained clergy graduating from seminaries over the past 15 years has declined overall. Their study suggests that as far back as 1984, recruitment for ministry in Protestant churches was beginning to wane.<sup>12</sup> Some contributing factors to this was negative associations with the pressures of ministry resulting in pastors suffering from burnout

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<sup>7</sup> “Is the decline in priestly vocations ending?”, in *The CARA Report*, Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, Vol. 18 No. 1, Georgetown University: Washington, D.C., Summer 2012, p.10.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> James T. Keane, “The future of Catholic Ireland”, in *America Magazine: The Jesuit Review*, Vol. 218 / No.5, pp.19-26, March 5, America Press Inc: New York, 2018, p.20.

<sup>10</sup> Claire Giangravé, “Clergy shortage grows to more than 3k Catholics for every priest, Vatican data shows,” in *Religion News Service*, <https://religionnews.com/2020/10/16/a-clergy-shortage-there-are-now-more-than-14k-catholics-for-every-priest-vatican-data-shows/>

<sup>11</sup> Dave Condren and Carolyn Raeke, “Empty pulpits: Protestant churches are facing dwindling ranks of clergy,” in *The Buffalo News*, November 27, 1999. Accessed from [https://buffalonews.com/news/empty-pulpits-protestant-churches-are-facing-dwindling-ranks-ofclergy/article\\_f870adf4-0ed5-5f78-bc5d-7f646808ed04.html](https://buffalonews.com/news/empty-pulpits-protestant-churches-are-facing-dwindling-ranks-ofclergy/article_f870adf4-0ed5-5f78-bc5d-7f646808ed04.html)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

and leaving. The dramatic changes in the nature of the pastorate means that some pastors are not only leaving, but religious younger generations are avoiding entering seminaries. In his study, *Rethinking Ministerial Ideals in Light of the Clergy Crisis*, Paul R. Kolbet contends that “the problem of recruitment is the result of a destabilization of the profession that has occurred in recent decades and has called into question the value of the clergy’s traditional skills and knowledge.”<sup>13</sup> Instead of a vocation of service in the church, Barna Research found that even “faithful, kingdom-minded teens and young adults” are increasingly attracted to other vocations “where their desire to make a difference can have a more entrepreneurial expression without the (real or perceived) institutional baggage of church.”<sup>14</sup> The result of all this is that it is getting more difficult to recruit people to the ministry; especially younger folk.<sup>15</sup>

There seems to be a focus on younger recruits to church ministry. Potential longevity in the ministry of a younger person, as opposed to a much older person, is perhaps an obvious expectation. However, it has been seen above that even younger ministers are prone to leaving church ministry earlier than expected instead of waiting until retirement. The study of Lovett H. Weems (Jr) and Ann A. Michel (2008) of clergy under the age of thirty-five in the United Methodist Church in the United States proved what many denominational and congregational leaders have suspected for a long time: that the number of these younger people graduating from seminary and entering ordained ministry has declined dramatically over the years.<sup>16</sup> Among the many aspects involved, including some identified already in other denominations, Weems and Michel also highlight factors which can occur much earlier in the journey towards church ministry. These factors involve enlistment efforts, seminary culture, the candidacy and ordination processes, seminary tuition and debt, the adequacy of clergy compensation, appointment practices, support structures for young clergy, and generational differences between younger clergy and older congregants. When any of these aspects become barriers instead of bridges for potential candidates for ministry, they are indicators that the process in whole, or in part, is perhaps not functioning as well as it should. In his Doctoral thesis addressing this concern within the United Methodist Church, David Rittgers suggests that although these factors may be the reality for prospective clergy, they must be environments that are conducive to enabling a clear discernment of call. He concludes that “having a clear sense of the call of God to leadership in the church is the most crucial and foundational factor in determining whether or not young people make the vocational choice to become pastors.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Paul R. Kolbet, “Rethinking Ministerial Ideals in Light of the Clergy Crisis,” in *Ecclesiology*, 5 192–211, Brill, Leiden, Netherlands, 2009, p.192.

<sup>14</sup> “The Aging of America’s Pastors,” in *Barna Research Releases in Leaders & Pastors*, March 1, 2017. <https://www.barna.com/research/aging-americas-pastors/>

<sup>15</sup> “What’s on the Minds of America’s Pastors,” in *Barna Research Releases in Leaders & Pastors in State of the Church 2020*, February 3, <https://www.barna.com/research/state-of-the-church-2020/>

<sup>16</sup> Lovett H. Weems (Jr) and Ann A. Michel, *The Crisis of Younger Clergy*, Abingdon Press: Nashville, Tennessee, 2008.

<sup>17</sup> David Thomas Rittgers, “Call Waiting: The young clergy crisis in the United Methodist Church,” dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Ministry, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky, 2013, p.112.

The Presbyterian Church USA is facing dire challenges to its efforts in recruiting more ministers. In the September 2017 of its magazine, *The Presbyterian Outlook*, a senior director of Theological Education Funds Development at the Presbyterian Foundation anticipated that three-quarters of the Presbyterian pastors currently serving congregations will be eligible to retire over the next decade.<sup>18</sup> The article noted that over the past two decades, the Presbyterian Church USA membership has dropped from 2.63 million in 1996 to 1.48 million in 2016, a decline of forty-three percent. The reality is that most congregations are small, some will inevitably close, and many cannot afford a full-time minister. What is interesting is that if the number of church members and congregations continue to reduce, but the projected aging clergy do not in fact retire and a small but steady number of newly ordained ministers keep coming through, then rather than a shortage, it creates the potential of a surplus of ministers. This scenario raises the question, as pointed out in the article, of “what kind of narrative the PC(USA)’s leadership is advancing – both for people considering becoming ministers, and for congregations and Presbyterians trying to identify and encourage those with gifts for ministry.”<sup>19</sup> An obvious challenge for those considering training for church ministry is that, under such circumstances, jobs might not be there once they graduate. Yet, it seems more likely that clergy reaching retiring age will eventually retire leaving plenty of opportunity for newly ordained ministers, but also leaving a massive hole in clergy numbers. Retired Presbyterian minister, Lawton Posey, comments on this matter that “the denomination and its constituent presbyteries must take a hard and close look at the formation and deployments of those who wish to do ministry in our church.”<sup>20</sup>

The Baptist Church, or more specifically the Southern Baptist Church in the United States, is also experiencing decline whereby its membership reduced by 435,632 since 2019 to fourteen million in 2020. From 2006, however, the shortfall was 2.3 million.<sup>21</sup> Despite the recorded decline in membership, baptisms, worship attendance, and financial giving of its members, figures for pastors and candidates for ministry proved difficult to attain. Perhaps the loose interdependent nature of Baptist congregations is a contributing factor. What might be inferred from such areas of decline within the Baptist Church is that its pastors and potential pastors could be experiencing the same.

It has been seen that, although many Christian denominations have been undergoing decline in their membership for many decades, the implication of clergy shortage is now real and critical. Not only does this have an impact on congregational life and contribution to the wider denomination, but it also has consequences for the recruitment processes and institutions (seminaries or theological colleges) which play a role in ministry formation. Clergy leaving church ministry through retirement, death, or for other reasons is not new. What is relatively new is

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<sup>18</sup> Leslie Scanlon, “Pastoral pipeline: Will there be enough ministers to serve the Presbyterian Church?,” in *The Presbyterian Outlook*, September 26, 2017. <https://pres-outlook.org/2017/09/pastoral-pipeline-will-enough-ministers-serve-presbyterian-church/>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Lawton W. Posey, “Shortage of pastors?,” in *The Presbyterian Outlook*, November 7, 2005. <https://pres-outlook.org/2005/11/shortage-of-pastors/>

<sup>21</sup> Bob Smietana, “Southern Baptist decline continues, denomination has lost more than 2 million members since 2006,” in *Religion News Service*, May 21, 2021, <https://religionnews.com/2021/05/21/southern-baptist-decline-continues-denomination-has-lost-more-than-2-million-members-since-2006/>

that fewer and fewer people are taking up the opportunity of a vocation in ministry. The reasons may be mixed, but the reality is very clear.

Exploring this phenomenon that has been going on for quite some time overseas suggests that churches in New Zealand are probably not exempt. Therefore, it is suspected that Christian denominations, including PCANZ, are perhaps beginning to wake up to and grapple with the same challenges. To be sure and to appreciate the ministry status in Northern Presbytery and PCANZ as a whole, we turn our attention to the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

### CURRENT STATUS: Ministers and candidates for ministry

The previous chapter explored some of the studies and literature on clergy shortage and ministry recruitment in the overseas context. With concerns raised about the candidacy process for ministry in the PCANZ potentially deterring future candidates (and therefore future ministers), it may not be a surprise to find that the overseas experience reflected in the New Zealand context as well. To be certain, examining the status of ministers and ordained ministry recruitment in the PCANZ and Northern Presbytery is the focus of this chapter. Two key questions this chapter seeks to answer are:

1. Is there a minister shortage in Northern Presbytery?
2. Are there fewer candidates coming through for ordained ministry within Northern Presbytery?

As well as reviewing the ministry status within Northern Presbytery and PCANZ, expanding this to note the broad situation in other denominations within New Zealand will provide some helpful comparisons. It will enable a greater appreciation of the issues within the context of Aotearoa.

#### Ministry status within Northern Presbytery

Northern Presbytery comprises of the greater Auckland region and Northland. The populations of these areas continue to grow making it the largest presbytery within PCANZ.<sup>22</sup> However, the number of PCANZ congregations and membership have been decreasing. In 2019, the *A Case for Change* document by the Northern Presbytery “Think Tank” team painted a somewhat bleak reality of its status.

*Currently, our Northern Presbytery comprises 74 churches across Auckland, including 8 Cooperating Ventures and 4 Pacific Churches. Over the last ten years (2008 to 2018) membership among Northern Presbytery churches decreased by 23%, which was similar to 22% reduction in membership across PCANZ. For the same ten-year period attendances among Northern Presbytery churches decreased by 44%, a bit higher than the recorded 40% reduction across PCANZ.*

*From information collected recently for the Presbyterian Churches across Auckland it is clear that there has been a 7% decline in membership and a 6% decline in attendances over the last five years (2014 to 2018). Only five churches have had a significant (>15%) increase in both membership and attendances. In contrast, seventeen churches have had a significant decrease in both membership and attendances. Further, fourteen had less than 40 people attending church on a Sunday. But, which is encouraging, 30 churches had more than 15% of children or youth attending church, a further 21 had between 5% and 15% of children or youth attending church. Also, we have a number of congregations in buildings that are out-dated, tired, requiring upgrading or redevelopment.*

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<sup>22</sup> Census 2018 shows that the population of Auckland was 1,571,718; up nearly 156,000 from 2013 <https://www.stats.govt.nz/tools/2018-census-place-summaries/auckland-region>. The population of Northland was 179, 076; up nearly 30,000 from 2013. <https://www.stats.govt.nz/tools/2018-census-place-summaries/northland-region>

*In terms of ministry, there are currently 78 active ministers across Auckland, including chaplains. When considering their ages, it is likely that about 19 ministers, or 24%, will likely retire in the next five years and the introduction of new ministers into Auckland is a small, variable number. This reduction will substantially worsen over the next 10 to 15 years, as only 34% of our ministers are aged below 55. If nothing changes, there will not be enough ministers to support all of our churches, particularly if the same model of ministry continues unilaterally.<sup>23</sup>*

Northern Presbytery acknowledges that, apart from some encouraging signs of growth, there is considerable and ongoing weakening of ministry within its congregations. Its largely aging membership is also being reflected in its ministers of which approximately a quarter will likely retire in the very near future. Fear of a minister shortage within Northern Presbytery is seriously noted. Just as disturbing is the admission of the lack of new ministers coming through.

To better appreciate the concerns about the status of ministers in Northern Presbytery, it deserves closer attention. The *Case for Change* noted that there were seventy-eight active people in ministry roles across the wider Auckland region. Since there are seventy-four parishes in the presbytery, the number of people in ministry might suggest that there is more than enough ministers to provide ministry to parishes. Rather than a shortage of ministers for each parish, there appears to be a surplus of four ministers. However, a closer look reveals that of the seventy-four parishes within the presbytery, eight parishes have more than one minister, forty-five have one full-time minister, fourteen have one part-time minister, while seven have no minister.<sup>24</sup>

These numbers may not necessarily indicate a current deficiency of ministers. The problem of deficiency arises in the very near future when a significant number of ministers will be nearing retirement age. Of the seventy-eight ministers, nineteen (24 percent) were aged between sixty and sixty-four years. Since these details were recorded in 2019, it is projected that by 2024 (in nearly two years' time), this group will reach retirement age. Moreover, fourteen ministers (18 percent) were already at retirement age. By 2024, the combination of these age groups will mean that forty-two percent of ministers may not potentially be in ministry.<sup>25</sup> If, however, they continue to do so, is it a realistic and fair expectation to put on them? Probably not. The reduced availability of ministers is clearly obvious unless new ministers can be called.

### **Ministry status within PCANZ**

Considering the ministry status with PCANZ is important because ministers in Northern Presbytery can come from anywhere within the national church. Some of the figures in the *Case for Change* reflects a growing unease of how things are in the wider PCANZ. Apart from the decline of membership and church attendance, there are other aspects that paint a grim picture of Presbyterian ministry across New Zealand. Drawing from the *2017 Survey of Parish Life Report* prepared by the Church Property Trustees, the 2020 Theological Education and

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<sup>23</sup> Executive Summary, *A Case for Change: An advisory paper to the Northern Presbytery*, October 2019, p.1.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

Leadership Training (TELT) report highlighted that from 1981 to 2017, the number of PCANZ parishes declined by over twenty percent.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the report suggested that in mid-2019 there were around one hundred and thirty (130) parishes or about a third of the total of parishes without ministry settlement. An unknown number of these parishes will not be able to support a full-time or part-time minister.<sup>27</sup>

The concern about the viability of parishes to support a minister parallels the issue of the availability of ministers. Like Northern Presbytery, the challenge for PCANZ is a diminishing clergy number largely due to many ministers nearing retirement. The TELT report conveys:

*Figures held by the PCANZ National Office show that in 2019 the age profile of currently active Ministers for whom data was held was significantly skewed to older age groups, with over forty percent of such Ministers being aged sixty or over and a further forty percent being aged fifty or over. While it is possible that the sixty-three Ministers for whom age data is not available are significantly younger on average, it would still not change the overall picture greatly. There will still be around one hundred and fifty (150) Ministers aged sixty and over, many of whom will be likely to retire from ministry within the next ten years, and a further one hundred and fifty (150) who will be likely to have retired by the end of the following decade.<sup>28</sup>*

The projection for a future shortage of ministers is real. Since the model of ministry within PCANZ requires a significant input from ordained ministers, the declining sufficiency of ministers can create increased pressure on ministries. In its 2021 update, the TELT report makes it explicit.

*We are in the midst of a significant season of retirements; we have heard of many middle-aged clergy reporting significant stress; we are seeing a number of newly ordained ministers exiting from their first appointments sooner than might be expected; and we hear that some ordinands are unsure about taking up positions within the PCANZ. We are in crisis...Story after story is telling us the same information, the status quo is not sustainable.<sup>29</sup>*

It can be seen that PCANZ is grappling with human resource shortage in ministry. While parish membership is declining and more and more are vacant, there is intensifying strain on the minister number which is also waning. The TELT report concedes that the PCANZ urgently needs “to find new ways of bringing people into ordained ministry and other ministry roles at all stages of life.”<sup>30</sup> These words echo the concerns of Presbyterian minister and former acting principal of KCML, Kevin Ward, who said of this challenge: “it has become an increasingly dominant theme of discussion and conversations particularly among our younger leaders; that our current understanding and model of ministry is creaking at the joints and not serving us very well. We are trying to squeeze the increasingly wide variety of ministries we need into a very narrow box, and for many the fit is increasingly uncomfortable.”<sup>31</sup> While Ward advocates the need for a widening of ordained ministry from just the “narrow box” of minister of word

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<sup>26</sup> Theological Education and Leadership Training report to Presbyteries 2020, p21. Parish numbers dropped from about 500 to 382.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p.22.

<sup>29</sup> TELT Second Report 2021

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Kevin Ward, “Reimagining ministry and ordination for the post-Christendom mainline Protestant Church,” *PCS 4* (2019–2020) 75–97, 81.

and sacrament, the “increasingly wide variety of ministries” implies that more people are required to be involved in ordained ministry.

At present, there are four stands of ministry in PCANZ. They are: National ordained ministry, Local ordained ministry, Local ministry teams, and Amorangi. While Amorangi ministry is prevalent with parishes of Te Aka Puaho, NOM and LOM are mainly the preferred pathways in the rest of PCANZ parishes. Although not providing any figures, TELT asserts that there is a growing number of candidates choosing the LOM pathway as opposed to the NOM pathway. The *Case for Change* report offers that there is one NOM training for every five training LOMs.<sup>32</sup> Reasons for this preference may vary including a shorter timeframe and less academic rigour toward ordination.

However, data from the Personnel Work Group of PCANZ helped provide some clarity. Their records show that from 2011 to 2021, a total of twenty-three LOMs became ministers. The numbers per year peaked in 2019 with five but have dropped to two for 2020 and 2021 respectively. These numbers do not seem to support the view that more people are choosing the LOM pathway to ministry rather than NOM. While LOM numbers may go some way to help curb the overall shortfall of ministers, even the TELT report concedes that “because of the way it is currently structured this will not necessarily assist with meeting the needs of all parishes, nor might it produce sufficient ministers with the breadth and depth of preparation that the church requires to lead it into the future.”<sup>33</sup>

The TELT reports are helpful in broadening the extent of the ministry concerns facing PCANZ. While much of it focused on the status of parish ministry, the status of training for ordained ministry, as well as the need to explore alternative pathways towards ordained ministry, very little mention, if any, was given to the status of candidacy for ministry. Recruitment is the pathway that must work well in the machinery of the PCANZ before any ministry training, probation, ordination, or induction into parish work can happen.

Another avenue to alleviate the perceived minister shortage in the PCANZ is the reception process. This is a process of receiving clergy from other denominations into the PCANZ. Figures from the Personnel Workgroup revealed that from 2010 to 2021, a total of thirty-nine ministers were accepted to serve in the PCANZ. This is nearly forty percent more than the LOM total for roughly the same period. It shows that not only are these ministers a significant contribution to the minister numbers in the PCANZ, but they also appear to be filling the ministry vacancies which PCANZ-trained ministers and candidates cannot do. It might be fair to say that if it were not for already-trained ministers being received into the PCANZ, then the minister shortage in the PCANZ would actually be more marked.

### **Other denominations in New Zealand**

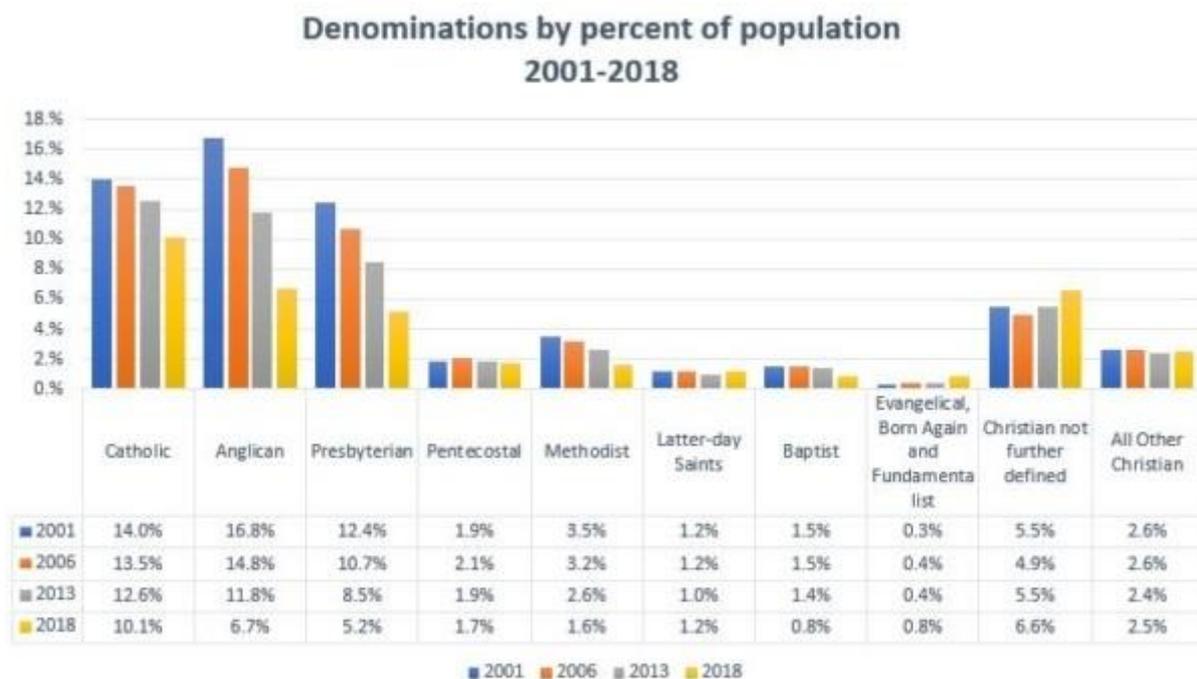
The PCANZ may not be the only church facing a crisis of clergy shortage in New Zealand. It may be helpful to briefly look at how other denominations in New Zealand are faring in the same regard.

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<sup>32</sup> Case for Change, p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> TELT 2020, p.22.

The decline of Christian churches in New Zealand is marked. Census New Zealand data shows that religious affiliation of the total population decreased from about sixty percent in 2001 to thirty seven percent in 2018.<sup>34</sup> Breaking it down into denominations, Dr Sandy Kerr from Carey Graduate School noted that while some of the smaller denominations experienced a degree of growth, other mainline ones such as Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists all experienced decline in the last two decades (see her chart below).<sup>35</sup> The statistics show that in the past the ministries of these churches may have been very effective for their growth. But by the early 2000s they were not able to lead and sustain their members resulting in significant reduction. Might the same be said of their clergy or potential clergy?



