



## **A Pastoral Encouragement from Andrew, Acting Moderator**

Tēnā koutou katoa. Greetings to you Presbytery whānau. I pray that you know God's wisdom and peace as you continue to navigate these times.

We face a massive relational challenge. As so many of you have identified, many of our discussions at work, in church, and in our extended families pivot around questions of trust. For some trust in institutional guidance has been eroded. For others it is hard to trust in science we do not fully understand—especially when the internet spreads a vast array of sometimes contradictory ideas. Many people are telling stories of tension within workplaces and families with regard to vaccinations. The church's posture and faithfulness through this time is once again of huge importance. There will be ongoing discussion about things like 'vaccine passports' and freedom. Perhaps the biggest challenge ahead of us is preparing our communities to hear and be the gospel in the way we talk to and treat one another. Tertullian, the ancient Christian leader, saw the world looking at the Christian community and remarking, 'See how they love one another'. This is how people will know we are Jesus' disciples (John 13:35). We face a massive relational challenge as the church, following Jesus, is reminded of its calling to love without partiality.

We have to exercise discernment and loving service in a regularly changing landscape. I'll not rehearse all the accumulating data you will be repeatedly encountering, but suffice to say that, according to the best information we have, vaccination is an appropriate act of both self-care and selflessness for the vast majority of people. Having said this much I want to acknowledge that a variety of opinions exist, and honest discussion of questions and concerns is crucial. It is also important that those with intelligent objections are respected and not sidelined by being stereotyped or ridiculed.

We are to pray for and act for the life of our world. Let us stand against the rhetoric of mere self-interest where it emerges and let us listen well, even to those we disagree with. Let us also remember those within our own communities and within the global context who require just access to care: what does it mean for us as Christian family to be the least and the last, to resist the will to power in lowliness?