



MODERATOR'S PENTECOST MESSAGE

James K Baxter wrote:

'Lord, Holy Spirit,
You blow like the wind in a thousand paddocks,
Inside and outside the fences,
You blow where you wish to blow.*

How is the Spirit blowing in our Presbyterian paddocks at this time? Or, as Jenny Flett said at the recent Special Assembly in speaking to the report of The Theology of Property and Money workgroup, "At this time in our history, what is the Spirit saying to the Church?"

This is a question that exercises me greatly as I move around our Church in my role as Moderator. I see signs of decline. Signals of church communities coming to the end of their life and offering land and buildings for sale. Young people who are searching for meaning and seeking spiritual experiences, yet not seeing our churches as viable places for that searching and seeking. Property and wealth amassed in outdated and underutilised resources.

Yet, I also see wonderful signs of hope. New church buildings completed at Rotorua and West Melton, populated with enthusiastic people and ministries. Capable lay ministry teams leading churches, like Waimate, navigating the faithful through COVID lockdowns and back into being together again in encouraging numbers. East Taieri Church, full of conference goers inspired by the grounded ministry lessons of Andrew and Christine Harrex from Lawrence. And a special character review at Scots College in Wellington which affirmed and celebrated the central place of Presbyterian faith at the centre of the ethos of this bustling, future-facing and vibrant school community.

There is here a collision of despair and possibility. Is the Spirit calling us to be wise in the way we deal with our despair and pivot into our possibility? There are common strategic threads in many of the reports of the recent Assembly that more than hint at the Spirit speaking to us. Just as the Spirit lit up the life of the early church at Pentecost, may we find ways of winding those threads into a garment of hope for the future. In another stanza from his poem, James K Baxter put it this way:

'Lord, Holy Spirit,
You are the kind fire who does not cease to burn,
Consuming us with flames of love and peace,
Driving us out like sparks to set the world on fire.'

Right Rev Hamish Galloway
Moderator Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand
moderator@presbyterian.org.nz

*James K. Baxter, 'Song to the Holy Spirit', in *Collected Poems* (ed. John Edward Weir, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 572.