The Roman Catholic Church is experiencing a shortage of home-grown clergy. More parishes are apparently closing or merging with others to become one parish. While this happens in some instances due to dwindling parishioner numbers, in most it is because of the lack of available priests.<sup>36</sup> Likewise, seminarian numbers have fluctuated over the last twenty years, but in more recent times, they have nearly halved from a peak of thirty-one in 2015 to fifteen in 2021.<sup>37</sup> A way of bolstering clergy numbers to meet the needs of parishes has been to draw

<sup>34</sup> 2013 Census Quick Stats about culture and identity, p.27. <https://www.nbr.co.nz/sites/default/files/quickstats-culture-identity.pdf>. See also 2018 Census Stats <https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/losing-our-religion>

<sup>35</sup> Sandy Kerr, "Do Statistics Really Matter?: Census Musings," in [https://www.carey.ac.nz/2019/10/do-statistics-really-matter/#\\_ftn1](https://www.carey.ac.nz/2019/10/do-statistics-really-matter/#_ftn1)

<sup>36</sup> "Your morning coffee is cancelled. #LightsOut," in *CathNews New Zealand*, Thursday, July 8th, 2021, <https://cathnews.co.nz/2021/07/08/think-differently/> accessed 3/10/21. See also "Catholic churches across Christchurch to merge parishes," in <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/391705/catholic-churches-across-christchurch-to-merge-parishes>, accessed 3/10/21

<sup>37</sup> Seminarian numbers provided from the Good Shepherd Theological College in Auckland.

upon priests from abroad. In 2014, Owena Orejana noted that the influx of overseas priests and seminarians “have helped ease the shortage of clergy in various dioceses.”<sup>38</sup>

Effective future leadership in the Baptist Church is also an important issue. Jonny Weir, the director of Ministry Training at Carey Bible College, is convinced that “identifying and empowering the next generation of Baptist leaders to lead in fresh, creative and faithful ways” is the appropriate response to the challenges of ministry.<sup>39</sup> In part, this is reflected by the encouraging number of ministry graduates that increased in the last decade.<sup>40</sup> Another contributing factor more recently has been making the ministry training programme available by distance. Even though a cap of fifteen intakes per year was implemented, the programme has consistently met this cap for the last three years.<sup>41</sup> Rather than a parallel to clergy and recruitment shortage as seen in the PCANZ, the Baptist Church situation appears to show an opposite trend.

### **Ministry candidacy status within Northern Presbytery**

The above figures for LOMs and NOMs is perhaps evidence of a recruitment crisis for ministry leadership across parishes in PCANZ. Indications are that fewer people today are stepping into the call to vocational ministry compared to past experiences. This poses a major challenge for congregations seeking to call a minister and for Presbytery functioning.

So, what is the status of candidates for ministry? If there is a decline in the number of candidates of Northern Presbytery, then how significant is it? Northern Presbytery came into existence in 2011 with the combining of four presbyteries – South Auckland, Auckland, North Shore, and Northland. While it is preferable to observe the number of candidates over a longer period, for example twenty years back to 2001, obtaining records from the respective past presbyteries has proven much harder. Therefore, candidate figures will be explored from 2011 to date.

National assessment details for NOMs show a clear and gradual reduction of candidate numbers over the years (see TABLE 1). Since 2011 the total figures of candidates from various presbyteries has fluctuated, but, in the main, has shown a downward trend. In 2012, the total number of candidates for NOM that attended national assessment was seventeen, being the highest in the decade up to date. Since then, the number has dropped by nearly eighty-two percent to three in 2021. This should be a great concern for PCANZ as a whole.

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<sup>38</sup> Owena Orejana, “Many priests in NZ now from overseas,” in NZCatholic, posted June 6, 2014, <https://nzcatholic.org.nz/2014/06/06/many-priests-in-nz-now-from-overseas/> accessed 3/10/21

<sup>39</sup> Charles Hewlett, “Forming leaders for the future,” in *Baptist Magazine*, Baptist Churches of New Zealand, <https://baptistmag.org.nz/forming-leaders-for-the-future/> accessed 14/9/21

<sup>40</sup> Baptist ministry graduate figures provided by Jonny Weir, director of Ministry Training at Carey Bible College. Figures showed that from 2010 to 2019, a total of 87 graduates compared to 74 in the previous decade.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 2019 – intake was 15, 2020 – intake was 16, 2021 – intake was 15.

<b>TABLE 1</b>			
<b>Number of candidates at National Assessment from 2011 to 2021</b>			
<b>Year</b>	<b>Total number of candidates (across all Presbyteries)</b>	<b>Number of candidates from Northern Presbytery</b>	<b>Number of successful candidates from Northern Presbytery</b>
<b>2011</b>	10	6	5
<b>2012</b>	17	5	3
<b>2013</b>	12	2	2
<b>2014</b>	8	4	3
<b>2015</b>	6	0	0
<b>2016</b>	9	3	3
<b>2017</b>	5	0	0
<b>2018</b>	6	2	2
<b>2019</b>	6	1	0
<b>2020</b>	6	2	1
<b>2021</b>	3	0	0

The figures are not encouraging for Northern Presbytery candidates as well. Although they made up just over half (six) of the total number of candidates who attended national assessment in 2011, they have continually reduced over time. More alarming is the fact that in three respective years, 2015, 2017, and 2021, there were no candidates at all from Northern Presbytery. From 2015 to date, the average number progressing to national assessment has been 1.3. This is a very sobering statistic for the largest presbytery in PCANZ to process so few candidates. When reflecting on the potential loss (forty-two percent) of ministers in Northern Presbytery when reaching and exceeding retirement age by 2024, the scarcity of successful candidates who become newly trained ministers to fill vacancies is deeply worrying. It should not be taken for granted, that newly trained ministers, including those who were originally candidates from Northern Presbytery, will automatically take on a vacancy within Northern Presbytery. If such ministers choose to begin ministry in other presbyteries, it will furthermore compound the presbytery's minister shortage.

On a more positive note, however, candidates from Northern Presbytery who did attend national assessment have been more successful, than not, in being accepted into ministry training. Of the twenty-five candidates from 2011 to 2021, nineteen (75 percent) had their call to ministry affirmed at national assessment. This may reflect the quality of candidates and how well prepared they were in the assessment process. Although encouraging, the successful candidates from Northern Presbytery are a rapidly diminishing number.

The above figures give a picture of the status of NOM candidates from Northern Presbytery. Unfortunately, they do not describe the whole picture. Apart from those who are endorsed by a presbytery to attend national assessment, there are others who are not. Furthermore, there are those whose application to presbytery are accepted and there are those whose applications are declined or not processed until all relevant information or requirements are attained. Then there are those who have made enquiries about candidacy for ministry but have not followed through by applying. What these indicate is that there appears to be more people engaging with candidate conveners about candidacy for ministry than the recorded numbers of those endorsed at presbytery assessment and progress to national assessment.

Candidate convener reports to Northern Presbytery Council confirm this despite some vague details and gaps of reports over the years (from 2011 to 2016). In 2017, it was noted that there were “more than the usual number of enquiries from potential candidates for National Ordained Ministry.”<sup>42</sup> An unspecified number of applications were received of which, after vetting them for all the necessary requirements, an invitation to presbytery assessment was extended to six. Again, in 2018, two candidates were endorsed for national assessment although the total number of applications to presbytery was unknown.<sup>43</sup> This was a similar situation in 2019 with the candidate convener mentioning receiving “some rather eclectic referrals for LOM training” as well as enquiries from people well into their retirement years.<sup>44</sup> In 2020, six applications for NOM were received of which only two were recommended to national assessment. However, no mention is made of the number (if any) of conversations with people enquiring about candidacy even if not making an application. It is unfortunate that, in some years, the total number of applications made as well as the number of conversations or enquiries about candidacy were not noted. If they had been, it would have given a clearer picture of the extent of interest and engagement regarding candidacy. It could show that there are far more people engaging with candidacy for ministry than the few who are successful at national assessment. This should give Northern Presbytery some encouragement.

LOM figures for Northern Presbytery going back to 2011 were not easy to obtain. Candidate convener reports from 2017 to 2020 showed that only four people were approved as LOM probationers with two withdrawing from the process leaving the other two progressing on to ordination. As seen above, although in 2019 there was obviously a good number of enquiries about LOMs, they do not seem to have advanced to the application, assessment, and endorsement stages. Although the interest here in the LOM pathway may echo the positive

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<sup>42</sup> Ministry Workgroup Report, June 2017

<sup>43</sup> Ministry Workgroup Report, July 2018

<sup>44</sup> Ministry Workgroup Report, February 2021

perceptions of the TELT and Case for Change reports, the overall sense is that actual national LOM and Northern Presbytery figures do not reflect the same level of confidence. Combined with the declining number of NOMs over more recent years, a shortage in candidacy for ordained ministry appears to be very real.

To conclude, this chapter attempted to understand the clergy status within PCANZ as a whole and for Northern Presbytery in particular. It found that there is growing concern of the availability of ministers in the near future with many reaching the age of retirement and possibly discontinuing in parish ministry. While retirement and other reasons for ending ministry are not new or unexpected, filling the void of these ministers is becoming increasingly challenging. Within the last decade the declining numbers of candidates trained through the NOM and LOM programmes will most unlikely fill vacant positions. This is also reflected in other denominations in the New Zealand context. Some respite has come through the reception of ministers already trained and ordained from other denominations into the PCANZ. In many ways, the suspected parallels of clergy and recruitment decline between churches overseas and the New Zealand context has been confirmed.

The chapter wanted to answer two questions. The first: "Is there a minister shortage in Northern Presbytery?" The answer is: not at the moment. While parishes in Northern Presbytery have experienced decline in membership and church attendance, the clear majority of parishes are served with at least one minister. However, this could all change in a few short years when many ministers will reach or exceed retirement age. The second question is: "Are there fewer candidates coming through for ordained ministry within Northern Presbytery?" The answer is: it appears so. While the number of candidates can fluctuate over the years, there has been a clear and steady decline of candidates from Northern Presbytery. It could be that the number of applicants and those who enquire with the presbytery candidate convener about candidacy each year are higher than the actual number whose candidacy is endorsed. But they are still unsubstantiated. Overall, the findings in this chapter suggests that there is very good reason for Northern Presbytery, as well as PCANZ, to be worried about the status of its future leaders in ordained ministry, especially with respect to candidates for ministry.

## CHAPTER 4

### Methodology: Mixed-Methods approach

People's concepts of spirituality and how that shapes their decisions and actions can be complex. This can also include a person's sense of call by God to church ministry as well as how they perceive their experience in the candidacy process. In particular, the study wants to know how these factors contribute to the decisions parishioners make about the pursuit of ordained ministry in the PCANZ through Northern Presbytery. To achieve this, the research uses a mixed-methods approach that incorporates quantitative and qualitative components. This chapter explains the use for such an approach and then outlines the analysis of data sought from parishioners, ministers, those who served in the capacity of candidate convener for Northern Presbytery. This includes elaborating on elements of questionnaires and their relevance for the current study as well as the process adopted for interviews. An assessment of the methodology employed for this research will then be summed up.

#### A MIXED-METHODS APPROACH

The present study employs a mixed-methods approach as an attempt to understand what factors influence people's decisions regarding ministry candidacy. It incorporates both quantitative and qualitative strategies for collecting and analysing of data in a single study. Drawing on the work of Campbell and Fiske that used multiple methods to study the validity of psychological traits of people, education psychologist John W. Creswell affirmed that it was probably the beginning of the growing trend of applying a mixed-method approach to research.<sup>45</sup> This prompted others to mix methods and soon approaches associated with field methods such as observations and interviews (qualitative data) were combined with traditional surveys such as questionnaires or surveys (quantitative data) to examine multiple approaches to data collection in a study. From this emerged the idea of "triangulating" data sources that sought a "convergence" across qualitative and quantitative methods.<sup>46</sup> For example, the results from one method could be used to help develop or inform the other method. Although relatively new, the mixed-methods approach has been used with increasing frequency in various fields such as occupational therapy, interpersonal communication, AIDS prevention, dementia care giving, and middle school science.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 2nd ed., (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2003), 15.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> For occupational therapy see C. L. Lysack & L. Krefting, "Qualitative methods in field research: An Indonesian experience in community based practice," *The Occupational Therapy Journal of Research* 14, no. 20, (1994): 93-110; for interpersonal communication see B. Boneva, R. Kraut & D. Frohlich, "Using e-mail for personal relationships," *American Behavioral Scientist* 45, no. 3, (2001): 330-349; for AIDS prevention see N. K. Janz, M A. Zimmerman, P. A. Wren, B A. Israel, N. Freudenberg, & R. J. Carter, "Evaluation of 37 AIDS prevention projects: Successful approaches and barriers to program effectiveness", *Health Education Quarterly* 23, no. 1, (1996): 80-97; for dementia care giving see P. F. Weitzman & S. E. Levkoff, "Combining

The quantitative approach is the gathering and measuring of data. Data is the basic unit or building blocks of information and when data is grouped into patterns, they become information. When information is applied, it becomes knowledge.<sup>48</sup> This study sought to obtain data from parishioners and ministers to identify whether or not a trend or pattern would emerge through the prevalence of particular responses. It wanted to measure how many parishioners and ministers would respond in a particular way to questions relating to their experiences of faith and service in the parish setting and consideration of ordained ministry through candidacy.

Understanding people's perceptions and attitudes to situations in life also required a qualitative approach. Qualitative methodology allows the researcher to collect data by means such as interviews. According to Strauss and Corbin, qualitative research is "...any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification. It can refer to research about persons' lives, stories, behaviour, but also about organizational functioning, social movements, or interactional relationships."<sup>49</sup> This method sought answers to people's questions and issues in their experiences of candidacy for ministry. As well as parishioners and ministers, Northern Presbytery candidate conveners (past and present) were also interviewed to provide further perspectives of the candidacy process. To truly appreciate the attitudes and perceptions of people involved in such a process, it was necessary for this study to gather data directly from the interviewees. Rossman and Rallis aptly put it this way: researchers "go to the people; they do not extricate people from their everyday worlds."<sup>50</sup> While it was preferable to interview people face to face in their context (home, church, or office), this was not possible due to the unexpected and prolonged Covid-19 Government lockdown. Interviews were instead conducted electronically via zoom.

By using the mixed-methods approach, it assisted to better understand the relational dynamic of people involved in the candidacy process. It supported in identifying some of the perceptions and attitudes which influenced the decisions and actions of parishioners, ministers, and candidate conveners when considering and engaging in the candidacy process. This approach not only describes the activities of people, but they also seek to understand "on a personal level the motives and beliefs behind people's actions."<sup>51</sup> It is the combination of these

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qualitative and quantitative methods in health research with minority elders: Lessons from a study of dementia caregiving", in *Field Methods* 12, no. 3, (2000): 195-208; for middle school science see L E. Houtz, "Instructional strategy change and the attitude and achievement of seventh and eighth-grade science students," *Journal of Research in Science Teaching* 32, no. 6, (1995): 629-648.

<sup>48</sup> Gretchen B. Rossman & Sharon F. Rallis, *Learning in the field: An introduction to Qualitative Research*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2003), 4.

<sup>49</sup> Anselm L. Strauss and Juliet M. Corbin, *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*, (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publication, 1990), 17.

<sup>50</sup> Gretchen B. Rossman and Sharon F. Rallis, *Learning in the Field: An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), 9.

<sup>51</sup> Steven J. Taylor and Robert Bogdan, *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Guidebook and Resource* (Toronto: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1998), 4.

different components that yields the most comprehensive understanding.<sup>52</sup> This approach appeared to be quite effective.

## STRATEGIES

### Interviews

In-depth interviews with various groups of people with Northern Presbytery was the primary method of gathering information. As an integral aspect of a qualitative approach, in-depth interviews with candidates for ministry, potential candidates (parishioners), presbytery candidate conveners, staff at KCML, and parish ministers were conducted. Interviews not only assist in discovering what others feel and think about their circumstances, they also help us to make connections with their experiences or their reconstruction of life-events. Rubin and Rubin aptly describe qualitative interviewing this way: “Through what you hear and learn, you can extend your intellectual and emotional reach across time, class, race, sex, and geographical divisions.”<sup>53</sup>

With regard to understanding the reasons why people do not pursue their sense of call to ministry, in-depth interviewing can help provide insights about perceptions of their circumstances to explain their choices. Using the term “ethnographic interviewing,” Kathryn Roulston adds that interviewing is not merely getting people to describe their experiences (phenomenological interviewing); it is also done to “explore the meanings that people ascribe to actions and events in their natural worlds, expressed in their own language.” By interviewing those involved in the candidacy process for ministry, the hope was to hear how their assessments of the call to ordained ministry, the clarity of candidacy information and requirements, and preparation support might influence their decisions and actions.

There were limitations to doing the interviews. It was very unfortunate that when the research began in mid-August 2021, the New Zealand Government announced an immediate nation-wide lockdown level four due to a Covid-19 Delta case in Auckland. The restrictions meant that in-person contact with others outside one’s bubble was not possible. An alternative was to conduct interviews using the Zoom platform which allowed for a live video and audio exchange. Therefore, all interviews with respondents in this study were conducted via Zoom. The Zoom videos were recorded to enable a transcript to be written and checked by respondents.

The process of obtaining interviews varied. Some parishioner respondents agreed to an interview after showing an interest in the research presented at regional meetings of Northern Presbytery, as well as ministers recommending parishioners in their congregation who might be suitable and willing to be interviewed. Referrals by others, as Robert S. Weiss found, are extremely helpful for obtaining interviews because a “vouching figure extends

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<sup>52</sup> David Plowright, *Using Mixed Methods: Frameworks for an Integrated Methodology* (London: Sage, 2011), 24-28. They posit that multiple methods of data collection may be employed to facilitate a relationship that allows for an in-depth portrait of the informants and their community. This can include participant observation, field notes, interviews and surveys.

<sup>53</sup> Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), 1.

their effectiveness” to other potential respondents, thereby helping to increase the study sample.<sup>54</sup> People were first contacted informally to gauge interest and were later followed up to confirm the respondent’s willingness to participate in the research.

Parishioner respondents in this study were selected based on the criteria that they were eighteen years of age or over, and a current member within a congregation of the Northern Presbytery. The interviews were based on open-ended questions that were intentionally grouped to address various areas of the respondent’s life. These included personal information noting age, gender, marital status, ethnicity, and involvement within their congregation. The questions also sought to explore their experience of their sense of call to ordained ministry and how they responded to it. They culminated in examining the factors contributing to the respondents’ decision of not pursuing the call to ministry. Such a move reflects Lahiff’s view that “while it is inaccurate to regard an interview as nothing more than a series of questions and answers, it is the questions which largely determine the route to be followed to the goal, as well as how many detours may be encountered. The lack of adequate planning of questions by the interviewer is one of the most frequent causes of inferior interviews.”<sup>55</sup>

Interviews with past and present candidate conveners of Northern Presbytery followed a similar vein. Questions focused primarily on the experience of conveners in fulfilling their role. This included the length of time they served as a candidate convener, the resources enabling them to know and complete their tasks, their engagement with people enquiring and actually applying for candidacy for ministry, the challenges of their tasks as well, the challenges they recognised in candidates, and the extent to which conveners promoted candidacy for ministry. The final aspect was exploring possibilities for how candidacy numbers could be increased.

The third group of people interviewed were ministers within Northern Presbytery. The purpose was to understand the experiences of ministers in encouraging people for candidacy to ministry. This was a follow-up to a questionnaire sent out to all parish ministers within Northern Presbytery. It sought to further expand on some questionnaire questions for how they worked with parishioners who considered ordained ministry. This included examining the preparation exercised with potential candidates, the kind of support offered to them during and after the assessment process, and the extent to which candidacy for ministry was promoted in the parish.

The interviews via zoom were recorded and then transcribed. The interviews lasted between thirty to forty minutes. Although time-consuming, due to the length of some interviews, transcription was necessary not only for accuracy, but as Molyneaux and Lane also assert, for drawing attention to the content and dynamics of the interview as well as to analysis of the interviewer’s performance.<sup>56</sup> Overall, interviews and the transcripts provided

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<sup>54</sup> Robert S. Weiss, *Learning From Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 34.

<sup>55</sup> James Lahiff, “Interviewing for Results,” in *Readings in Interpersonal and Organizational Communication*, second edition, ed. Richard C. Huseman, Cal M. Logue, and Dwight L. Freshley, 332-353 (Boston: Holbrook Press, 1973), 334.

<sup>56</sup> Dorothy Molyneaux and Vera W. Lane, *Effective Interviewing: Techniques and Analysis* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1982), 88.

a vehicle by which respondents could be heard and understood in terms of their life experiences, and a way to give them “public voice.”<sup>57</sup>

## Questionnaires

Part of the mixed-methods approach used in this study included analysing questionnaires completed by parishioners and ministers. The use of questionnaires was an attempt to gain a wide coverage of responses from people within the sixty-eight congregations in Northern Presbytery. As well as the broader scope of gathering information about people’s perceptions or experiences regarding candidacy for ministry, Delbert Miller posits that questionnaires also “permit more considered answers,” offer an opportunity for respondents “to check information,” and provide “a sense of privacy.”<sup>58</sup> Although statistics from Northern Presbytery and PCANZ were helpful in terms of providing insight into the status of membership, as well as clergy and ministry candidate numbers, questionnaires were required for gauging the prevalence of particular responses by individuals.

The rationale of the parishioner questionnaire was to try and identify trends in the way a parishioner engaged with the idea of candidacy for ministry in his or her congregation experience. The survey was aimed at parishioners between the ages of eighteen and fifty years of age with the hope of evaluating the perspectives of a cohort with ministry longevity in mind. It included trying to understand how parishioners perceived aspects of ministry within their congregation that could encourage candidacy for ministry, as well as the degree to which the work of their minister influences such a consideration. The questionnaire also sought to gauge the scope of understanding people have with respect to components of the candidacy process (application requirements, assessment process, training). Ultimately, it wanted to identify what factors would mostly discourage them from pursuing candidacy for ministry. Such complex issues may be thought to be better covered through direct interviews or participant observations rather than through questionnaires. However, the responses by people are still relevant because they come from their life experiences.

The questionnaire for ministers was parallel to that for parishioners. It sought to identify the experience of ministers in parish ministry with respect to the number of years and parishes they served. Among their various parish responsibilities, the study wanted to know the level of priority given to encouraging candidacy for ministry in their work. Of particular significance was identifying whether they had engaged with people from within their parish who considered candidacy for ministry and assessing the extent of that engagement. At its heart, the questionnaire endeavoured to grasp if there was a trend for promoting candidacy for ministry and how that is facilitated by ministers. The reality is that candidates come from parishes and ministers play an important part in that journey.

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<sup>57</sup> Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing*, 19.

<sup>58</sup> Delbert C. Miller, *Handbook of Research Design and Social Measurement*, 5th edition (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Inc., 1991), 141.

Both questionnaires offered answers to questions in which respondents indicated the response that best suited their choice. An option was also given for the respondents to provide an answer in their own words. Some questions involved the use of scores to provide a range between two opposing answers. The respondents could decide which score in the range best suited their response.

An example from the parishioner questionnaire is:

Based on your parish experience, to what extent would you consider ordained ministry as a vocation for yourself?  
Choose a score to indicate your answer.

1	2	3	4	5
No consideration				Strong consideration

An example from the minister questionnaire is:

During your parish ministry, to what extent do you encourage parishioners to consider ministry in PCANZ?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Very rarely									Very frequently

I recognise, however, as Turner and Martin rightly identify, the subjective nature of and inherent complexity of opinion questions.<sup>59</sup> Robert DeVellis, while acknowledging that shorter scales are generally good, on the one hand, because they place less of a burden on respondents, asserts that “longer scales, on the other hand, are good because they tend to be more reliable.”<sup>60</sup> Responses arranged this way to open-ended questions is limiting. Yet, they enabled some indication for the extent of preference people had about their experiences and relationships with others in parish life.

Both questionnaires were relatively brief. The parishioner questionnaire consisted of fifteen questions while the minister questionnaire was shorter with ten questions. Keeping them brief and simple rather than long and complicated was considered the best approach. From experience, the latter usually discourages people from participating in and completing questionnaires. The parishioner questionnaire was designed first and tested in two congregations for clarity and ease of completing. Feedback was very valuable which enabled some refinement for the final draft to be used. Experience from this helped to design the minister questionnaire with more confidence resulting in the decision to distribute it rather than testing it.

The questionnaire surveys were to be conducted electronically online rather than by hardcopy. The rationale being the assumption that most people today have greater access to and are connected more widely through online technology. The Monkey Survey application was used to create the surveys as well as the link to

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<sup>59</sup> C. F. Turner and E. Martin, eds., *Surveying Subjective Phenomena*, Vol. 1 (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1984).

<sup>60</sup> Robert F. DeVellis, *Scale Development: Theory and Application*, Applied Social Research Methods Series, Vol. 26 (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1991), 86.

access them online. A pdf electronic copy of the questionnaire was also included for the parishioner survey with the view that some might prefer printing it out and complete the questionnaire as a hard copy and then mailed in.

The distribution of questionnaires was not as easy as anticipated. It was decided that the link for the parishioner survey and pdf copy would be sent by email. This was also the case for the minister survey (but without a pdf copy). The email included a brief explanation about the research and the purpose of the survey. The concern was regarding the parishioner survey. Although it was assumed that the targeted cohort would most likely have greater access to online technology such as the internet and email, it did not necessarily mean that was the case for all in the cohort. There is the chance, then, that some in the cohort might not get the opportunity to receive and participate in the survey. Second, obtaining the email addresses of potential respondents within the various parishes in the bounds of Northern Presbytery was difficult. The alternative was to have the presbytery office send the email out to parishes through its parish email list, and then for the parish person who receives it, to forward it on to parishioners through their parishioner email list. The survey for parish ministers was also done this way, except that the presbytery office was able to send the email directly to ministers on its ministerial list. This ultimately meant trusting that the email was sent to and received by the intended recipients.

The expected number of participants for parishioner and minister surveys was mixed. Since the parishioner survey targeted those between the ages of twenty and fifty, it was not possible to know exactly how many of this cohort are in parishes within the Northern Presbytery. Therefore, it was difficult to anticipate a response rate for parishioners. The hope was that the email with the survey link reached as many of the cohort as possible. On the other hand, the minister survey was clearer. There are seventy-five ministers currently serving in parishes in Northern Presbytery. While it is possible that some ministers may not have experienced assisting a candidate or potential candidate for ministry from their parish, simply knowing that is also helpful.

It is important to reiterate that the questionnaires are simply tools to enhance an understanding of some aspects of people's experiences in their religious context. Their purpose is not to prove or substantiate, by means of measurements, these experiences. They simply provide some of the information required to try to make sense of the complexities of the attitudes and behaviours that people demonstrate in considering the call to ordained ministry. They also contribute to the range of other information sought through qualitative strategies. In this sense, the methodology seeks to identify the data as integral pieces that can fit together enabling a clearer picture of what the wider puzzle of ministry leadership looks like. Therefore, the findings of this research do not depend simply on the data from interviews, questionnaires, or Northern Presbytery and PCANZ records. They are features that assist towards a growing understanding of how well, or not, the development of leadership/discipleship is within Northern Presbytery.

## ASSESSMENT OF METHODOLOGY

This study has obvious limitations. One of them has perhaps been the lack of clarity in the questionnaires to parishioners and ministers. This may have created confusion affecting the answers given as well as revealing the researcher's inexperience in designing questionnaires. Although the analysis used categories and scores in an attempt to simplify and quantify complex areas of the respondent's experiences, it, in many ways, did not really do justice for the respondent to express some of the strong opinions and feelings like those who were interviewed. Some questions in the parishioner survey were skipped over, therefore, not answered. Although there was an opportunity in the questionnaire to provide comments to an answer for "Other", those who did choose this answer did not add any thoughts.

The most concerning aspect about questionnaires was the low response. Although the analyses for parishioners and ministers will be covered in the following chapters, it needs to be mentioned here that the response rates were lower than expected. The parishioner questionnaire was aimed at a particular age group (20 to 50 years old) in the sixty-eight congregations of Northern Presbytery. While the statistics in 2019 showed that the total membership in Northern Presbytery congregations was 8,776, it is not known how many of this number are aged between twenty to fifty years. The number of parishioners who completed the questionnaire survey was only thirty-five. The hope was that at least a hundred would have completed the survey.

There may be all kinds of reasons why the response rate was so low. One could be that when congregations received the email with the survey link, it was not distributed to the emails of parishioners (presuming they have an email). Another could also be that people do not prefer to complete surveys or questionnaires whether online or in hardcopy. Whatever the reason, although the information attained from the respondents was helpful, they cannot be taken as a generalised views for the whole of the target-group in Northern Presbytery.

Similarly, disappointment arose around the number of ministers interviewed. The kind of ministers sought were those who experienced assisting parishioners with respect to candidacy for ministry. While ten parishioners were identified and agreed to be interviewed, only three ministers were willing to do likewise. Despite email reminders and some telephone conversations to encourage minister participation, this did not eventuate as anticipated. One minister, however, did correspond via email to express his thoughts about the recruitment issue. The consolation was that the five candidate conveners interviewed were ministers. Again, it is not certain why the lack of involvement on the part of ministers. Perhaps their commitment was to their ministry duties, or they, too, did not like online surveys. Maybe it also reflected their apathy and lack of interest in the very issue this study wanted to examine. There might also be some unease to explore how much effort ministers actually put into identifying and encouraging people into ministry. Whatever the reason, it is suspected that people generally do not want to be asked about things they perhaps should show an interest in but have not. The negative effects of the lockdown could also be a factor for both ministers and parishioners.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONSIDERING ORDAINED MINISTRY: Parishioners and Candidacy

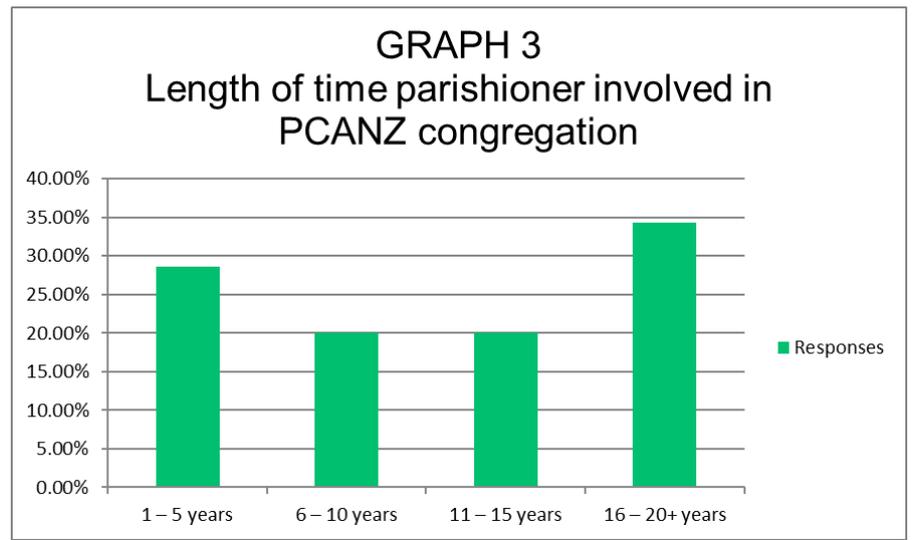
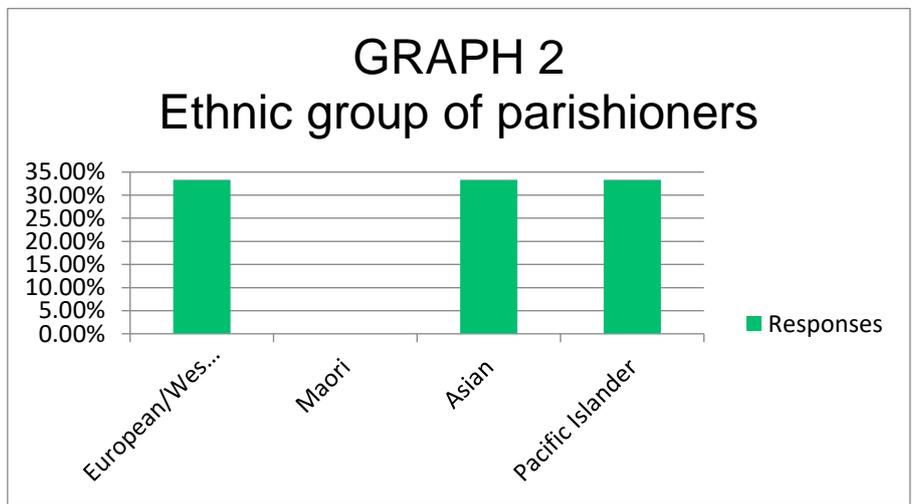
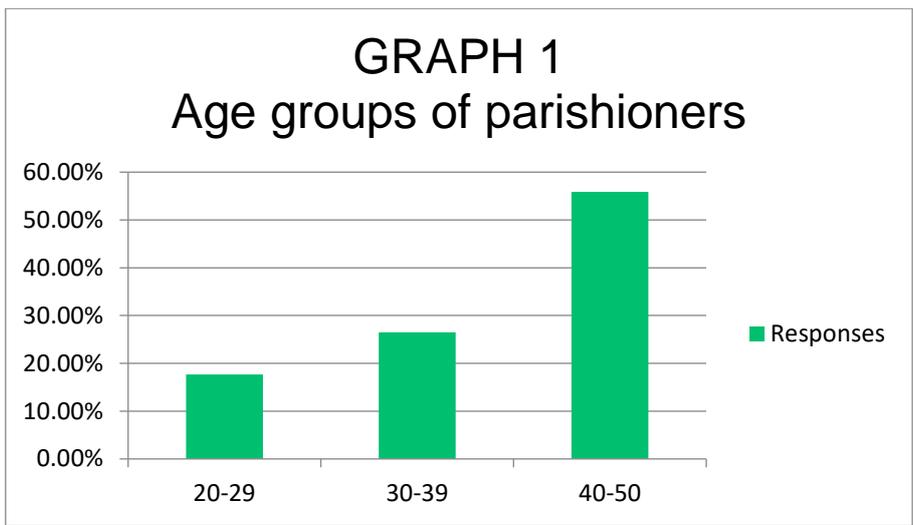
There are challenges on the pathway towards ordained ministry. They include wrestling with the faith or spiritual conviction of God's calling upon one's life as well as weighing it against the circumstances of one's context. Taking a closer look at the latter is helpful to understand the experiences of candidates or potential candidates for ministry who have contemplated a calling to ministry. The approach involves analysing data from both the parishioner questionnaire as well as insights from interviews. These may help to identify and comprehend factors for why people consider a vocation of ordained ministry in the church as well as discontinuing to pursue it. The experiences of such people might not only help shed greater light on the perceptions they have about ordained ministry and ministry candidacy, but also how they might contribute to concerns of a candidate shortage in Northern Presbytery.

#### **Parishioner perceptions and experiences of ordained ministry**

To appreciate how people respond to a sense of calling to ordained ministry as a vocation, it is important to understand their perceptions and experiences of ministry in their parish. The parishioner questionnaire attempted to do this by exploring responses to various aspects of ministry and of the pathway to ordained ministry. Analysing the survey of the parishioner questionnaire was useful, albeit limiting. It was limiting in terms of a very small sample size of thirty-five respondents. Despite this constraint, the survey still provides insights which can become a framework to build upon. Incorporating the thoughts of ten respondents from interviews as building blocks give a greater awareness of the experiences of people considering a journey to vocation in the church. In total, there were forty-five parishioner respondents in this study.

Most respondents in the survey reflected a sense of maturity. Just over eighty percent were aged between thirty and fifty years (see GRAPH 1). There was a good balance of gender in the sample with fifty-one percent female and forty-nine percent male. Diversity of ethnicity was also evident amongst parishioners with thirty-three percent European, Asian, and Pacific respectively, although the absence of Māori respondents is also glaring (see graph 2). Of the ten people interviewed, their ages ranged from thirty-one years to sixty-nine. Over half (fifty-four percent) having been in a Presbyterian parish between eleven and twenty-plus years. Those at the higher end of the age range shared their consideration for ministry when they were much younger. All had been involved within a PCANZ congregation for a significant part of their life, although some came from other denominations both from within New Zealand and overseas. Others had moved away to another denomination and then returned more permanently. Only one had left their PCANZ congregation since discontinuing their sense of call to ordained ministry. Unlike those in the survey, the gender balance of interviewed respondents were mostly male with only

two women. Ethnicity was evenly split between European and Pacific Islander. Respondents of the survey and interviews clearly represent folk who have a good grounding in Presbyterian parish ministry.



The journey of contemplating ordained parish ministry by parishioners begins in their parish experiences. Gauging how parishioners view parish ministry may give an idea of how this might influence their considerations about ordained ministry. Respondents from the survey and interviews generally viewed parish ministry in a positive

light. The survey presented various aspects of ministry such as worship, pastoral care, community outreach/service, Christian education, the eldership/leadership, role of the minister, and asked which ones encouraged them most (see GRAPH 4). The responses for each aspect varied, but it was clear that the majority (seventy percent) rated worship as more encouraging to them. Next was community outreach/service (almost fifty-six percent), Christian education (forty-seven percent), eldership/leadership (thirty-eight percent), pastoral care (thirty-five percent), and the minister (twenty-six percent). Many, if not all, those interviewed had a great appreciation of these areas of parish ministry. Respondent A was in a marriage of mixed ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Although the church they attended had worship services in their respective languages, they chose instead to attend the English-language service as an important compromise.

Respondent A

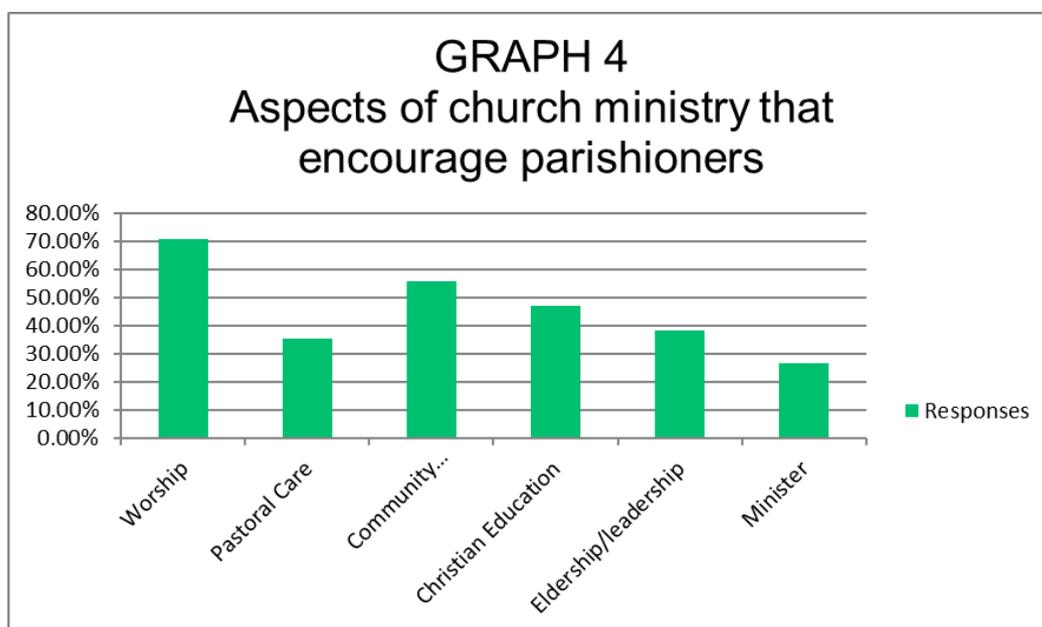
“And after we got married we grew up there, but there was no place for us because of the different languages... we decided just to go to the English service.”

Regarding community outreach/service, respondent B found that as well as looking “after the youth and children’s programme” in his local church, Christian service in the community was also an extension of parish ministry.

Respondent B

“Part of my work in the community was as a chaplain in the intermediate school. Prior to that, I worked as a state school chaplain in primary schools. In the years finishing from Carey, I was at MIT as a chaplain.”

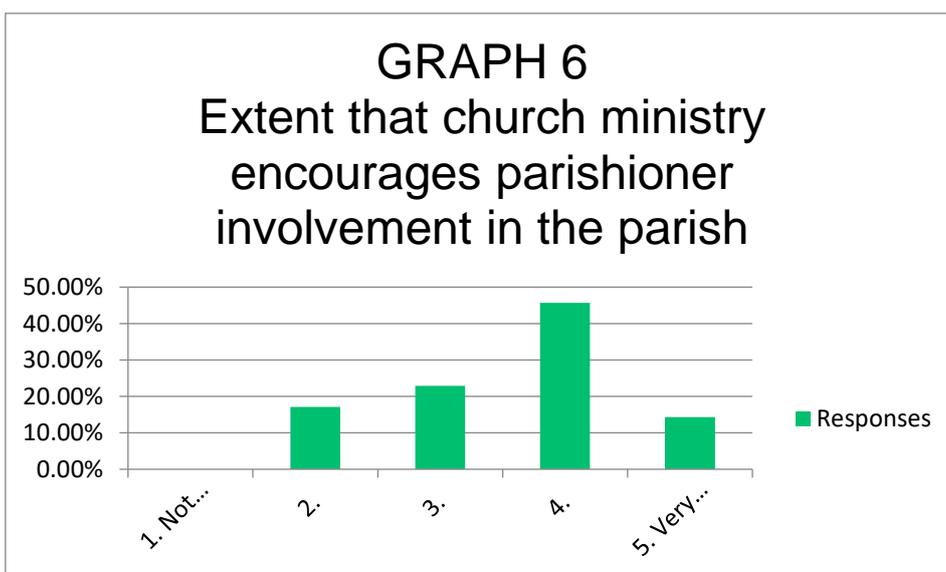
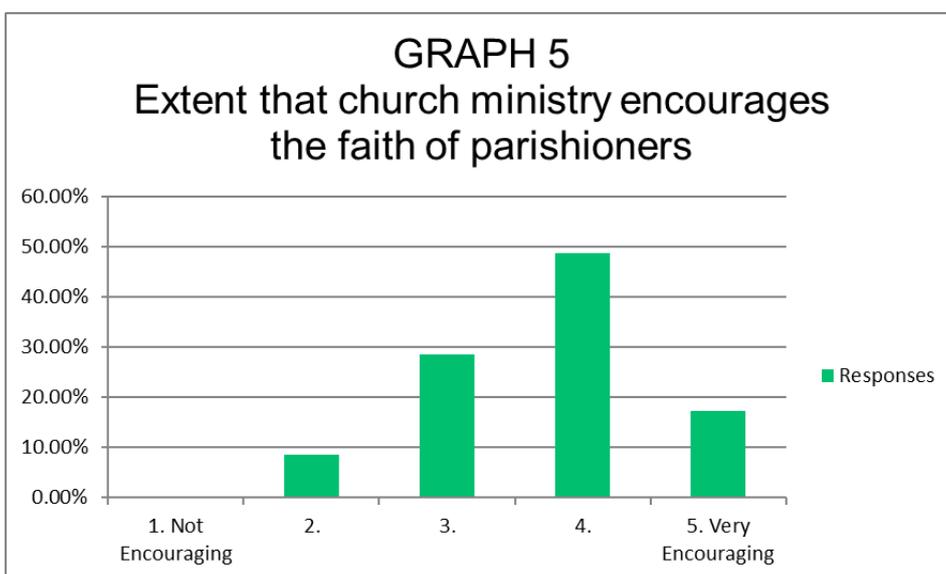
These few examples show how the different aspects of ministry can positively impress upon the decisions and actions of parishioners.



As well as having a positive perspective of ministry, the study wanted to know how that impacted the faith of parishioners. Again, this might provide some insights with respect a person’s sense of call to ordained ministry. Nearly two-thirds of respondents in the survey leaned towards the idea that ministry in their respective parishes greatly encouraged their faith (see GRAPH 5). The other third were either neutral or less inspired by the ministry

they experienced. It is understandable that people may find some aspects of ministry more meaningful to their faith than other areas. If their experience of parish ministry is mainly positive as well as inspiring to their faith, then this could be seen as a promising part of their discernment.

This was also reflected in the degree to which parish ministry encouraged members to get involved with different facets of their parish life. Sixty percent of respondents indicated that they were more inclined to get involved in their church because they were encouraged by their parish ministry, as opposed to the rest who were not quite inclined or were not swayed either way (see GRAPH 6). As was seen earlier, a significant proportion of them were not only inspired in their faith by the parish ministry they experienced, but it also moved them into active involvement. Again, this seems to be another positive factor that could influence those contemplating ordained ministry.



The desire to be part of parish life was clearly reflected in respondents who were interviewed. Not only did they see their congregation and ministry activities as a core component of their life, they also fully embraced the part they played within it. Respondent C was baptised and grew up in his parish from birth. After attending a

confirmation course for a year, he was confirmed and then was actively involved with children and youth ministry. Thereafter in his late twenties, he was ordained as an elder and took on the role of superintendent of the Sunday School. Respondent D who had a longer involvement in different Presbyterian parishes expressed:

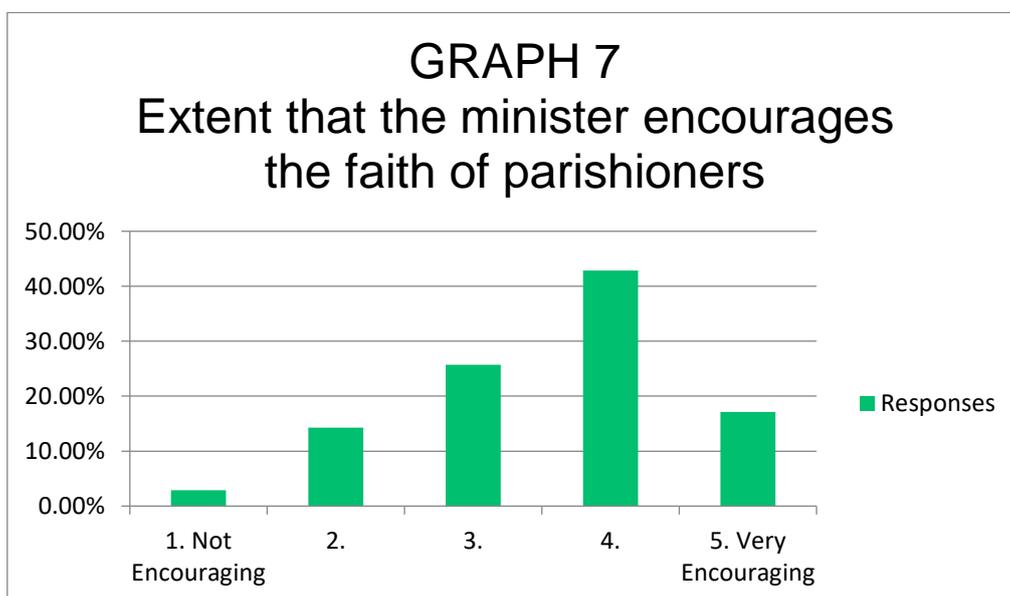
Respondent D

“I was an elder. I’ve been a youth group leader. I’ve been a worship leader. I’ve been on boards of managers; probably on just about all the administrative courts really... I was pretty familiar with the Book of Order for the rules and regulations. I was the secretary for the board of managers down there and I did a stint as the treasurer as well when the treasurer was overseas at one stage. So, I got to understand all the intricacies of how the big church really works.”

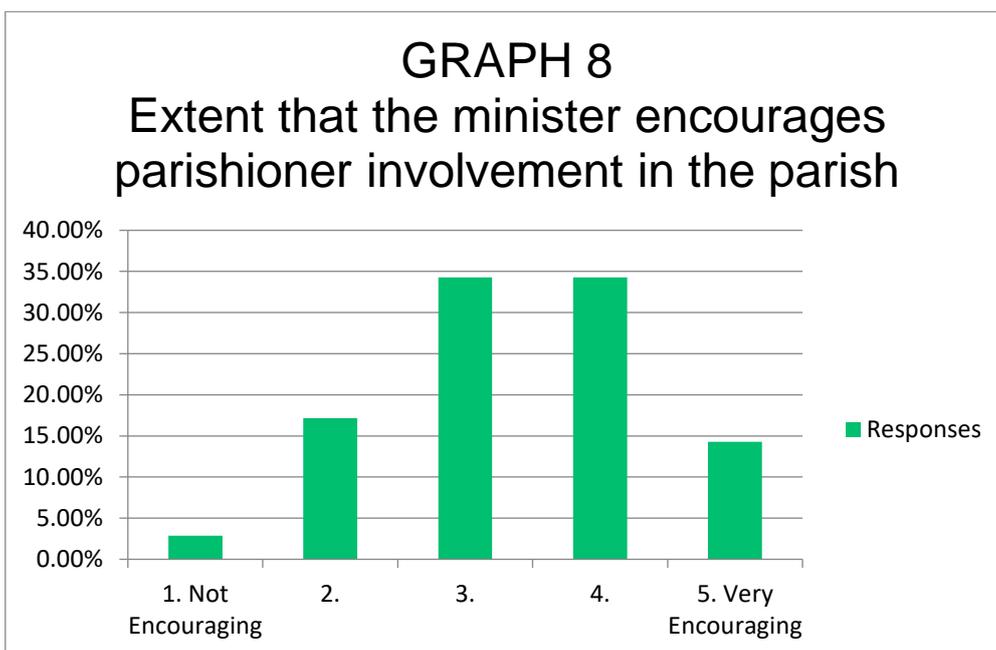
Overall, respondents appear to value the different ways of service in parish ministry. They are meaningful to their faith and provide avenues for that faith to be exercised in the church.

However, the survey did reveal some unexpected results with respect to the influence of the minister upon respondents. As noted already in GRAPH 4, the survey showed that the minister scored the lowest (twenty-six percent) in terms of being a source of encouragement for respondents. Even the leadership of the elders (thirty-eight percent) fared much better than that of the minister. There may be various reasons why the influence of ministers upon parishioners is not as persuasive as that of the wider works of ministry in a parish. While a minister may be a central figure in the life of a parish in terms of leadership and decision-making, he or she is still one among many who play a part in the parish. So, the corporate effort might be more impactful than that of an individual.

Yet, the focus specifically on the minister showed more encouraging signs by respondents. In terms of the extent to which the minister inspired the faith of respondents, nearly sixty percent of them affirmed this (See GRAPH 7). About a quarter were undecided while fewer still felt that their faith was less inspired by the minister. These figures closely resemble those of the extent to which parish ministry inspires the faith of respondents. That may be due to the minister being involved directly or indirectly with the ministries which respondents found meaningful or relevant to their faith.



The impact of the minister upon people’s church involvement was also similarly reassuring. Again, sixty percent of respondents were inclined to be motivated by the role and work of their minister to actively serve in their congregation. Despite this considerable support of the minister, it still fared slightly less than the motivation provided by the overall ministry of the parish (sixty-six percent, see GRAPH 8). A significant number (thirty-four percent) felt somewhat motivated by the minister or at least neutral between not being encouraged and being very encouraged. The rest were less motivated to be active in the church with respect to the minister. The data paints an encouraging picture of parish ministry and the part the minister has in it. In spite of the lower ranking of the minister as a source of encouragement for respondents in the greater scheme of parish ministry, the minister still appears to be an influential figure in parish life.



Some interviewees conveyed similar sentiments about their minister. Respondent E experienced different ministers over the years in her parish and while she appreciated the ministries they offered; she was still able to differentiate ones that had the greatest impact on her.

Respondent E

“I learned a lot from them. Their preaching was excellent, but there wasn’t any stirring of interest to get more involved for the ministry. It wasn’t until [the latest minister] preached at [parish] for the very first time that something started; a fire that was starting to light... It took a few months. I knew I was keen but at the same time I wanted to hear more from [the minister].”

Respondent F also affirmed how the ministers in his parish had shaped him as a person and as a Christian.

Respondent F

“They were very much part of my formative years in terms of tradition in the church that resonated with me. It was a fairly intellectual or heady Christian thing which was my inclination.”

Likewise, respondent A attributed his return to congregational involvement to the influence of his minister.

Respondent A

“So, after my wife passed away I have the freedom to go and do whatever I want. But I decided to go back because of [the minister’s] sermon on that night; it really hits me. From then on, I went back to church and became active.”

From such comments, it can be seen that ministers are quite influential upon their parishioners. But the extent of that influence may depend on how relevant or meaningful the engagements are.

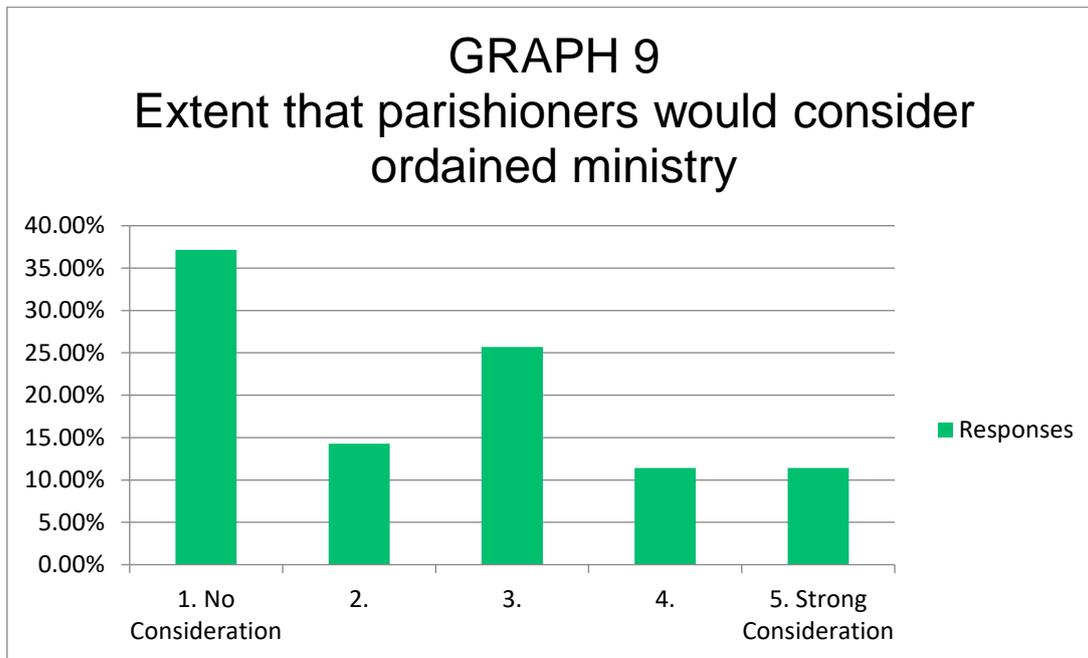
The difference of parishioner perceptions of the minister between respondents from the survey and those interviewed may be due to how this aspect was explored. The survey is anonymous and less direct compared to an interview and, therefore, can provide an avenue for someone to be honestly critical about a minister. Speaking to an interviewer, who is also a minister, is perhaps not conducive for that.

### **The pathway to ordained ministry**

The heart of the survey wanted to know how people’s experiences of parish ministry might influence their thoughts on pursuing ordained ministry. Considering that views of parish ministries including the role and work of their minister was mostly positive, it was expected that the majority of respondents in the survey would be more inclined to contemplate a pathway to ordained ministry. The result, however, showed the opposite. Just over twenty percent indicated a favourable leaning towards ordained ministry with half of this number strongly considering such a vocation in the church (see GRAPH 9).<sup>61</sup> Nearly a quarter indicated some undecidedness about it while just over half were not persuaded enough to regard ordained ministry as a potential option for their future. Moreover, thirty-seven percent of this group signalled that they did not strongly believe such a pathway was what they really wanted.

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<sup>61</sup> 20% might be considered quite a high interest if the sample actually represented an average congregation. However, with such a low number percentage taking part the sample is probably biased toward those who do have some interest in ministry.



There may be all kinds of reasons for this finding. For the minority who leaned towards considering ordained ministry, an obvious reason might be a growing sense of God’s call upon their life. The positive and meaningful experiences of ministry in the parish and engagement with their minister might be contributing factors to extend such experiences into candidacy for ordained ministry. Both the personal and corporate life of faith in the local church context can have an impact on how parishioners see the direction of their faith journey. For respondent G, since her childhood in the church, the pathway from parishioner to candidate for ministry was not a matter of not if, but when.

#### Respondent G

“I think it’s been something that’s been simmering away for a longer period of time... There was a moment when I suddenly felt as though; a strong feeling that it was time... you know, that God was saying, ‘it’s time.’”

Similarly, after much involvement in parish life, respondent H considered ordained ministry as an inevitable direction in life, although the motivation was different.

#### Respondent H

“There are a lot of ministers developed in my family. That’s why I was thinking I want to carry on with that legacy of the family; to be a minister.”

Respondent H may merely be following a family tradition, but it is one that is clearly grounded in the life of the church. Whatever the rationale for contemplating ordained ministry and however one discerns their sense of call to such a vocation, experiences from parish ministry appear to play a significant part.

It is understandable that those in the survey who were undecided may be hesitant to think about such a move because it can raise all sorts of questions or uncertainties about other aspects of their life. A neutral stance may indicate some degree of consideration toward ordained ministry, but not enough to move them further along the pathway due to a lack of clarity or motivation in their sense of call and life circumstances. After resigning from

his job, respondent F was encouraged by an elder in his church about theological studies and ministry. The study was taken out of interest and started well which also enabled a sense of call to emerge. However, a later change in his family circumstances made his progress very challenging.

Respondent F

“For the first year and a half it was fine, but in the second year my grandfather died, and my sense of call was starting to be challenged anyway. So, my wife and I decided that I’d complete the degree, but the call wasn’t strong enough to take on another two years in Dunedin. We felt that it was appropriate to finish the degree so that it was completed, but that was it.”

Respondent F’s circumstances were such that he was not motivated enough to apply for candidacy.

Even some who did apply for ordained ministry also experienced a great sense of confusion, albeit it mixed with definite disappointment in an unsuccessful candidacy. Although applying for ministry may reveal an obvious intention, the intended outcome is not always guaranteed. An unsuccessful candidacy can make a person re-think or hesitate to go down that path again. Respondent I was heavily involved in his local parish as well as in the community. He had a theology degree and was very familiar with Presbyterian polity and processes. The vague explanation given to him for his stumble at presbytery assessment left him unsure whether to reassess trying again.

Respondent I

“So, all of that is causing me to think, what is the outcome of all this? I know I’ve got the enablement; I know I’ve got the ability; I know I’ve got the knowledge. So, it’s really a perplexing question... I’m a guy whose really in a quandary and tossing it out.”

Sometimes the discouragement from such an experience can cause one to re-evaluate one’s priorities. Respondent J succeeded to National Assessment but did not progress further due to an “unsettledness” in the process. The respondent had also withdrawn from the assessment process on two other occasions because of family commitments.

Respondent J

“In that process, in coming down here and moving into our own home and getting pregnant with number two, the whole feeling of this... unsettledness, I don’t know if it was accurate because the whole year was an unsettled year. However, it didn’t seem like it was the right time to go right back into it again, to re-apply because of the current circumstances we found ourselves in. If I had stayed in it, we would have had to move out of the house we had just bought and rented it out and find somewhere else in which we were placed. Again, it didn’t seem like a very sensible or timely thing, so I rescinded my application again.”

Whatever priority respondents have, it can be important enough to make them pause and re-examine the direction in which their faith and life circumstances lead them. Perhaps as respondents G and J have conveyed, moving from that neutral point of indecision toward ordained ministry, or retreating from it, is a matter of “timing” and realisation.

The majority from the parishioner survey were clearly of the mind that ordained ministry in the church as a vocation was not for them. Those who earlier indicated that the various aspects of parish ministry, including the

minister, did not encourage their faith and participation in church life may be part of this significant response. The apparently negative outlook of their parish experience might explain their reluctance to consider ordained ministry. It may also reflect an absence in a sense of calling to such a vocation in the church. Yet, this group, whose faith and parish involvement were not encouraged, represented only a small number of parishioners. The highest negative response was twenty percent with respect to the extent the minister encouraged parishioner involvement in the parish. This means that of the majority who were not inclined to consider ordained ministry, about thirty percent may involve those who were either neutral toward or had some relatively positive experiences of ministry and minister in their parish. If so, it reveals that even fairly encouraging experiences of ministry in the parish for parishioners may not always translate into a desire to further contemplate ordained ministry.

Interviews with respondents reflected some of the results from the survey. Most, if not all, had comparatively promising experiences of ministry in their parish. They had an initial desire, a sense of call that they were discerning, and, among other things, the support of people in their parish and family. For example, respondent A discussed consideration for ministry with his wife and parish minister after hearing what he describes as God's "voice."

Respondent A

"A voice that keeps coming to me 'use your time to go and take the word of God out.' That's your search and the more you understand that God loves you. You need to take that word and give out to the people. And I asked [the minister] that I was thinking if I can become a minister, to preach the word of God."

Likewise, after finding her faith and biblical knowledge grow since attending lay preacher classes, respondent E also found the same regarding her desire for ordained ministry.

Respondent E

"So, I went back to the lay preachers class and what did we study? The first book that [the minister] told us to look at was Ephesians 1. That confirmed for me the want or the need to explore further. The interest to go into ordained ministry was born."

However, both respondents were part of a majority (seven) who, in fact, did not progress their experiences into candidacy for ministry. Their reasons will be explored in detail later. But these responses so far exemplifies that a desire for ordained ministry does not automatically result in a solid commitment. Sometimes, as in the case of respondent C, the potential for ministry that a minister sees in a parishioner is not necessarily what the parishioner sees for him/herself.

Respondent C

"To be honest, it's not something I probably thought of on my own. Considering the ministry was something that my previous minister always encouraged. His encouragement only prompted me to think about it or consider it, but not something I thought of on my own. To be honest, it was not something I actually wanted to do."

Having held different leadership positions in parish life, respondent D did not see altogether that training for ordained ministry would essentially make him a "great and competent leader."

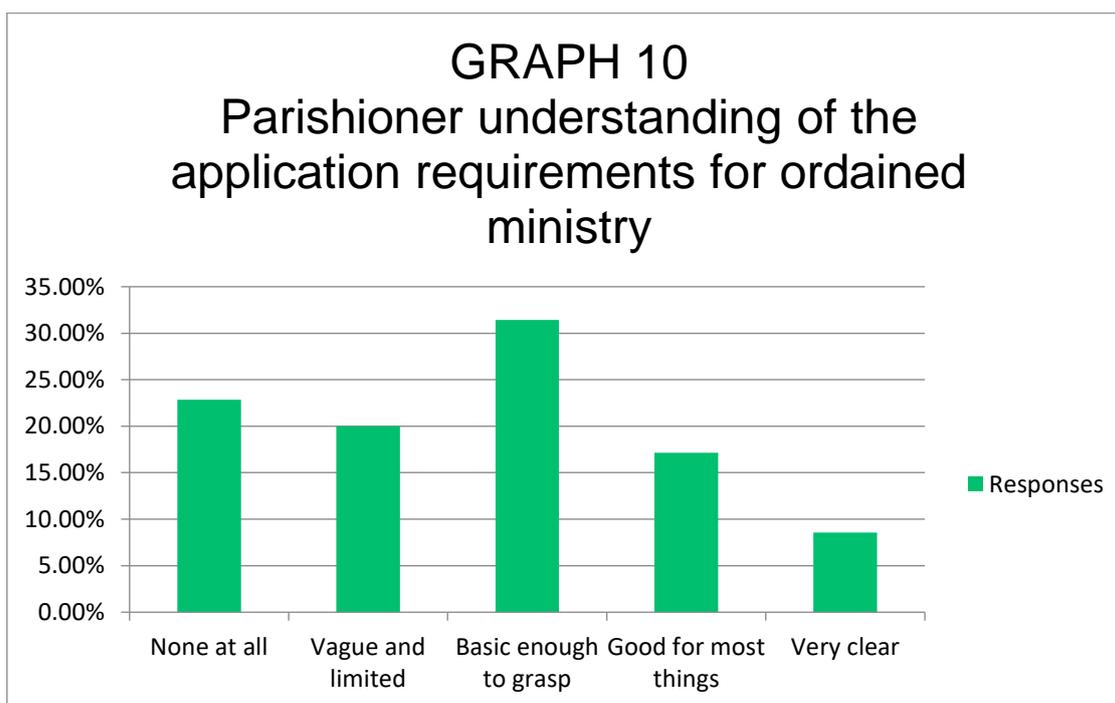
## Respondent D

“My role was more as a "Team Player/Member". At that stage, it seemed that ministers had to do absolutely everything themselves, make all the decisions, and the only help they had was maybe a part-time office secretary a few hours a week (plus myriads of volunteers - of which I was one). I was not keen on this level of responsibility - especially as a single man. I also had no real desire to shift to Dunedin to spend several years in study, away from my friends and family. I was fairly happy with the work I was doing in the Bank and in the church and did not feel I wanted a church leadership/ministry role.”

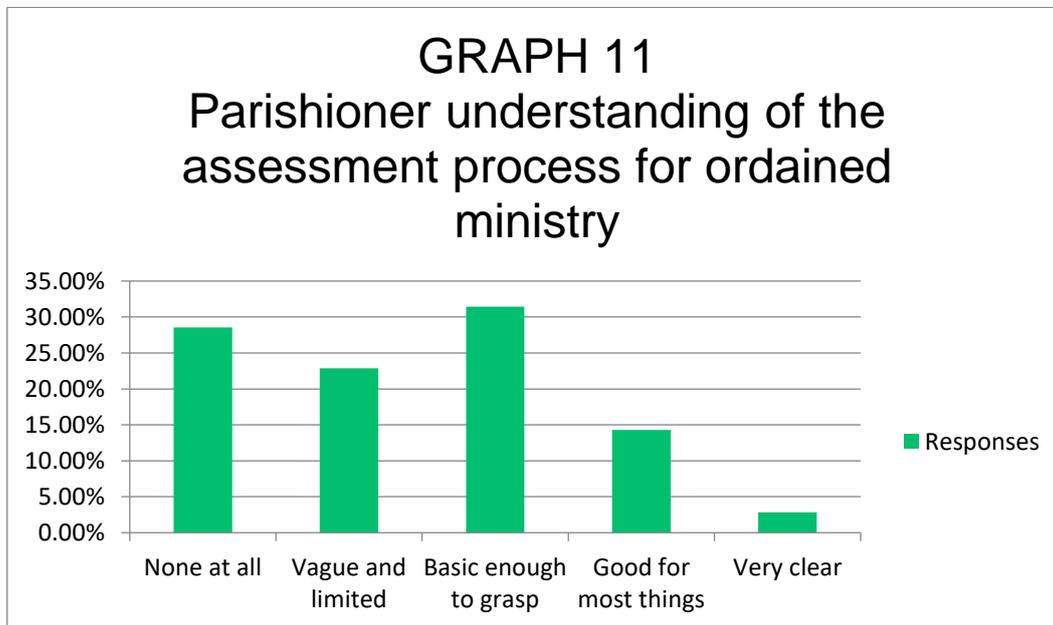
It seems that, to a large extent, respondents in both the survey and interviews may ponder and have certain convictions about ordained ministry but following through is easier said than done.

### Candidacy Requirements

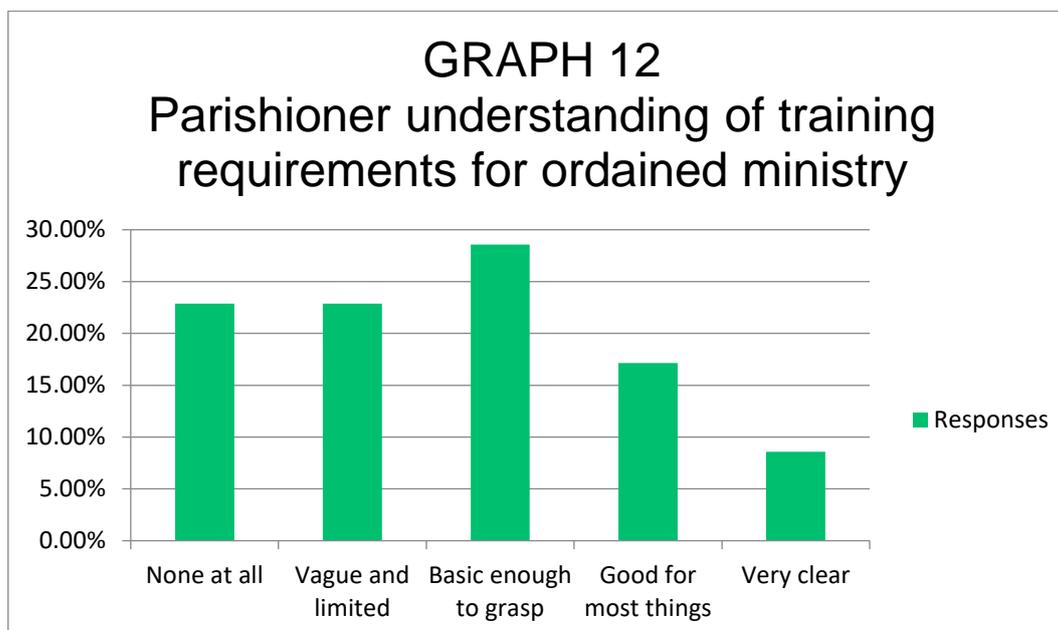
As well as discerning one’s call to ordained ministry, clearly understanding other elements involved can be challenging also. Having the relevant information about what else is required along this pathway is important. The parishioner survey wanted to gauge how well-informed parishioners were on aspects such as the application requirements, the assessment process, and training for ordained ministry. When asked how well they understood the application requirements for ordained ministry, just over thirty percent indicated that they had a basic understanding enabling them to get a sufficient handle of the requirements (see GRAPH 10). Coupled with those who had a good or very clear grasp of the requirements, well over half (fifty-seven percent) of the survey sample conveyed confidence in their knowledge of what was expected for applications. Conversely, this still left a significant number (forty-three percent) of parishioners who felt they had insufficient knowledge of this aspect of the pathway to ordained ministry.



Respondents having a sound grasp of the assessment process was perhaps more trying. This time, those with a basic or greater understanding of the assessment process represented nearly forty-eight percent of the survey sample (see GRAPH 11). Although such respondents had some confidence about how things worked in the assessment process, it still meant that a slightly higher number (fifty-two percent) were very much in the dark about such matters.



When identifying what respondents knew about what was involved for ministry training, again there were some slight differences of opinion from the survey sample. Over half (fifty-four percent) had a basic or greater understanding about training for ministry while forty-six percent did not (see GRAPH 12).



There are some clear observations about these three areas of application requirements, assessment process, and training for ordained ministry. The first is that number in the parishioner survey sample who had a

basic knowledge of these areas was relatively consistent at around thirty percent. While such people may have part knowledge regarding the procedures, they did not have the full information to assist them in weighing their options about ordained ministry. Second, if an average is taken of those who indicated having a better and clearer understanding of these three areas, it comes to about eleven percent. This glaringly shows that although these people are well advised about the methods toward ordained ministry, they are, in fact, an obvious minority. Third, an average for the rest who lack awareness of these areas is twenty-three percent. It means that there are twice as many who are poorly informed about the requisites for ministry than those who are very familiar with them. People who have a sense of call to ordained ministry would need the relevant information about necessary procedures as part of their evaluation as to whether to continue taking steps along that pathway. If they do not have such information, it would not be surprising that they procrastinate or discontinue any contemplation about ministry.

The experiences of those interviewed apparently reflected some of the findings from the parishioner survey. Many spent time seeking advice from their minister which mainly involved conversations about the qualities and character of being an ordained minister. The desired outcome seemed to be clear, but the relevant information of the expectations to achieve this goal seemed a non-talking point or vague at best. Respondent H demonstrates this well.

Respondent H

“There was some information that [the minister] gave to me about how to be a minister, about the duties of the minister in the church and to be involved in the local community. To become a minister, you have to go out and look for those souls and bring them into the church.”

Interviewer

“Did you have a look at the application for how to become a minister?”

Respondent H

“I haven’t seen the application yet.”

Interviewer

“So [the minister] didn’t give you an application to fill out or read?”

Respondent H

“No.”

Interviewer

“So, what is your understanding of how you can apply to become a minister?”

Respondent

"I have to commit myself to be a minister, to be involved a lot with people in every ministry inside the church."

Interviewer

"So, you never actually read the application form about what's required to apply for ministry?"

Respondent H

"I haven't read the application form, but that is my own personal understanding of what is the duty of the minister."

Interviewer

"Can you tell me what you understand about the process, about the interviews at Presbytery and National Assessment?"

Respondent H

"What I know is that it involves the congregation, the Settlement Board, and also Knox College as well."

Interviewer

"Did you try to make an application so you can train to be a minister?"

Respondent H

"I haven't made the application yet."

The experience of respondent A had some parallels.

Respondent A

"[The minister] said, well keep praying so that the Lord will direct you. You know there are always some hurdles and some things that keep coming to your mind; you know, material things like I have a house and I haven't finished paying the mortgage."

Interviewer

"What else did [the minister] tell you about what you can do? Was it just to pray or did he give you advice and what kind of advice?"

Respondent A

"He gave me advice like you don't need to go to Knox. You can always go to [study] up here in Auckland. You can go to work and go to school."

Interviewer

"Did you look at the application form for ministry to know how you can apply for ministry?"

Respondent A

"No."

Interviewer

“Do you know where to look, to get information?”

Respondent A

“To be honest with you, I haven’t even tried.”

Interviewer

“Do you understand the process of when you apply, of what happens at Presbytery?”

Respondent A

“No.”

Interviewer

“Do you understand the kind of training is involved for ministry?”

Respondent A

“No.”

Apart from her own minister, respondent E also got advice from other ministers as well from Rev Dr Mark Johnstone, a former staff member from the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership. The information from them was very encouraging, but, at the same time, very general rather than specific in terms of what actual steps to take in the process.

Respondent E

“[The minister’s] advice was to keep at it, to keep on keeping on. Do not give up because you do not have funds; seek other help from other places. For the application process, that’s what I know coming from Mark Johnstone.”

Interviewer

“So, did you actually get an application and see the information of what is required?”

Respondent E

“No, I haven’t.”

Interviewer

“Since that conversation with Mark, did you try and get information even if online about applications requirements and assessment process?”

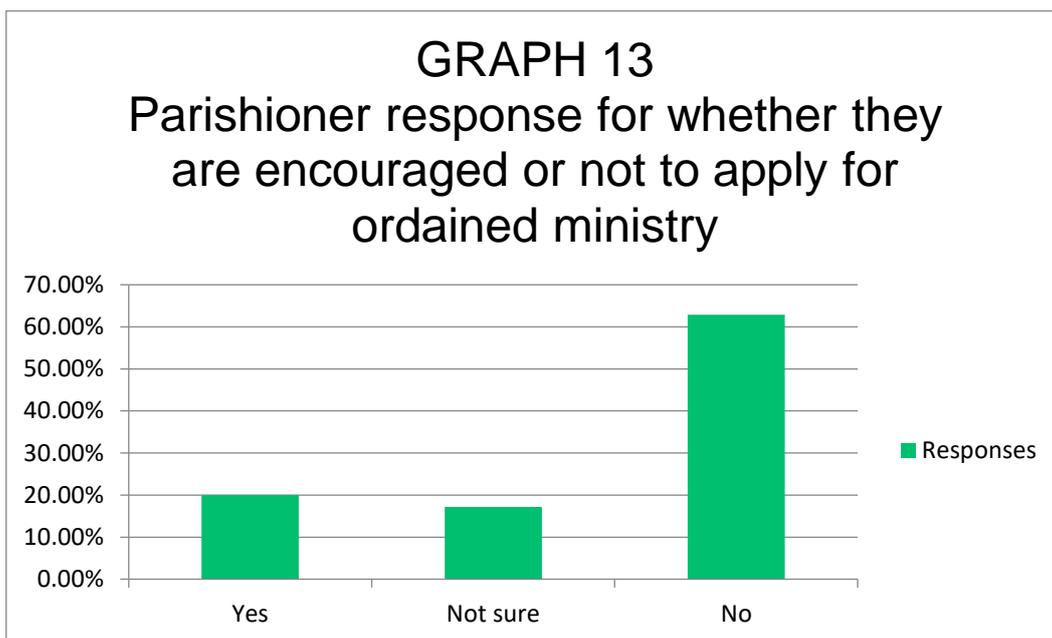
Respondent E

“To be honest, I didn’t.”

These very few examples still exhibit the fact that having the necessary information about the process toward ordained ministry is a vital component of discerning one's steps and direction for life in the church. Without all the details at hand it is difficult to really make an informed decision. It can be seen that the lack of helpful information usually hinders or stops any forward progress toward ordained ministry, at least for these respondents.

### **"Yes" or "No" to ordained ministry**

How would respondents in the survey decide their next step? Weighing up their experiences of ministry in their parish, along with the knowledge of what is expected for a successful candidacy, would they be encouraged to apply for ordained ministry in the PCANZ? The vast majority (sixty-two percent) of parishioners in the survey expressed that such things would not encourage them enough to apply (see GRAPH 13). Seventeen percent were unsure. But from what has been noted so far about the experiences of respondents challenged to make a response, indecision is perhaps a subtle indication of unwillingness or a polite way of saying "no." If coupled, then, with those who explicitly indicated in the negative, the more realistic number of those turning away from the ordained ministry pathway would be nearly eighty percent. This clearly shows that while ordained ministry maybe appreciated by many in their congregation, to serve in that capacity is not for everyone.



On a more positive note, others in the survey were affirming. The remaining few (twenty percent) of the sample were willing to explore how far this pathway would take them. As noted earlier with interviewees, thirty percent who considered candidacy actually applied for it. Although the number from both the parishioner survey and interviews are small, they still represent a significant potential in the bigger scheme of things. Hypothetically, if the survey sample was representative of all parishioners between the ages of twenty and fifty years within Northern Presbytery and twenty percent of them applied for ordained ministry every year, the presbytery assessment would be overwhelmed. As such, a candidate shortage would not be a concern.

### Factors for not pursuing candidacy for ordained ministry

The reality, however, for Northern Presbytery, is that fewer and fewer people are in fact applying for ordained ministry. The crux of this study wanted to know why this is. The question was put to those who previously indicated that they were unsure or would not apply for ordained ministry and to also identify what factors contribute to their decision. The list of factors were not exhaustive and were mainly related to candidacy. Parishioners could choose more than one response if applicable to them.

The factor that generated the most response for not applying for ordained ministry was the absence or lack of a clear sense of God’s calling upon the life of respondents. Forty-four percent of them felt this way (see TABLE 2). This is despite the fact that many of them also had positive experiences of ministry and minister in their parish. It shows that positive experiences of serving in the congregation in a lay capacity is perhaps more preferable than serving as a church minister.

<b>TABLE 2</b>		
Parishioner response for reasons not applying for ordained ministry		
Answer Choices	Responses	
I have no sense or am unsure of God’s call to ordained ministry.	44.44%	12
I am unclear of the application requirements for ordained ministry.	14.81%	4
I do not think I can fully meet the application requirements for ordained ministry.	25.93%	7
I am unclear of the assessment process for ordained ministry.	14.81%	4
I do not think I can fully meet the assessment requirements for ordained ministry.	11.11%	3
I am unclear of the ministry training requirements for ordained ministry.	14.81%	4
I do not think I can fully meet the training requirements for ordained ministry.	3.70%	1
The financial cost involved for ministry training would make it too difficult for me.	29.63%	8
Relocating myself and/or family for ministry training would make it too difficult for me.	29.63%	8
The whole process including application, assessment, and ministry training for ordained ministry is too long.	22.22%	6
Other (please specify)	18.52%	5
	<b>Answered</b>	<b>27</b>
	<b>Skipped</b>	<b>8</b>

Uncertainty regarding candidacy procedures was also a cause for not pursuing ordained ministry. Insufficient knowledge of application requirements, assessment process, and ministry training was consistently chosen by nearly fifteen percent of the sample. In terms of self-confidence for completing these three areas of process, twenty-five percent of respondents indicated a perceived deficiency for meeting the application

requirements, while eleven and three percent respectively felt the same about the assessment process and ministry training respectively. Although the figures for these areas can be seen as relatively minor contributors to people shunning ordained ministry, when held alongside the lacking sense of God's call upon them, what becomes more evident is a growing feeling of inadequacy.

This result was not surprising since it was noted earlier that people with a sense of call to ordained ministry would need the relevant information about procedures to continue taking steps toward that goal. Unfamiliarity with process expectations would most likely lead to procrastination or withdrawal from the journey to ordained ministry. It was also observed prior that most in the survey felt they were not well versed enough about the procedural areas. So, it was somewhat surprising why many more in the survey did not indicate these as contributing factors? Perhaps suggesting no sense of God's calling as the main reason for not pursuing ordained ministry sounds better than a feeling of inadequacy or incompetence.

There were other factors given which were more significant as a basis for not proceeding in the direction of ordained ministry. They included the perceived financial costs to a parishioner and his/her family, although such costs were not articulated. Nearly thirty percent of the survey sample found this a challenging factor. It would be reasonable to suspect that if a parishioner contemplated applying for ordained ministry with the hope of being a successful candidate, then there are financial implications that come with that success. One aspect is funding for one's theological education as a foundational requirement. But the question is, who pays for it? Is it the candidate or the national church (PCANZ)? Details from the KCML website in relation to NOM applicants states that:

*"If you are a Foundation Studies student, there may be some financial support available from the Church before the commencement of the internship studies programme, depending on the level of Trust Funds available. However, this is not guaranteed."*

If a candidate for NOM is successful at national assessment, then "there may be some financial support" if such support is sufficient and available to complete foundational theological studies prior to entering the internship programme. The uncertainty about how a prerequisite for ministry training is paid for can be a cause for concern. So, what about parishioners who undertake theological studies before having their candidacy confirmed at national assessment? Who pays for their tuition for the time it takes to complete a theological degree? There appears to be nothing from KCML for someone who takes on studies as part of the pathway towards ordained ministry. The onus, then, seems to fall upon candidates to cover study expenses which would further compound their existing financial commitments.

Interviewees who undertook theological studies, even though unsuccessful as a candidate, paid for it themselves. Those who contemplated applying and took into account study commitments on top of their living commitments did not hide their reservations.

Respondent A

"I remarried and the kids I have from my previous relationship are still in the house, but I don't want to put a burden on them to pay for the mortgage; I don't know."

Interviewer

“So, your financial situation is one of the things that weighs heavy on your heart and mind.”

Respondent A

“Yes.”

Respondent E coupled financial pressures with cultural expectations as a hinderance.

Respondent E

“I think the thing for me was I was too embarrassed to ask anybody because of that island mentality; that if you don’t have money and you ask, then shame on you. That’s what it was and I’m hating myself thinking that now.”

Interviewer

“You talked about finances and the cultural mentality that have held you back. Are there other things preventing you from proceeding with your sense of call to ministry?”

Respondent E

“Nothing except for those two things. I now feel silly about it, but finances is a major issue for me.”

Yet, for respondent G, the financial costs to study did not override the strong sense of call to ministry. Money concerns were real, but not a determining factor.

Interviewer

“You mentioned earlier about doing some theology papers. What made you decide to do that first rather than waiting for the assessment process to confirm you or not?”

Respondent G

“That’s a good question. When I look at it, it would probably have been more sensible in many ways to keep working and do the discernment process, and then when I was in, to start studying. But the problem with that was that I had that really strong sense of God saying to me, ‘it’s time.’ I had that feeling that I needed to stop what I was doing and to actually make an active change in direction as part of what I was being called to do. That’s what happened and so that’s what I felt I was meant to be doing. I guess in some ways, that’s made things a little more difficult for me in terms of, say financially, and obviously that’s a big part. But I’ve had those sort of God moments where God says, ‘I will provide everything you need to be able to do this.’ So, I’ve had those moments that I just have to trust.”

Related to financial pressures and just as significant is the idea of possibly moving oneself and or one’s family for ministry training if one was a successful candidate. Again, approximately thirty percent of the sample offered this as a factor that would detract them from ordained ministry. Relocating to an unfamiliar area for an internship can be unsettling. There are various aspects of life to weigh up including finding suitable and affordable accommodation, spouse employment, schools for children, and so on. Although the questionnaire did not specify such things as part of people’s consideration, these were clearly some of the things that respondent J considered, among others, despite the uncertainty of his candidacy.

Respondent J

“There were a lot of other factors also with my situation. I had told my bosses that I wasn’t expecting to be in this job until, you know, I was being honest with them. I said, “hey this is what I’m looking at,” you know, national ordination and that’s most likely going to kick off next year. So, FYI.” Also at that time, our rental agreement was coming to a close and we didn’t know what we were going to do. Our landlord was asking, “hey, what are you doing because there are people interested in the place.” Obviously, we weren’t keen to sign another year’s lease. So, there was a lot of pressure building up...

There was almost this kind of an idea, well if I get through we’re going to have to move to Dunedin to a city I’ve never lived in and I didn’t know anyone in Dunedin. Also at the time, we were looking at buying a house, and so the question was, could we afford a house in Dunedin? Answer, not on your life, especially if we were to go on what I would be receiving...

Also, my daughter was born in December 2019. With a new one at home, well if we can’t buy a house, then we’ve got to rent. Well, how can we afford to rent when you only have x amount of dollars? We already started doing the math and my wife...would have to have to go back to work which would mean [child] would have to go to pre-school. And that’s not something we wanted.”

It can be seen that relocation for ministry training is not always as straightforward as one might think. Circumstances can change at a pace that makes things unpredictable or unmanageable. As such, candidates for ministry have to seriously count the cost to following God’s calling.

Following this testing aspect to a lesser degree was the forecast of a lengthy process. For the NOM process, it can potentially take seven or eight years from the time an application is made to finishing an internship. This is especially the case for those who have not already undertaken theological studies. Following the guidelines by KCML as well as NAW, the process is as follows:

1. The first year may involve exploring a sense of call and seeking guidance with one’s minister, elders, and any other person relevant to the purpose. At the end of that year or at the beginning of the following year, an application may formally be lodged with the presbytery.
2. In the second year, the appropriate documentation and requirements for the application are obtained and further preparations are made in anticipation of presbytery assessment in October of that year.
3. If the candidate is successful at the presbytery assessment, presbytery will recommend that person to national assessment in May of the following year.
4. In the third year at national assessment, if the candidate is again successful and is accepted as a student for ministry, then he or she can plan to begin theological studies in the second half of that year, or at the beginning of the following year.
5. If the student studies fulltime, it is likely to take three or four years to complete. Taking the lesser (three years) means that, so far, the journey has taken five and a half years or six years (if studies begun at the beginning of the year following national assessment).
6. After theological studies, the student can begin a two-year internship. At completion, seven to eight years has passed before awaiting licencing and ordination.

If theological studies, for whatever reason, takes an extra year, then the whole process could potentially extend to nine years. This is an extremely protracted timeframe to invest one's life on the journey towards ordination. It is understandable, then, that such a process may not be appealing to some people. This view was well affirmed in the interview with respondent C who had already spent some years completing a degree for a career in which he was very settled.

Interviewer

"Because in the pathway for ministry, you may have to do a degree in theology that can take three or four years, and then a two-year internship programme. Potentially it could take six years and seven if you include the application and assessment process. Would that be appealing to someone like yourself?"

Respondent C

"No, not at my age. There are probably a few factors in it now that I think about it. Besides it being a spiritual calling, but in the seven-year period, there would probably be a lot of things that I could accomplish. In those seven years I could have a family, you know. Even if I kind of got myself in a financial situation where I had to be committed to something, then paying it; it is an extremely long time. I mean, I'm in my thirties, and by my forties and I'm entering into the ministry, which other people have done, but on top of that, I'm not sure."

The last option as a factor for not following through to apply for ordained ministry was left open as "Other." Although the opportunity was given for respondents to share their own thoughts, none were stated. Those interviewed, on the other hand, did express some other reasons. A common thread running through them was that despite an inclination towards ordained ministry, there was also significant satisfaction of their present circumstances. Most respondents were quite happy to continue serving in a particular capacity in their congregation. It was clear in their minds that their participation in parish ministries and missions was still doing "God's work." The clarity this brought them became increasingly preferable against wrestling with questions regarding God's call and the uncertain implications for pursuing the vocation of ordained ministry.

Interviewer

"So, you had this feeling of what could be ministry moving forward. I'm trying to understand how you sensed or thought if God was in it."

Respondent D

"People used to talk about, 'have you really had the call to ministry?' So, I explored what that call really meant. At that stage I felt that I wasn't really being called to go into ministry. I was enjoying my career in banking and the things I was doing there. It didn't feel as though it was time to go and do something entirely different and starting off again. I was doing banking training and qualifications etc. and quite content..., but I didn't think ministry was going to be the spot where I was going to. That was the kind of feel that I got. I don't know how you can define a call, but I think a call is like a deep-seated desire that this is where you were meant to be going and getting pushed into that direction. You've got indicators and things like that, and I didn't have any of those. I was more involved and getting on really, really well with the youth I was working with."

For respondent B, notwithstanding his pondering about ordained ministry, the missional work of his congregation was something he was deeply committed to, and which had a high priority for him.

Respondent B

“I thought about doing it, but I held back a little bit. It’s just because of my involvement with mission work in the [place]. That seemed to hold me back because I don’t want to get involved in training or get involved with ministry that might hold me back from what I’m doing. With that in mind, that’s what holds me back from training to be a minister.”

Respondent I was often encouraged by his minister to consider ordained ministry, but which also meant being challenged about giving up his work of helping families in the wider community. For respondent I, his work was seen as a practical and social extension of ordained ministry.

Respondent I

“I have sort of put [minister’s] statements back on the backburner. But then I found myself questioning, like a lot of what we do at work, I have more freedom than you could ever imagine to talk about Christian things. But there is still a clash of worldviews in the workplace. If I was playing in a pastoral ministry, I would approach a lot of our issues a lot differently from what I do. It’s just a fact of life and that’s causing me to think, okay, is this really where I want to be long term?... I have more opportunities to minister to people in the world with the love of Christ than I could possibly ever have. And the other thing is that my wife has said to me, ‘Mark, you don’t need a pulpit.’ Because with a pulpit, I’m confining myself. Whereas at the moment, I’ve got contacts in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Tauranga, where I am able to let the love of Christ flow through me to others.”

The above comments reveal that saying “no” to ordained ministry does not necessarily equate to saying “no” to service in the church. It does, however, signify a particular capacity in which that person serves; in this case, the prospect of serving as an ordained minister. It is encouraging that respondents in this study continue to be actively involved in their respective congregations. But remaining there also means their absence as potential candidates for ordained ministry. Since the vast majority in the survey were not inclined towards this pathway, as were the interviewees, the absence gap is glaring to see. If this absence continues to grow, it may reveal a widening and deeper hole in ordained ministry that may get harder to fill.

In sum, this chapter attempted to understand the perceptions and experiences of parishioners within Northern Presbytery regarding candidacy for ministry. While respondents in this study had a great appreciation of ministry and minister in their respective congregations, for many it did not necessarily translate into an application for candidacy. Those who did apply and were unsuccessful clearly had reservations about their experiences leaving them very disillusioned about the candidacy process and reluctant to consider it again. The heart of this study sought to identify factors that contribute to the very low number of candidates in Northern Presbytery. Having analysed the parishioner survey and interviews, the following factors were identified as having significant influence upon respondents.

1. **No clear sense of calling to ordained ministry.** The positive experiences of lay ministry in their respective congregations does not necessarily extend to pursuing ordained ministry in the wider church. Although grateful of the work and support of their minister, discernment about candidacy was not something that motivated respondents towards it. This may also reflect a lack of priority given to fostering candidacy for ministry in their parishes.

2. **Lack of clarity and confidence regarding candidacy requirements and process.** Most respondents in the survey sample and interviews were challenged about relevant information for candidacy. It is not so much a matter of what information there is about candidacy; rather, having the information (access) and clearly understanding it so that they are better informed about the candidacy expectations. The low number of candidates noted earlier may be an indication that parishioners have understood the requirements but feel they cannot fulfil them. It could also be that parishioners do not have all the relevant information and so are under prepared for a successful candidacy.
3. **Personal and financial costs.** It appears that in assessing their future vocation in the church, respondents also wrestle with anticipated costs upon their finances and family life. This included how the required theological studies would be covered (if studying fulltime) while still having to manage their other financial commitments for living, and how relocation affects the family dynamic if successfully entering the internship programme. Just over twenty percent of the parishioner survey sample indicated that the lengthy candidacy process was a reason they would not pursue it. But financial implications seemed to sway their decision even more. The low number of candidates in Northern Presbytery perhaps reflects not only the low confidence parishioners have in their ability to fulfil the candidacy requirements, but also their reluctance in taking a risk on a pathway that could potentially incur greater hardship upon them.
4. **Greater preference for their current status.** The study showed that some respondents are inclined to choose, or at least attempt, candidacy, but the majority are not. Those interviewed who had a negative experience of candidacy were less likely to reconsider it. Some who had seriously considered it did not even apply or get all the relevant information about candidacy. Therefore, although the notion of ordained ministry may be an aspiration for people, the desire to pursue it does not appear to be as strong as the preference to remain where they are and doing what they currently do. Saying “no” to all the future uncertainties of candidacy might also be saying “yes” to the present securities of parishioner life.

Considering the experiences of respondents in relation to candidacy for ministry has been helpful. In their experiences, the influence of ministers have played an important part. To gain a clearer picture on why fewer parishioners are choosing candidacy in Northern Presbytery, examining further the influence of ministers will be addressed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 6

### Ministers and parishioner candidacy

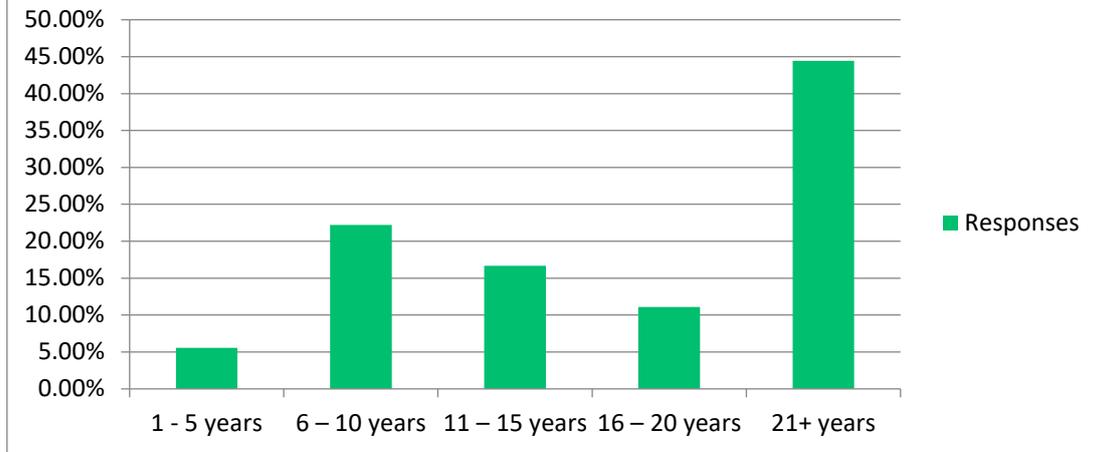
This study has identified that there is a decreasing number of people in Northern Presbytery congregations applying for ordained ministry in PCANZ. The experiences of some who considered this pathway or who applied and did not continue pursuing it was examined in the previous chapter. It was noted how influential ministers are in the candidacy process. This chapter seeks to understand the challenges of the process from the perspective of the minister and another key role in the process, that of the presbytery candidate convener. It will take a closer look at parish and presbytery practices to gauge how ordained ministry is communicated and promoted to people in congregations. Insights are drawn from a survey sample of ministers and from interviews with ministers who have engaged with parishioners towards candidacy, and from some who served as candidate conveners in Northern Presbytery. Looking at how the findings measure up against the factors identified in the parishioner analysis for the declining candidate numbers in Northern Presbytery will be helpful to better understand the problem as well as possible solutions.

Candidates for ministry begin their journey as parishioners. It was seen earlier that the parish context provides opportunities for parishioners to contemplate the notion of ordained ministry as a possible vocation for them. The experience of participating in various ministries of the parish as well as engagement with the minister are some aspects that can shape the perceptions parishioners have about ordained ministry. Depending on how positive or negative these perceptions are, they can also be influential in determining whether a parishioner continues exploring the pathway to ordained ministry or not. We saw that for some, like parishioner G, the biggest motivation to proceed ahead was a deep spiritual conviction. Yet, for the majority of parishioner respondents, the influence or encouragement to consider ordained ministry came through others in the congregation, primarily the minister. It is important, then, to examine the extent of this influence by estimating how the conception of ordained ministry is transmitted and advocated by ministers in their ministry.

The questionnaire to ministers in the Northern Presbytery was insightful but limiting regarding the sample size. Only eighteen ministers in parish ministry completed the survey. Therefore, findings cannot be taken to be representative for the experiences of ministers in general.

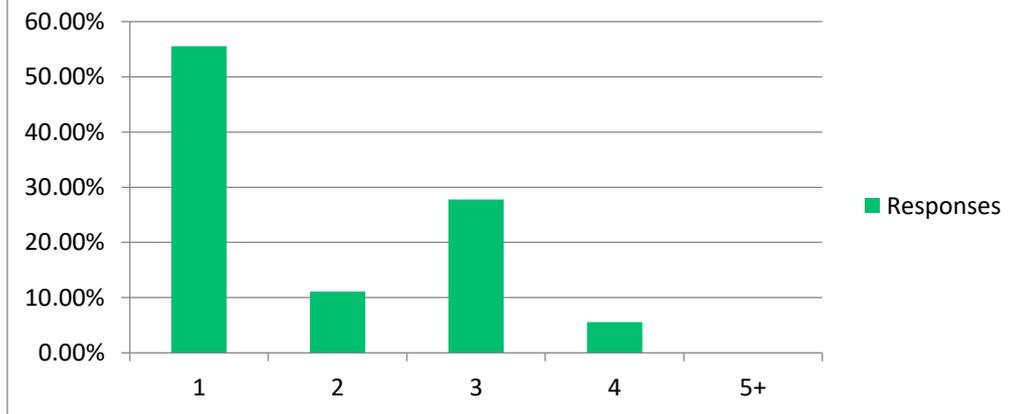
Despite this, the details obtained retain their relevance for this study. The survey showed that most minister respondents were very experienced in parish ministry. While twenty-eight percent had been in ministry between one and ten years, the majority (seventy-two percent) had served from eleven to twenty-plus years (see GRAPH 14) demonstrating a tremendous grounding in parish life.

**GRAPH 14**  
**Years of ministers in PCANZ parish ministry**



Another interesting observation involves the number of congregations these respondents served in. The number of parishes in which they served ranged from one to four. Over half the sample spent most of their ordained ministry in one parish, with the rest experiencing ministry in multiple parishes (see GRAPH 15). Of special note, if those who served in three or four parishes are combined, they represent nearly a third of the sample indicating a diversity of ministry context.

**GRAPH 15**  
**Number of PCANZ parishes ministers served in**



What these details reveal, so far, is the exposure by most in the sample to the breadth and depth of parish life. For those who expend their service in a sole parish, it may be fair to assume that they have gained significant familiarity with parishioners and the relationships formed with them. Those relatively new in ministry and serving in their first parish, getting to know people and forging relationships as well as grasping the rhythm of parish life are usual priorities. Respondents who have ventured in multiple parishes will appreciate new opportunities that a

different context offers. Whether serving in one parish or more, ministers, more than any other people, should understand that these are places and occasions of calling. They are situations in which the awareness of what God might be doing is brought to the fore in the minds and hearts of the minister as well as parishioners in the congregation. Discernment and the conversations around how people might align themselves to God’s purpose is integral for all involved. It is not something limited solely to the journey from candidacy to ordained ministry. Rather, it is at the very heart of parish ministry that can shape its future including that of its parishioners.

**What priority is given to promoting candidacy for ordained ministry?**

What priority, then, do ministers place on exploring with people in their parish ministry about Christian service? In particular, to what extent do ministers engage in conversations with parishioners to think about ordained ministry? Respondents in the sample were asked to rate their response to this question on a scale between 1 “Very Rarely” to 10 “Very Frequently.” The responses varied in the range but did provide some obvious leanings. Those who gave scores of 5 and lower represented just over sixty percent of the sample indicating that they were not inclined to encourage parishioners to consider ordained ministry (see TABLE 3). More disturbing is that just over half of this number gave scores of 1 or 2 showing that they very rarely conversed with parishioners about it. On the other side, while it was positive that about forty percent were somewhat inclined to raise the matter ordained ministry with parishioners, none suggested that this was a very frequent effort. It was seen in the parishioner assessment that ministers played an important role in encouraging them toward ordained ministry. If this was also the case for the ministers in the sample (when they were parishioners), then they do not appear to practice this as often in their own ministry now that they are ordained ministers. Perhaps ministers being more proactive in this area may help parishioners take further steps towards applying for ministry.

TABLE 3																			
Frequency that ministers encourage their parishioners to consider ordained ministry in PCANZ																			
Very Rarely		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		9		Very Frequently	
22.22	4	11.11	2	5.56	1	16.67	3	5.56	1	11.11	2	16.67	3	11.11	2	0.00	0	0.00	0
%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%	

Those interviewed appear to confirm the low level of engagement with parishioners about ordained ministry. One minister has been in ministry for thirteen years and, very early on, had one experience of assisting a parishioner towards candidacy for ministry. The candidacy was unsuccessful and, since then, the minister has not engaged with anyone else about candidacy for ministry. Instead, a focus of ministry has been about encouraging parish involvement.

Interviewer

“In terms of the idea of encouraging or promoting ordained ministry within your own ministry, how do you incorporate that into your ministry? Or what priority does it have in your ministry?”

Respondent

“It’s probably not high to be fair. I realise that it’s something that needs to be worked on more, but for the most part over the last ten or thirteen years, it’s been about putting more lay staff on or putting people into roles. I guess it’s identifying the people with passion that are coming through for which we just haven’t had a big amount; you know, those who would like to take it further.”

Another has been in ordained ministry for just over ten years and has had one experience of working with a parishioner towards candidacy for ministry as well as encouraging a couple more to consider ordained ministry. However, the very challenging nature of ministry has raised some reservations about whether to continue encouraging others about it.

Interviewer

“When you reflect on your time as a minister, nearly ten years now, how much of it emphasised encouraging people about ordained ministry?”

Respondent

“Not much really. I think a lot of my experiences have been, in one sense, struggling with what I’m finding in ministry. Would I encourage a young person to take that on? I mean I enjoy ministry, but my question to a young person would be, or my concern really is, how many parishes out there would I want to send someone fresh out of KCML? Where would I want to send them? I mean it’s coloured by my own experiences.”

While ministers may recognise potential candidates for ministry, efforts to guide parishioners along were still oriented towards parish involvement rather than towards ordained ministry.

Interviewer

“Of the number of people who serve in different capacities in your parish, have you recognised or explored any that you think could go further into ministry?”

Respondent

“Yes. I mean we had [name] who came through, but that was different. I have had others come through who showed some interest, but I did have some issues in terms of character. In the end it just didn’t work out. Often I’d keep my eye on them and if they’re ready, I’d say “let’s go and do that.” We’ve had a lot come through from the youth and so they’re working in the youth field now. They really haven’t had the passion to go into ministry.”

Interviewer

“When they’ve given you a hint or indication about ministry, how did you facilitate that?”

Respondent

“I kind of have a look at how they work. We’ve got a team environment and I look at how they work in that dynamic, and what they step up for. We often push people into further education through Laidlaw or Carey... Some are connected through relationships, but we just encourage people to step out and try things. We’ve had a few that

done like that, but not everybody picks it up. Particularly when you get kids fresh out of school, they get in and say, ‘this is great.’ But then the reality kicks in of what ministry life is really like. So, we’ve had a bit of that. Then there are behavioural issues or character issues that we’ve had to address.”

### Assisting in the candidacy process

Encouraging parishioners about ordained ministry involves the exchange of relevant information. Again, it was previously observed that most parishioner respondents felt that they lacked clarity about the expectations of the process towards ordained ministry. How confident then are ministers with respect to their knowledge of the requirements to assist parishioners? It can be expected that since having gone through the process themselves, ministers in the sample would be assured of such things. Just like the previous point, the responses ranged from 1 “Very Vague” to 10 “. It was encouraging to note that the majority (sixty-one percent) in the sample gave scores of 6 and higher conveying that they were reasonably well informed of the requirements for ordained ministry to help parishioners (see TABLE 4). Although the rest in the sample offered lower scores suggesting some unfamiliarity of candidacy expectations, it was somewhat distressing to find that nearly twenty-eight percent of ministers felt out of touch with the relevant information. Without the necessary details, it would be extremely difficult for ministers to offer any constructive guidance to parishioners considering a vocation in the church.

TABLE 4																			
Familiarity ministers have about application requirements, assessment process, and ministry training																			
Very Vague		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		9		Very Familiar	
11.11	2	16.67	3	0.00	0	0.00	0	5.56	2	22.22	4	5.56	1	5.56	1	11.11	2	16.67	3
%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%	

Interviews with candidate conveners highlighted how important it was for people inquiring about ordained ministry to having relevant information about the candidacy process.

Interviewer

“How much information do you think they had to help them decide before applying. “

Candidate Convener 1

“There was probably mixed level on that because a lot of conversation I had with them was also informing them about what the process would look like, what the requirements were, the difference between national ordained ministry as opposed to what they might have had in mind in terms of their home church. There was definitely information flow at that early point.”

Interviewer

“For those who didn’t have as much information as others, did that put them off from applying?”

Candidate Convener 1

“No, it didn’t because we did spend time on it. Depending on what kind of church they came from and how close that church was with our process, it was important to provide information. And then we had LOM’s in the mix and sometimes they had no idea, like ‘how do I become a minister?’”

The experience of Candidate Convener 4 involved providing printed material to assist those making enquiries.

Candidate Convener 4

“[We] printed stuff out for them; stuff that was on the website. We meet with them and handed over the information. But some of them already knew where to look for that information on the KCML website. But we printed it out and gave it to them in person and talked with them about any questions they had about ministry and the process.”

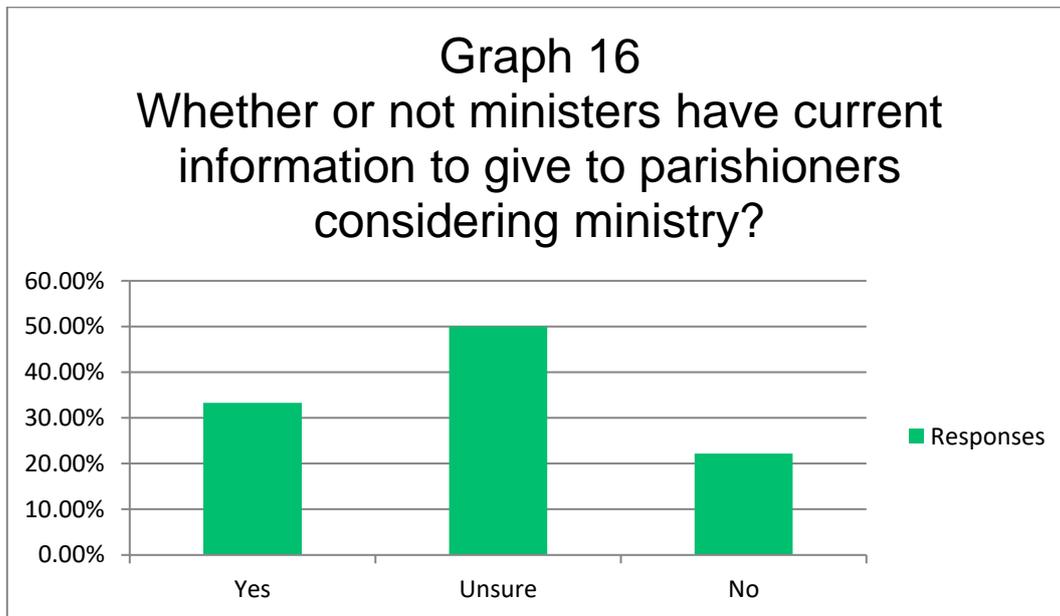
Yet, for Candidate Convener 4, exploring and clarifying the relevant information with candidates was just as important, or perhaps more so, than merely providing it to people in writing.

Candidate Convener 4

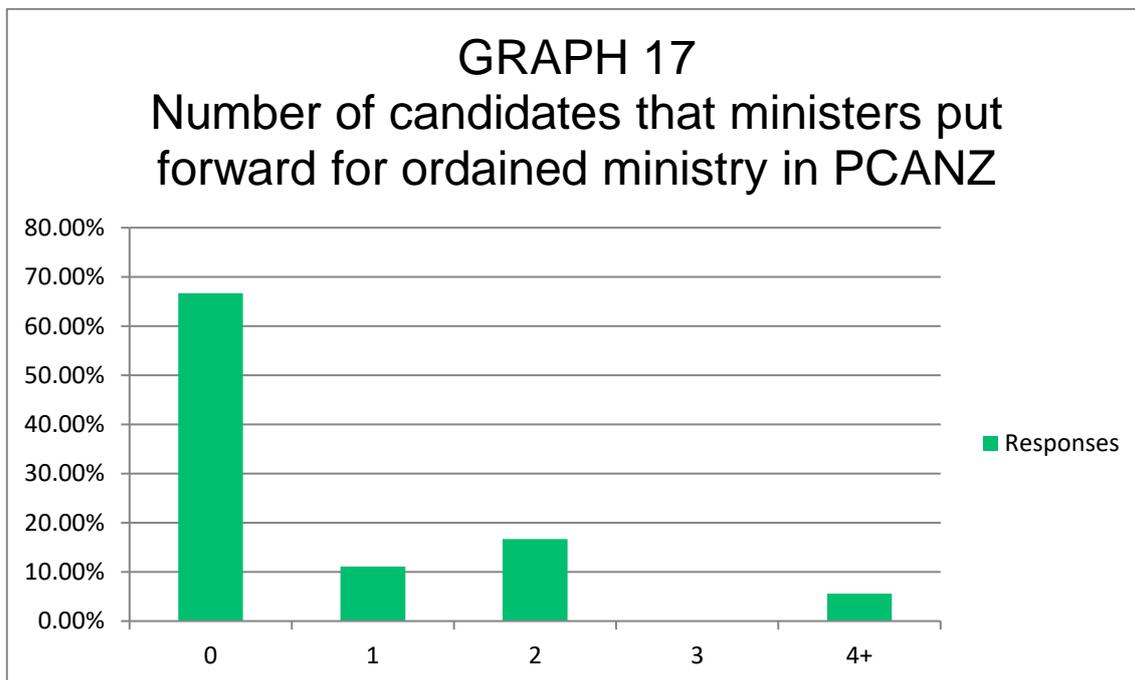
“I decided that I wanted to walk alongside them in the process. If they had any questions along the way or if there anything that came to my attention that they needed to know, then I would pass it on to them. I kind of met with them regularly just to see how they were tracking, whether they had any concerns and stuff like that. I really didn’t let them go. I held onto them regularly before national assessment.”

These examples show the value of relationship building between a candidate and someone who acts as a mentor for them when evaluating their circumstances with respect to applying for ordained ministry. The mentor is usually their minister, but eventually and often involves the presbytery candidate convener. While a successful candidacy is never guaranteed during the assessment process, having clarity about the necessary information and requirements can at least provide some confidence for a candidate or potential candidate.

Having the relevant information on hand for parishioners is also important. If a minister is not very familiar or out of date regarding the latest information on the candidacy process, getting the information or providing adequate access to it can be most helpful. A third of respondents in the sample said they had the appropriate information to share with parishioners (see GRAPH 16), with about twenty percent stating they did not. Half the sample indicated that they were unsure if they had applicable information to share with parishioners. The lack of certainty is perhaps a sign they probably do not have such information available, or if they did, they are not confident of its availability or accessibility in the congregation. This is important because ministers are usually the first port of call for any enquiry about ordained ministry. They are, after all, the ones who have been through the candidacy process themselves and would have knowledge and experience to share with a curious parishioner. There are obviously other avenues a parishioner could seek information from such as the presbytery candidate convener or KCML staff and website. But a parishioner’s relationship is primarily with his/her minister rather than with others outside of the parish. The point here is the availability of appropriate information to people at the local congregation level before they begin looking for it elsewhere. If the number of respondents who indicated “unsure” and “no” are coupled to mean a lack of having current information about the candidacy process in their parish, then it is no surprise that this correlates with what was observed in the parishioner survey and interviews – ambiguity of expectations contributes to people being not inclined to apply or continue candidacy for ministry.



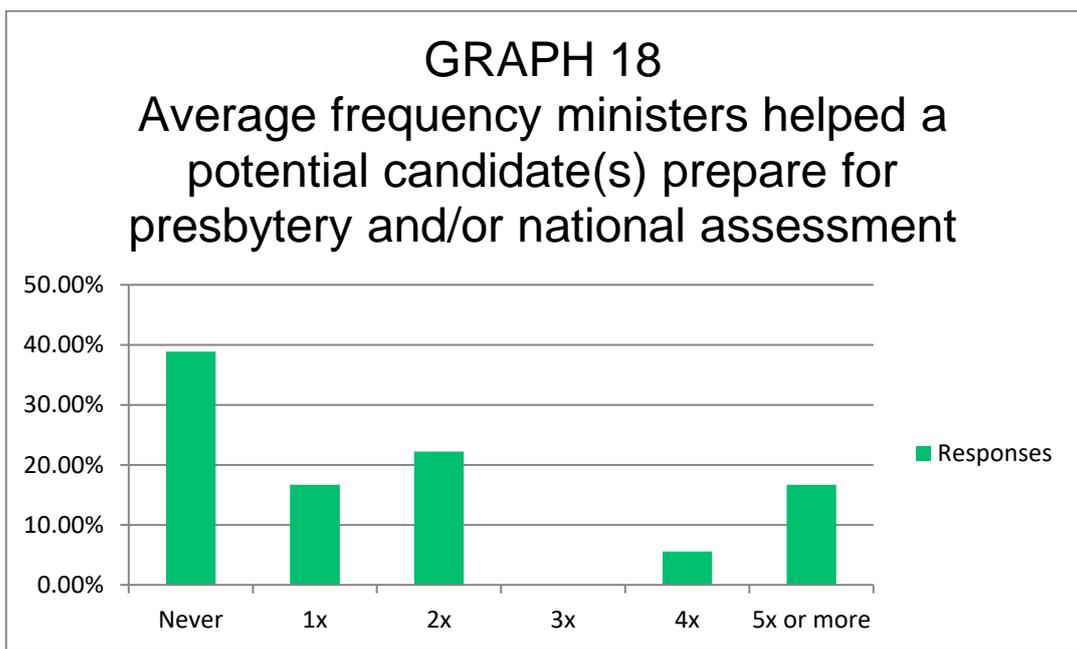
Respondents were asked how many people they had assisted to apply for ordained ministry candidacy. The results were mixed, but still disappointing overall. While about five percent of the minister sample managed to put through four or more people to apply for ministry candidacy, slightly higher numbers, eleven and seventeen percent of ministers had assisted one and two parishioners respectively (see GRAPH 17). This left two-thirds (sixty-seven percent) of ministers who, during their parish ministry, had no one put forward for candidacy.



What might be inferred from this experience in parish ministry? Perhaps it confirms, from what was noted in the parishioner survey, that very few people are, in fact, not greatly interested in pursuing candidacy for ministry from the congregations of these ministers. It could also be that parishioners are interested, but do not have sufficient confidence to make an application for candidacy. Perhaps there are other implicit reasons from a parishioner perspective. But how might this situation reflect on the part ministers play? So far, it has been seen that most

ministers in the sample are not that inclined to encourage their parishioners to consider ordained ministry, have less than adequate knowledge of the current candidacy requirements/process, and do not have such information readily available to enquiring parishioners. Although the previous chapter indicated that parishioner respondents thought the work of the minister apparently influenced their faith and involvement in the congregation, the minister sample suggests that the influence seems very minimal with respect to guiding parishioners in the direction of candidacy. It is not surprising, then, that this nominal impact resoundingly echoes the absence of potential candidates in the ministries of these respondents.

It would be useful to know the extent of assistance that ministers offered their candidate or potential candidate. The first aspect to explore was the average time respondents engaged to help such candidates prepare for presbytery assessment and national assessment. The data was again revealing. While it was pleasing to see that seventeen percent of respondents usually met five or more times with a potential candidate to help prepare them, and five percent did this four times on average, the majority of respondents (nearly forty percent) in the sample spent very little time preparing their candidate (see GRAPH 18). A similar number indicated that they never spent time helping prepare a candidate. This might be the case for a significant number of respondents earlier showed that they did not put people forward to apply from their respective congregations. Therefore, it may reflect limited opportunities for them to offer support rather than unwillingness or neglect.



Interviews showed that some did have limited opportunities to assist people who were seriously considering ordained ministry as a vocation. This was also reflected in some of the advice given to parishioners and often drawn from the experiences of the respondent. Therefore, if the respondent had experienced infrequent engagement with his/her minister in the past when going through candidacy, that practiced was probably going to be repeated.

Interviewer

“In terms of the whole preparation with your candidate going through, what were some key advice you gave to that person leading up to the assessment?”

Respondent

“Not really anything. There was no formal programme I was working through. I mean when I went through for ministry, I just put up my hand and said, “I want to do it.” I went into the presbytery and had a couple of meetings. I did well and that was it. That was my experience, and I don’t even know if one of the ministers came along with me.”

Interviewer

“So, you were following pretty much from your own experience?”

Respondent

“Yes, pretty much.”

Another minister shared a similar experience.

Interviewer

“What sort of things did you do to help prepare [candidate] for presbytery assessment?”

Respondent

“I guess to relate my own experiences in that regard and to be aware that some stamina was needed. I said there would be probing questions to be asked, but I guess I just based it on my own experience.”

Presbytery candidate conveners, however, recognised the importance of spending time with people enquiring about ordained ministry. As Candidate Convener 2 shared:

Candidate Convener 2

“Some people come and talk to me about it and then part way through the length of process, which was a long process before they ever got processed by the national church, let alone the presbytery, they might come and see me six or seven months before the presbytery assessment and in that time they often lost heart wanted to drop out. So, I spent quite a bit of time cajoling them and listening to them and encourage them to hang in there because it was just a long process.”

The experience of Candidate Convener 3 emphasised the supporting role of ministers throughout the whole process. While candidate conveners do assist with sharing information as well as advice for the assessment process, the candidate’s relationship with his/her minister is integral for affirmation and motivation.

Candidate Convener 3

“We do speak with them, but that’s usually after they have spoken with their minister who tries to fish out the information. By the time they come to us, it’s because they want to apply. At that point, it is more like telling them what is needed. From a pastoral concern, it’s more their minister whom they know well that is so vital in that journey... But I felt that for all of the students, it’s a frightening process and so if you don’t have that support of your own minister, by the time they get to us ...it’s just providing that information base.”

Yet, restricted preparation of parishioners is not conducive to successful candidacy. It is also unrealistic to think that parishioners are to fend for themselves or prepare on their own. In terms of pastoral care and discipleship, ministers have a responsibility to nurture and guide their parishioners as followers of Jesus. If discipleship involves helping others serve in the church, which can include ordained ministry, then ministers need to faithfully fulfil this aspect of their ministry by assisting potential candidates as best they can.

### Discerning a sense of call

Another aspect of the support of ministers is helping parishioners understand their ideas about a sense of call to ordained ministry. As noted earlier, this is an integral part of their support as ministers since they, themselves, have taken this pathway and continue to walk it when moving into a parish for the first time or multiple times. When engaging with parishioners contemplating ordained ministry, respondents in the sample were asked to rate the emphasis they placed on discernment together with the parishioner/candidate. They were asked to give a score ranging between 1 “Very Little” to 10 “Very High”. It was very pleasing that the majority (sixty-one percent) of ministers gave scores ranging from 6 to 10 indicating that exploring and clarifying a parishioner’s sense of calling to ordained ministry was a highly regarded practice (see TABLE 5).

TABLE 5																			
How ministers rate their emphasis of discerning with the candidate of God’s calling upon them to ministry																			
Very little		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		9		Very high	
11.11	2	11.11	2	0.00	0	11.11	2	5.56	1	11.11	2	16.67	3	11.11	2	5.56	1	16.67	3
%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%	

Of the remaining thirty-nine percent that did not share the same emphasis about discerning the calling with the parishioner, more disturbing was that twenty-two percent were even less concerned about discernment. Although encouraging that most respondents considered discernment with the parishioner a priority, the limited engagement to assist them prepare (as noted above) suggests a couple of things. One is that preparation was mostly or solely about discernment, or that, two, time on discernment is reduced to accommodate other aspects of preparation.

Interviews revealed that testing the sense of call was an important and challenging part of working with candidates for ministry.

Interviewer

“As best as you can remember, how much time did you spend with this person talking about this journey and discerning his call before going to presbytery assessment?”

Respondent

“Because he was on staff, it was possibly a little different from others. I don’t know, maybe two years max. That was the path we were looking at and asking where do we go from here?”

Interviewer

“Did you get a sense that he was very clear that God was leading him?”

Respondent

“He was exploring options at the time. I think he was quite open to the thought of ministry, but he did have a strong call to mission as well.”

Interviewer

“So, his application for ministry was part of testing his call?”

Respondent

“Yes, it was part of testing his calling. I must admit I was quite surprised when he got turned down. But in the long run, I think it was the right call.”

Although ministers play a critical part in helping parishioners discern a sense of call, for presbytery candidate conveners, sometimes what is conveyed to them by candidates is that the discernment process at the parish level was not always as helpful.

Interviewer

“Going back to the area of discernment by potential candidates, how much of that was done with their ministers or people in their parish?”

Candidate Convener 1

“I think not heaps. In some cases, there had been the beginnings of good conversations. In other cases, it was just very much their own. It had been kind of box ticked, a little bit, by the church. But it didn’t feel like they had been invited to be part of anything in the life of the church or discussions at any level. That was okay in a sense that, ‘hey, this is what we would like it to look like, we would like to see them get opportunities to do things,’ to be part of the session or sit on meetings to get a sense of it. The ones we put through, I put in a decent amount of time with them.”

Candidate Convener 5 was adamant that corporate discernment at parish and presbytery levels is both vital and challenging for candidates.

Candidate Convener 5

“The individual discernment of a calling that one has, then goes into a corporate context which I think is really challenging for many people because it seems like you have to convince a lot of people that you have a sense of calling. You seem to have to hold it with a real sense of certainty and at the same time with a real humility. You may be sure, but others may not be.”

Interviewer

“If I can go back a little bit to corporate discernment, by the time a candidate comes to presbytery assessment, are you saying they really haven’t had the full discerning support from their parish?”

“That’s how it looks for many of them. I’m tempted to say that at least half the time, the letters from the session and minister are form letters. It’s as if they haven’t actually sat down with the candidate and carefully, prayerfully, reflectively discerned or worked through things with the candidate. It just doesn’t seem that way. It’s just a formalising paper as part of the requirement.”

The above comments are a reminder that the engagement between minister or parish leaders and the candidate regarding discernment needs to be intentional. What ought to be explored at the parish level is the beginning of a corporate discernment so that its familiarity continues for candidates at the presbytery level.

**Potential costs in candidacy**

Supporting parishioners preparing for or progressing in their candidacy journey can also include discussing potential costs to the parishioner. Whether financial, relational, emotional, or whatever sense of loss a person anticipates when assessing his/her circumstances regarding candidacy, having some clarity about potential costs is important. This was clearly seen in the experiences of parishioner/candidates in the last chapter. It is helpful, then, to explore how ministers can assist parishioners. Rather than delving into how the variety of complex aspects of cost can be resolved, the study simply wanted to gauge the level of discussion ministers have with parishioner/candidates about potential costs, whether they discussed this aspect much or very little. Again, respondents were asked to indicate a score ranging from 1 “Not at all” to 10 “A great deal” as a rating of the extent to which they discussed potential costs with parishioners. The results were evenly split among respondents in the sample showing that while some were generally inclined to discuss potential costs with parishioner/candidate, others relatively equally did not give this aspect much attention when giving guidance. More interesting were the responses at the extreme ends of the range revealing that twice as many respondents do not discuss costs at all with parishioner/candidate compared to those give a great deal of effort to do so (see TABLE 6).

TABLE 6																			
Percentage of ministers and the extent to which they discussed potential costs with candidates																			
Not at all		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		9		A great deal	
23.53	4	5.88	1	5.88	1	17.65	3	0.00	0	23.53	4	5.88	1	5.88	1	0.00	0	11.76	2
%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%	

What is the significance of this observation? Lack of clarity about the candidacy journey is a significant contributing factor for people discontinuing to pursue it. Just like discerning the call and understanding the requirements for candidacy, counting the cost for such an endeavour is equally important. If the first two areas are unclear to parishioners/candidates, then an unrealistic assessment of what the journey might cost them (in all kinds of ways) may further compound their uncertainty and increasingly dampen their confidence to proceed. The

discipleship component of ministry means that ministers have a responsibility to help candidates or potential candidates to assess their situations as clearly as possible. While it is important for ministers to be affirming of those considering the pathway to ordained ministry, it is perhaps more important that ministers ensure that people are better informed about what implications may arise for such an undertaking. If the consequence is that people disengage from a vocation to ministry, it could be viewed as a failing on the part of ministers. Yet, robust, and honest conversations is about assessing what is realistically manageable for people under certain circumstances. It also means respecting the person and their decision in light of their circumstances. This is not a failure for ministers or candidates. Rather, it might be the appropriate decision at the beginning of the process, no matter how seemingly disappointing, to prevent immense regret and disillusionment of faith and church further down the line for candidates. For ministers, ignoring to explore or, at least, to raise an awareness of potential costs or losses for such a move by parishioners can be seen as unwise at best or lazy and irresponsible at worst.

Somehow, candidate conveners, rather than ministers, conveyed deep concerns about anticipated costs for candidates on the pathway towards ordained ministry. Some common themes they noted in candidates were financial concerns, especially when undertaking theological studies without any certainty for the success of their candidacy. Then there were the implications for family and the pathway to a vague future.

Candidate convener 2

“A lot of them were under real financial strain because there’s no payment for their training until they are accepted by the national church. And so, there’s a long time before they get to that point. The other comments were like ‘it’s such an old church, how will I ever fit into it?’... So, that was really difficult for family people because they had to virtually study part-time if they had another job in the church or something. None of them, if they had a family or marriage, could go and study fulltime with no guarantee that this was going to lead them anywhere.”

Interviewer

“If there is no guarantee you would be accepted, then why would you want to put yourself under that strain?”

Candidate convener 2

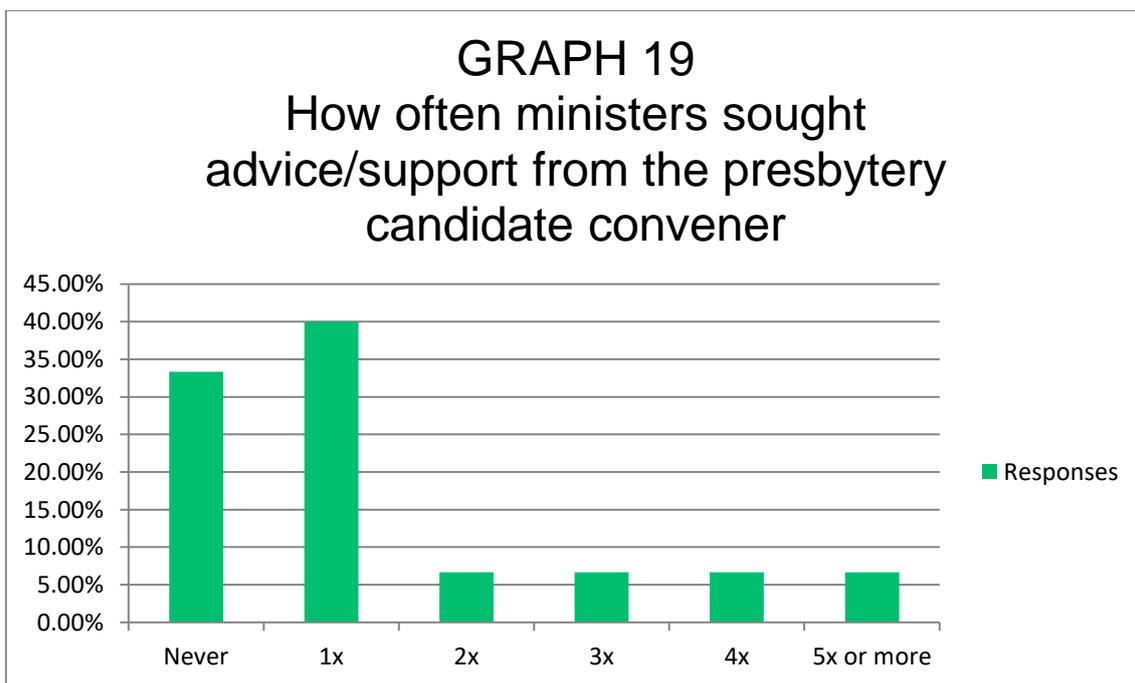
“Yes, that’s right. By the time I finished, it was mainly retired people who had made their career and money and had a bit of extra time, they were coming to apply for ministry. The younger ones simply couldn’t afford it. For a start, they couldn’t afford to live in Auckland. If they had a mortgage, it was a big mortgage. If they were renting, it was still too difficult. So, the financial thing makes it extremely difficult, especially for a young guy. Some of the women had a husband who was working, and they were fine. They younger ones felt, well why not go to the New Life churches where they’ve got lots of people around them of the same age; they’ve got financial backing, and the whole thing is a short time before they go into the ministry.”

### **Presbytery candidate Convener**

Ministers also need support when assisting parishioners/candidates considering ordained ministry. Previously, it was noted that some respondents in the sample were unfamiliar with candidate process requirements. A primary source of support for parish ministers in the presbytery is the candidate convener. The

candidate convener can provide advice or specific information to ministers so that ministers can appropriately assist a candidate or potential candidate in their parish. Gauging the frequency of respondent engagement with the candidate convener might also show the effort ministers make in supporting their parishioner’s aspirations regarding ordained ministry. The survey sample showed that very few ministers engaged with the candidate convener on multiple occasions. While it was pleasing that in this very small number were ministers who sought advice from the candidate convener in three, four, or five-plus instances respectively, forty percent did so only once, and about a third did not engage at all (see GRAPH 19).

There may be different ways to interpret these results. It could be that those not seeking support from the candidate convener was because there was no need; they were not assisting a parishioner for ministry candidacy. Those who spoke with the candidate convener on one occasion may have been because that occasion provided enough details to compliment relevant information already known by the minister. The very few who engaged multiple times were perhaps endeavouring to ensure that all aspects required for the candidacy process were adequately covered. The point here is that support is available to ministers to aid their effort in assisting parishioners considering ordained ministry. There should be no excuse for ignorance when a resource such as the candidate convener is accessible in the presbytery.



In the interviews, respondents were very much aware of the candidate convener role and function in the presbytery. But often assistance from the candidate convener is not always sought. If it is, the engagement is sometimes minimal.

Interviewer

“In terms of your interaction or engagement with the candidate’s convener of the presbytery to help you better assist or support your candidate, how did that relationship work?”

Respondent

“I had no contact at all as far as I can remember. I may have sent an email to say, “hey here’s someone to look at.” In terms of how the discussions went and the reasons they turned him down, I didn’t have any of that. But that might be the way things operate.”

Interviewer

“What I’m really looking at is the extent to which you engaged with the candidate’s convener leading up to the assessment, not after it.”

Respondent

“Again, this is a number of years ago so I’m not clear on how the process went. I mean, I don’t remember talking to a particular person or group. I don’t even know how I got in touch with them or whether they ever existed. But I must have made some point of contact.”

From the perspective of candidate conveners, supporting ministers with their candidate is important. Yet, responding to or initiating constructive engagement with ministers can be lacking at times. This was the experience of candidate convener 5 who conceded that engagements need to improve.

Interviewer

“With respect to contact with ministers, ministers of the candidates coming through, to what extent do you engage with them to share information and providing advice about assisting the candidate?”

Candidate convener 5

“That’s something that I’ve kind of felt is a weak spot because, honestly, there’s no engagement... One of our other candidates, his minister contacted [us] by email and we responded. But it was not great. We should have made a call and made it more personal. So, the response-times were really long and it kind of felt like there was a willingness, but it got lost in the mix of that way of communicating. The process looks like once you’re in the mill, ministers are kind of hands-off, ‘I can’t influence that.’”

These comments are somewhat distressing but seem to reflect the reality for ministers and candidate conveners. The limited engagements between them to assist candidates or potential ones may be unintentional and a consequence of the busyness of their work as well as the vague assumptions they have of each other. What is evident is that the minister and candidate relationship with the candidate convener is an important one. It is vital because the convener is the one who is believed to be most knowledgeable regarding the necessary information for the candidacy process. The convener is not only helpful to candidates directly, but they are also indirectly effective through ministers seeking to support their candidate. When interviewing Dean of studies at KCML, Rev Dr Geoff New, he highlights why the relationship with the presbytery candidate convener is crucial.

“Candidate conveners would be referring people to me to inquire about study. They either might be considering commencing theological study or have begun and they’re checking with me about the requirements; also, course selection particularly. Candidate conveners would be contacting me for just clarifying the process; what happens when, and so I do get a lot of inquiries from candidate conveners. It is really on a case-by-case basis; you know, ‘I’ve got this person, what could you advise?’ ‘How long do you think it will take?’ It’s a regular part of my work with

LOM and NOM...As I said, it's me talking through about what is required. Invariably, and not infrequently, I find myself saying to even a minister or a potential candidate, 'you need to be talking to your presbytery candidate convener.' A lot of times, people don't even know about the candidate convener or go straight to KCML, which is understandable because we're seen as 'that's where you train,' so that's where the answers must be.' Now, I find myself a lot of the time saying, 'have you talked with your candidate convener?' I steer them back to the convener. I answer their questions but I'm very diligent in ensuring that they've got the relationship with their presbytery."

It is clear that the role and functions of the presbytery candidate convener are advantageous to both the candidate and his/her minister. But they are only beneficial when the relationship is intentionally sought, established, and working well to enable relevant information to be exchanged and appropriate support offered. The converse would be greatly concerning if what Rev Dr New suggests is true that "A lot of times, people don't even know about the candidate convener." The reducing candidate numbers, data from both parishioner and ministers samples, and experiences of those interviewed may lend some weight behind such a view. If so, then it is imperative, as Rev Dr New also asserts, that a good working relationship at the presbytery level through the candidate convener is ensured. Hopefully, this might make candidacy for ministry more fruitful.

The above situation raises another question about the relationship between the presbytery, through the candidate convener, and parishes. If this relationship is critical, then what priority is given to promoting candidacy for ministry in the presbytery? How is it done? Conversations with those who served as a convener conveyed that it was a notice usually sent out once a year with other presbytery notices. Then it was a matter of simply waiting for expressions of interest or applications. Since it was a regular part of the process, no further consideration was given to how else notification to parishes could be handled. When asked what they did to try and better promote candidacy for ordained ministry to parishes, all clearly stated that it was not something they considered.

Candidate convener 1

"I don't remember it ever being promoted."

Candidate convener 2

"No, I never did any of that. That's a good point. I would just send it out with the presbytery mailing inviting people to apply, but I certainly didn't do any canvassing."

Candidate convener 3

"There is a lack of exposure at the local level and it's not bringing people in. We are not exposing this vital need at the local level."

Candidate convener 4

"Maybe we can do better. We can do a lot better. But again, it's what people do with the information that's out there."

Candidate convener 5

"I'm not sure. If it is, then that's another piece I haven't been aware of. I don't think I've ever come across a candidate convener in any other context going out and promoting to churches, to talk to them about sensing a call to ministry."

It was not as if these conveners did not want better exposure of candidacy for ministry to parishes of the presbytery; rather, it seemed to be a matter of doing what had been done previously. It reveals as a sense of passivity in that there is a certain expectation that people will inevitably apply. But passivity can also indicate that not much effort or intentionality has to be applied to encourage and better inform parishioners. In some ways, it turns the responsibility of generating interest in ordained ministry squarely on parishioners and/or their minister.

Candidate convener 5

“My sense has been that if someone in the congregation is sensing a call to ministry, then the onus is on them to come forward to their minister or perhaps on the minister to say, ‘you’ve got a real skill here, have you thought about ministry?’ That may well be something that isn’t happening anymore.”

Candidate convener 2 concurred,

“I would send things out two or three times, but all at the beginning of the year. I would send it to presbytery who would then send it out to the ministers. But if the minister did not pick up on it, then people don’t find out about it. And that’s unfortunate.”

Promoting candidacy for ministry may well require extra effort by candidate conveners, but more work can also mean more responsibilities and pressures. Therefore, rather than the sole responsibility being put on the shoulders of a candidate convener, perhaps the encouragement of people to think about ordained ministry needs to be a shared experience between those in parishes and presbytery. It also needs to be an intentional, rather than an ad hoc, approach so that the necessary information and support is given to enable applicants the best chance possible to succeed in the candidacy process.

In summary, this chapter attempted to understand candidacy for ministry from the perspective of parish ministers. It was seen that while respondents in the survey sample and those interviewed experienced the candidacy process themselves and were well established in parish ministry, they seemed less inclined to promote ministry candidacy in their work. They tended to encourage parishioner involvement in the congregation, but not in the wider church in terms of candidacy for ministry. A consequence was the lack of serious engagement by ministers in the discernment of a parishioner’s sense of call. This appears to confirm the first factor from the previous chapter for why fewer people are applying for candidacy in Northern Presbytery: that **parishioners struggle with a clear sense of call to ordained ministry.**

It was encouraging to know that a slight majority of minister respondents believed they were familiar with relevant information of the candidacy process to advise people in their parish. Yet a significant number remained very vague about such matters. It was not surprising, then, that most indicated that they have never put forward anyone from their parish as a candidate for ministry. The unfamiliarity about relevant information involving candidacy requirements has implications for how they can assist a potential candidate. Again, this appears to affirm the second factor influencing parishioner hesitancy regarding candidacy: **lack of clarity and confidence regarding candidacy requirements and process.**

Another integral role with respect to candidacy is the presbytery candidate convener. They are key to inform and assist candidates and ministers. While both ministers and candidate conveners are critical for parishioners about discernment of call and advice on how to deal with the challenges of candidacy, candidate conveners are the ones who seem to increasingly recognise the concerns of parishioners. In particular is the concern about costs that have a huge impact on those contemplating ordained ministry. This aspect also supports the third factor contributing to the declining candidate numbers in Northern Presbytery: **financial and personal (family) costs.**

Despite the importance of the candidate convener role, it appears to be underutilised by ministers or parishioners. Like the priority ministers give to promoting candidacy in their ministry, it appears that candidate conveners also do not do enough to raise the profile of candidacy for ministry. Apart from the usual notice about candidacy amongst other Northern Presbytery notices, the effort looks very passive. Whether the lack of effort to raise the profile of ordained ministry in the presbytery mirrors what is happening in parishes, or the other way round, it seems to indicate the value or esteem in which ordained ministry is held. The lack of interest in candidacy within Northern Presbytery is perhaps a consequence. As such, it is no surprise that it reflects the fourth factor contributing to diminishing candidate numbers in the parishioner analysis: **greater preference for their current status** rather than pursuing ordained ministry.

It seems to be taken for granted that people will always apply for candidacy like in the past. But those days are long gone. What is needed is an openness to see candidacy in Northern Presbytery's for what it is now and then have the courage to do respond appropriately. For that, attention will be turned to the concluding chapter.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION: A response to candidacy decline

The concerns that Rev Dr Keown raised about the challenges of candidacy for ordained ministry in the PCANZ are serious enough that Northern Presbytery wants to address them. While much of her concerns raised are issues that NAW and LSC have to assess themselves, they have provided an opportunity, nonetheless, for Northern Presbytery to examine the part it plays and the responsibility it must take in the candidacy process dilemma. This responsibility also has to be borne by its ministers and parish leaders who are key people for parishioners undertaking such a daunting endeavour.

It has been seen so far that there is a genuine concern of a potential clergy and recruitment shortage in Northern Presbytery as well as PCANZ. While this concern is also challenging to other denominations in New Zealand, Northern Presbytery has reached a point whereby it needs to consider its future by first clearly assessing its current situation regarding candidacy for ministry.

The previous chapters have shown that there are various factors contributing to the declining number of people applying for candidacy to ordained ministry in Northern Presbytery. They are shaped by the ideas and practices of parishioners, ministers, and the presbytery through the candidate conveners. Although several factors were identified in the parishioner analysis, a few were identified as having significant influence upon parishioners. To recap, they are: (1) lack of clear sense of call, (2) lack of clarity and confidence in candidacy requirements and process, (3) financial and person costs, (4) a greater preference for their current status. The minister analysis found that the low priority given to encouraging candidacy in congregations and presbytery was reflected in lack of attention given to discernment of calling, lack of awareness of the necessary information about candidacy, and valuing the present parish context over an ordained ministry vocation. Candidate conveners in particular acknowledged the tremendous costs upon those contemplating ministry.

The candidacy process is not a perfect system at the parish and presbytery level in Northern Presbytery. There is room for improvement. Drawing from what has been identified already in this study, some proposals are offered as a helpful response to curb the reduction of candidates and, hopefully, turn it around. These proposals are (1) prioritise and encourage candidacy for ministry in congregations, (2) improving presbytery promotion of candidacy for ministry, (3) develop a candidacy for ministry handbook, (4) and seek financial support for theological foundation studies.

#### **1. Prioritise and encourage candidacy for ministry in congregations**

Having one's faith and participation in the life of the congregation encouraged is an important aspect of parish ministry. This is something that both parishioners and ministers agree on. While such service at the local level is appreciated and urged by ministers, the study reveals that same urgency does not seem to extend people's service towards ordained ministry. For some ministers, encouraging parishioners about ordained ministry is an obvious aspect of their ministry, but for others, it is seriously missing. In other words, not enough is being done by ministers or parish leaders to promote the vocation of ordained ministry to members.

There are all kinds of reasons why encouraging people to consider ordained ministry is not a priority for ministers. Without rehashing what has already been identified in the parishioner and minister experiences, it is sufficient to say that the candidacy process begins at the parish level. If candidates come from parishes, then should it not be expected that a key aspect of parish ministry includes an intentional approach regarding ordained ministry? As people who have first-hand experience of this, ministers are products of the influence and constant prodding, prayers, and assistance from others (mainly ministers) in the congregation when they, themselves, were once parishioners. In many respects, this is one avenue of discipleship that involves moving forward while reaching back to enable others to also progress as followers of Jesus. If ministers or parish leaders are to be faithful in this area of discipleship, then encouraging and supporting candidacy for ordained ministry in the life of the parish must be a priority among other ministry priorities. Roy Oswald highlights the centrality of the parish with respect to clergy recruitment, "the local congregation is especially qualified to inspire and support potential candidates."<sup>62</sup> Considering the situation Northern Presbytery finds itself in with decreasing applicant numbers for ministry, bringing the focus of ministry recruitment from the peripheral of parish life closer to the centre might encourage more people to consider such a future for themselves.

Recruitment for ministry not about improving application numbers. Rather, it provides opportunities for people to be challenged to contemplate and explore God's calling in their life. That is what discipleship involves. It includes the spiritual discipline of discernment with people so that they might realise their potential in God at the parish level and beyond. This is when ministers, other parish leaders, and family can be part of the corporate discernment process in the parish before expanding it into the presbytery. According to David Rittgers,

The vocational call must be explored and tested. It must be confirmed within the context of the community of people called the church who can provide encouragement throughout the process. The call to ministry has both internal and external components that need to be validated and nurtured within the context of the church community.<sup>63</sup>

When encouraging candidacy for ministry becomes an increasingly integral component of parish life, then it helps to nurture a culture of call and discernment as part of that parish life. In this way, the occasion for assisting people

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<sup>62</sup> Deneff, Lawrence W. (1995) "Finding Leaders for Tomorrow's Churches: The Growing Crisis in Clergy Recruitment," *Consensus*: Vol. 21: Issue 1, Article 28. Accessed 14/9/21 at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol21/iss1/28/cites> Roy M. Oswald, *Finding Leaders for Tomorrow's Churches: The Growing Crisis in Clergy Recruitment*, Washington DC: The Alban Institute, Inc., 1993, 122.

<sup>63</sup> David Thomas Rittgers, *CALL WAITING: The young clergy crisis in the united Methodist Church*, Dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Ministry, Asbury Theological Seminary, May 2013, p. 119.

understand and progress in the direction they believe God is leading them is not a single event for ministers. Rather, it can potentially be a developing feature of ministry. In this regard, Rittgers again emphasises the valuable impact of the minister.

Pastors are responsible for creating a culture of call within their local churches in which young people feel safe to test the call of God and connect it to their vocation, whatever that vocation may be. They call out the gifts and graces they observe in the laity they lead. They make themselves available for conversation as mentors for persons exploring the call to pastoral ministry. They provide opportunities for people to wrestle with the call and test their gifts by allowing them to preach, lead, and serve. Some pastors go further and help candidates navigate the difficult process of candidacy and ordination.<sup>64</sup>

This proposal may seem to put more pressure on the time and energy of ministers. While this is not the aim, it is an area that needs attention, nonetheless. It also may not be easy since keeping the status quo for practices in parish ministry requires less effort. But if encouraging discernment for how God might be working in their lives of parishioners, including the possibility of candidacy, is not a priority in parish ministry, then it can be expected that fewer and fewer parishioners may consider applying for ordained ministry. It raises the question: where, then, does Northern Presbytery expect ministry candidates to come from?

## **2. Improve presbytery promotion of candidacy for ministry**

Raising the profile of candidacy for ordained ministry also needs to happen at presbytery level. This is primarily through the efforts of the candidate convener. As part of the candidacy process, Northern Presbytery puts out a notice regarding applications. This usually happens at least once a year. As seen through the interviews with candidate conveners, it seems to be a very passive approach. But it would be a mistake to expect that people will inevitably apply for or enquire about candidacy from a minimal promotional effort of the presbytery. It has been seen that although ministers are influential upon the faith and participation of people in their congregations, they appear not as influential regarding candidacy for ordained ministry. Apart from family and friends, where else can parishioners get the needed encouragement, relevant information, and appropriate support if they are contemplating candidacy? It should be from the presbytery.

Northern Presbytery is encouraged to find ways to be more proactive in how it communicates candidacy to parishes. This might involve varying the medium of communication as well as increasing the frequency of contact with parishes. While sending information about candidacy through the presbytery notices is helpful, it can also be limiting. As noted by some conveners, if the information is sent out to parishes and does not get past the person who receives it, then congregation members could potentially miss opportunities to take steps in the direction of candidacy. As well as disseminating written correspondence about important dates in the candidacy process, consideration may also be given for the candidate convener to speak at major Northern Presbytery events such as

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 120

the annual Leadership Conference, Regional meetings, or presbytery youth services. In these settings, a candidate convener could also utilise an intern (if there is one currently serving in a parish in the presbytery) to share about his/her experience. One candidate convener suggested this creative option for promoting candidacy for ministry:

“I think if you had the right people doing it and, you need a bit of charisma, it could be done really well. You could have someone who’s gone through the internship process, or in the midst of it, and who has real clarity about what it’s looking like for them... Like anyone you will get to promote any career, you want someone who knows what they’re doing and what they’re talking about.”

These occasions not only provide prospects for sharing information, but they can also increase the awareness and visibility of the role and function of the candidate convener to many in the presbytery. The result is the consolidating of relationships between the candidate convener and parishioners, ministers, or parishes.

With respect to frequency, bombarding parishes with candidacy information is not the aim here. Rather, it is about raising the profile and value of ordained ministry in the parish, presbytery, and national church. The various ways of engagement are important, and their frequency also needs to reflect how effective they are. Promoting candidacy for ministry should not be overdone in a way that it becomes a mere mechanical process that is impersonal and meaningless to people. Rather, pitching the message of ministry needs to be sensitive and intentional. In the opinion of one candidate convener, “But again, it’s what people do with the information that’s out there. I think it’s also about frequency. If you see something too many times you can become tone-deaf to it after a while. It’s being strategic of when you put the applications out there.”

### **3. Develop a candidacy for ministry handbook**

This study clearly heard of the lack of clarity about the candidacy process. Both parishioners and ministers conveyed this concern. What might be a helpful way to increase the number of people contemplating and being assisted towards candidacy for ministry is for Northern Presbytery to have the relevant information in the form of a handbook. Having a handbook can be a helpful resource for parishioners, ministers, and candidate conveners.

The contents of the handbook is important. While this is proposal is not meant to be prescriptive, the following are only suggestions. There are certain aspects (already highlighted in this paper) that need to be articulated well in the handbook as part of the candidacy process. They can include the:

- discernment process at the parish level
- application requirements
- discernment and assessment process at the presbytery level
- national assessment process

- theological foundation studies
- internship programme

The handbook can also incorporate relevant dates for receiving applications as well as dates for presbytery and national assessments. Although much information about the requirements for NOM and LOM are on the KCML website, these can be simplified and integrated into a document that is clear, reader-friendly, and attractive to potential candidates. Having the profile of the presbytery candidate convener within it is also helpful as an initial introduction to enquirers of the appropriate presbytery person to have conversations with.

The medium of the handbook is also significant. An electronic version can be put on the Northern Presbytery website as well as having hardcopies printed to give people if this their preference. It may also be beneficial for parishes to have an electronic version on their website so that parishioners and ministers can access it at the local level. Similarly, hard copies can also be printed and strategically displayed for all to notice within the church premises. The aim is to make clear and relevant information as available as possible.

#### **4. Financial support for foundational studies**

Studying for a theology degree at a tertiary institution costs money. Seeking ministry through both the NOM and LOM pathways involves theological studies. These studies have to be paid for somehow. For those taking the NOM path, the academic requirements are significant. When a candidate is endorsed at national assessment, there may be funds, through KCML, to enable a candidate to complete the necessary academic qualification. But financial assistance is dependent on the amount of funds available. Until then, the responsibility for meeting the costs of theological studies lies with the candidate. Unless that person has sufficient funds, fulltime study will usually mean taking on a student loan until the study is completed. This will inevitably incur a debt from student loans. As one minister commented through a written correspondence, “that loan will hang over their heads while in the internship and be there while they await a call, then into their ministry until paid off. Ordained ministry is hardly a high paying job so having a debt over your head hardly makes it appealing.” This can be a strain on the finances and family relationships of a candidate making prospects of ordained ministry very discouraging. Even if a person does pay for and completes a theology degree, it does not guarantee the confirmation of his/her candidacy at presbytery or national assessment.

An incentive for potential candidates for ministry is having the assurance that the costs for their foundation theological studies will be met. Rather than financial support though KCML being conditional upon the sufficiency of certain funds, meeting the costs of required studies needs to be more solid. The presbytery may decide to invest in a potential candidate by paying his/her tuition fees. But again, that does not necessarily guarantee a successful candidacy, nor the person being called back to a position in the presbytery once completing his/her training. This would not be a wise investment.

Responsibility for funding the foundation studies of successful candidates (confirmed at national assessment) should lie at a higher level. It ought to be funded by the national church rather than by the presbytery. This would require approval from either LSC or COA or General Assembly. It would be an investment by the national church to enable new ministers to serve throughout the church. Knowing that such fees are secure means that the priority for potential candidates is ensuring that the parish discernment is affirmed, the application requirements are met, and the appropriate preparations made for presbytery assessment, and if successful, national assessment. It is proposed, then, that Northern Presbytery consider making a proposal to either LSC or COA or General Assembly to approve the funding of foundation studies for successful candidates for ministry.

### **Closing comments**

This study has been both challenging and rewarding. To undertake the research and writing of this report in a short timeframe of four months under the Covid-19 restrictions has not been easy. Yet, the findings about candidacy for ministry, although not always comfortable to accept, brings a sense of relief in that this area of concern can be looked at honestly rather than dismissively. If there is clarity about a problem, then it may also provide clarity about solutions.

The study obviously has limitations. The low number of responses to questionnaires and interviews means that the findings cannot be taken to represent the majority of parishioners and ministers in Northern Presbytery congregations. Despite this, the few insights gleaned may in fact reflect the circumstances of a significant number who were either unavailable, or perhaps unwilling, to admit similar views as those who participated in the study. Of importance is that people's experiences about candidacy for ministry were heard and considered instead of being vaguely presumed.

The proposals offer a hopeful way forward to candidacy for ministry for Northern Presbytery and its parishes. It means that the efforts of this study does not stop here but must continue through the measures deemed fit by presbytery and parishes to be implemented. A favourable outcome would see more people in congregations better encouraged and assisted about candidacy for ordained ministry. If this report can achieve that, then it may also serve as a helpful and hopeful resource for other presbyteries and PCANZ as a whole to attain. To reach this point could mean a change to the title of this paper from "Missed Calls" to "Calls Answered."

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1

Letter by Rev Dr Emma Keown to Northern Presbytery Council

**To Northern Presbytery Council**

**12<sup>th</sup> September 2020**

I am writing to you to express a concern that I have in relation to the assessment process for candidates to the PCANZ.

This has no reflection on the National Assessment team who do a magnificent job, nor do I have an issue with the people trying to work within the process (KCML) my concerns are for the candidates themselves and the demands made of them by the process. Let me be clear; my issue is with the process itself which I believe is actually damaging us as a church in terms of future leaders. (Before I go any further I do need to say that I am on the National Assessment Workgroup – NAW, but I hope that you can see that my comments are made with no one person in mind and my concerns are general and not specific).

As you will be aware there is a very real shortage of candidates coming through to assessment, to such an extent that there will not be enough future ministers and leaders to lead our churches and this is particularly true for Northern Presbytery.

I am aware of the following concerns:

Candidates start the process for assessment at least a year earlier than the actual assessment. Then, if and when accepted, they do not start the internship process to the following year and that is if they have met all the stringent academic requirements. The time spent getting into the process takes out one year, then the assessment itself takes another year, then if all goes well and they are accepted that does not start to the following year. Its too drawn out, not flexible enough and just adds years to what could be a simple process if expediated well.

As well as this, the actual internship program seems to be extremely limited; if and when a candidate is accepted. At the moment there are 6 candidates (in the current year), and not enough churches putting their hands up to take them on. This is due to the cost involved (\$24k) and also having to provide accommodation for the intern or expect them to fund it, find it and pay for it. This is especially difficult in Auckland where rents would be \$600 or more depending on the size of the candidates family. Often the spouse will also have lost employment so the candidate and family will be unable to live on what is provided or afford accommodation.

Additionally, the churches that have put their hands up to take on a candidate as an intern are all over the country and sometimes the choice is extremely limited, making it almost impossible for the candidate to continue with the process (often with a young family and/or a spouse who has to quit their job in order to move). I believe this process is proving too difficult, incredibly restrictive and the cost is generally too high in multiple ways, but most especially for the candidates themselves.

I am not talking about lowering standards, I am talking about making it possible for people to begin the process in the first place. Too many good leaders, too many future ministers are walking away because the actual system is unrealistic.

I am aware of some candidates who are thinking this is all too hard and the options are so limited they would be better off going into other denominational systems and processes, or even going overseas. Some are considering lay leadership in the PCANZ as a pathway because at least they are paid somewhat adequately for the work they do.

The potential is that we will lose really good leaders because it is all too hard and the system is not working. I believe this situation is urgent and particularly for Northern Presbytery. I do not believe we have the luxury of time ... this is happening right now.

As far as Northern Presbytery is concerned, I think we need to address this now and come up with a solution. I am not suggesting I have all the answers this letter is simply to point out the problems. However, in light of this, could I give some points to consider:

Could Northern Presbytery say that any Northern Presbytery candidate(s) who are accepted through the process will do their internship in Auckland/Northern Presbytery and make sure there is financial backing for that to happen for both the candidate and the particular church involved?

Could Northern Presbytery seriously look at the whole process and address what I believe is a dysfunctional and harmful process (from the candidate's point of view)? This is putting many people off becoming part of the PCANZ and causing serious distress to the ones already involved in the process.

Could Northern Presbytery take this opportunity to address this with the Council of Assembly and raise this issue on a National scale as a matter of urgency.

Thank you for considering this, I look forward to hearing from you and your suggestions for a better way forward.

Yours sincerely



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## APPENDIX 2

### Questionnaire to parishioners in Northern Presbytery

#### Your Details

1. What is your age group?

20 – 29 years

30 – 39 years

40 – 50 years

2. What is your sex

Male

Female

3. Which general ethnic group do you identify with? (Choose more than one if applicable)

European/Western

Maori

Asian

Pacific Islander

Specify...

4. How long have you been involved with a congregation in the PCANZ?

1 – 5 years

6 – 10 years

11 – 15 years

16 – 20+ years

#### Your experience of church ministry and minister

This section looks at the impact upon you by the activities (church ministry) in your parish and the work of the minister.

5. What aspects of church ministry encourage you most? (Choose more than one if applicable)

Worship

Pastoral Care

Community outreach/service

Christian Education

Eldership/leadership

Minister



12. How well do you understand the assessment process for ordained ministry?

I don't understand the assessment process at all

I have a vague and limited understanding of the assessment process

I have a basic understanding with enough details to grasp the assessment process

I have a good understanding of most things involved for the assessment process

I have a very clear understanding about the assessment process

13. How well do you understand the training requirements for ordained ministry?

I don't understand at all the training requirements for ordained ministry.

I have a vague and limited understanding of the training requirements for ordained ministry.

I have basic understanding with enough details to grasp the requirements for ministry training.

I have good understanding of most things involved for the requirements for ministry training.

I have a very clear understanding about the requirements for ministry training.

14. Would all the information you have encourage you to apply for ordained ministry in the PCANZ?

Yes (If answer was "Yes", then questionnaire is finished)

Not sure

No

15. If your answer was "Not sure" or "No" to the previous question, what would the reason(s) be? Choose one or more of the following answers if applicable.

I have no sense or am unsure of God's call to ordained ministry.

I am unclear of the application requirements for ordained ministry.

I do not think I can fully meet the application requirements for ordained ministry.

I am unclear of the assessment process for ordained ministry.

I do not think I can fully meet the assessment requirements for ordained ministry.

I am unclear of the ministry training requirements for ordained ministry.

I do not think I can fully meet the training requirements for ordained ministry.

The financial cost involved for ministry training would make it too difficult for me.

Relocating myself and/or family for ministry training would make it too difficult for me.

The whole process including application, assessment, and ministry training for ordained ministry is too long.

Other (please state)

**APPENDIX 3**

Questionnaire to ministers in Northern Presbytery

How long have you been in PCANZ parish ministry?

- 1 – 5 years
- 6 – 10 years
- 11 – 15 years
- 16 – 20 years
- 21+ years

How many PCANZ parishes have you served in?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5+

During your parish ministry, to what extent do you encourage parishioners to consider ministry in PCANZ?

- |             |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |                 |
|-------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----------------|
| 1           | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10              |
| Very rarely |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | Very frequently |

How familiar are you with the current application requirements, assessment process, and training for ministry?

- |            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |               |
|------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---------------|
| 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10            |
| Very vague |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | Very familiar |

Do you have all the relevant information ready to give to parishioners considering ministry?

- Yes
- Not sure
- No

During your parish ministry, how many parishioners have you put forward as a candidate for ministry in PCANZ?

- 0

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4+

How much time did you spend on average helping a potential candidate(s) prepare for presbytery assessment and/or national assessment?

- Never
- Once
- Twice
- Three times
- Four times
- Five times or more

How would you rate the emphasis of discerning together with the candidate(s), God’s calling upon them to ministry?

- |             |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |           |
|-------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----------|
| 1           | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10        |
| Very little |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | Very high |

To what extent did you discuss potential costs (financial or otherwise) to the candidate(s)?

- |             |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |              |
|-------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--------------|
| 1           | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10           |
| Very little |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | A great deal |

How often did you seek advice or support from the presbytery candidate convener up until the time of presbytery assessment?

- Never
- Once
- Twice
- Three times
- Four times
- Five times or more