

# **The Synod of Eastern Australia**



## **Minutes**

**Of the 172<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting  
Held at Taree NSW  
7<sup>th</sup> May to 10<sup>th</sup> May 2019**

Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia

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**19.1 OPENING**

Within the Taree Church building of the Manning River Congregation, on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> May 2019, at 4.30pm, the Synod of Eastern Australia met. The Moderator Rev Tut Wan Yoa took the chair, and extended a welcome. Those gathered joined in praise, singing from Psalm 63, and the Moderator constituted the meeting leading in prayer.

**19.2 MODERATOR'S SERMON**

Mr Yoa read from John 15:1-17 and shared on the subject: The importance of Christian mission. We are in a significant time in the Church. Much has been lost, or is being challenged, by our society. Every local church is sent out to bring the Word of God to the world, to turn people to Christ. God promises the presence of his love to meet every need, especially in the use of our God given gifts. What lacks in the PCEA in reaching out to the world? Are we abiding in the vine, working for the Lord Jesus Christ? We need to come to grips with God's missionary purpose for His world. We should work together bearing fruit to the glory of God.

Those gathered joined in the singing of Psalm 119:89-96 and the moderator led in prayer. The Clerk gave thanks to the moderator for his address and this was acknowledged by the court with acclamation.

**19.3 ROLLS OF PRESBYTERY**

The Certified Rolls of Presbyteries were tendered. Apologies for non-attendance were received from those marked † below.

<b>Northern Presbytery</b>	<b>Ministers</b>	<b>Commissioned Elders</b>
Brisbane	JD Klazinga	S Carswell
Hastings	J Forbes	G Hamilton
Northern Rivers	DJ Kerridge	J Greensill
<b>Central Presbytery</b>		
Hawkesbury/Nepean	DK Muldoon	TM Reeve
Hunter/Barrington	R Tso	AH Steel
Manning	GD Ball	TI Leggott
St. George's	JA McCallum	DA McIntosh
<b>Southern Presbytery</b>		
Geelong	Vacant	DPT Manly
Knox	AA Miranda	C White
All Nations	TW Yoa	RS Ward
Narre Warren	Vacant	S Loudon †
Ulverstone	Vacant	ID Hamilton

The Moderator welcomed Rev John Forbes as a new member of Synod.

**19.4 ASSOCIATION OF DELEGATES FROM OTHER CHURCHES**

Rev Robin Tso introduced delegates from other churches: Rev Graeme Hart, Reformed Presbyterian Church of Australia; Rev John Macleod, Free Church of Scotland (Continuing); Rev Bruce Martin, Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America; Rev Ian Hall, The Southern Presbyterian Church of Australia; Rev Lourens Nel, The Christian Reformed Churches of Australia; Rev Don Burgess, The Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia. The moderator welcomed delegates to the Synod and it was resolved that these brothers be associated with the court.

It was resolved that Rev Peter Smith be associated with the court.

**19.5 CLOSURE OF SESSION**

Notices of motion were called for and read and the session was closed with the singing of Psalm 33:1-9 and Mr Klazinga leading in prayer at 5.30pm.

TI Leggott  
Clerk

TW Yoa  
Moderator

The session was opened with praise from Psalm 9:1-8 and with Mr Greensill leading in prayer at 7.00pm.

**19.6 MINUTES**

The minutes of Session 1 were read and confirmed.

**19.7 ELECTION OF MODERATOR**

The Clerk reported that the Rev Robin Tso had been appointed Moderator-elect. It was moved and seconded that this appointment be confirmed. The motion was carried and Mr Tso took the chair.

**19.8 MODERATOR'S ADDRESS**

The court joined in singing praise form Psalm 115:1- 9. The Moderator read from Acts 2:14-47 and addressed the court. How do we see ourselves, as a denomination, from the past and into the future? The picture before us as a Church gives many signs of discouragement. But there is no reason for discouragement. Rather we should be crying out the Lord for His reviving grace. Revival is a biblical concept, a blessing that the Lord has been pouring out on His Church from the very beginning. Revival is not an innovation. History testifies to the reality of revival over the years. As our forefathers sought to be faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ at the beginnings of the PCEA and the Lord blessed that work so that there were more ministers then than now. Can we doubt that the Lord would bless us with revival yet? Do we see the need? The moderator spoke of seven marks of biblical revival. 1) True biblical revival is the sovereign work of God. 2) Sound doctrine is important. 3) Sincere preaching of the Gospel. 4) It requires courage. 5) Revival can take place in established denominations. 6) There needs be peace and unity amongst the brethren. 7) Calling on the name of the Lord our God in prayer. The moderator led the court in prayer.

The Moderator reminded the court of the order and manner of business to be undertaken.

Mr Ward proposed a vote of thanks to the Moderator for his address and that it be published in the Banner. The court resolved in favour.

**19.9 ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE**

The Clerk presented the Administration Committee's Report. {xe "Administration Committee"}It was resolved that the report be received. The Clerk presented the proposed deliverances and it was resolved that:

1. That Remits from Presbyteries (Items 1, 2 and 3) be taken with the Law and Advisory Committee Report.
2. That Correspondence 4 be taken with the Administration Committee Report.
3. That Correspondence 5 be taken when considering Synod Committee Structure.
4. That Correspondence 6 be taken with the Church and Nation Committee Report.
5. That Correspondence 7 be taken with the Church and Nation Committee Report.
6. That Correspondence 8 be taken with the Church and Nation Committee Report.
7. That Correspondence 9 be taken with the Church and Nation Committee Report.
8. That Correspondence 10 be taken with the Inter Church relations Committee Report.
9. That Correspondence 11 be taken with the Northern Presbytery Report.
10. That Correspondence 12 be taken with the Northern Presbytery Report.

11. That Correspondence 13 be taken with the Northern Presbytery Report.
12. That Correspondence 14 be taken with the Law and Advisory Committee Report.
13. That the following examiners of records be appointed:
 

Northern Presbytery	Rev D Muldoon and Ulverstone elder.
Central Presbytery	Rev AA Miranda and Hastings elder.
Southern Presbytery	Rev J Forbes and Hunter elder.

#### **19.10 NOTICES OF MOTION REGARDING COMMITTEE STRUCTURE**

It was noted that the notices of motion from Mr Reeve and Mr I Hamilton would be taken up with discussion of Committee Structure at a later session.

#### **19.11 CORRESPONDENCE ITEM 4**

An overture from Northern Presbytery regarding Synod Timetable arrangements. Mr Kerridge presented the overture. There were a number of questions. Further deliberation would be deferred to the next session.

#### **19.12 CLOSURE OF SESSION**

Notices of motion were called for and read, and Mr Muldoon closed in prayer at 8.50pm.

TI Leggott  
Clerk

R Tso  
Moderator

### **SESSION 3**

**WEDNESDAY 8<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2019**

**9.00AM**

The session was opened with prayer and the singing of praise from Psalm 85:6-13 at 9.00am. The Moderator read from Habakkuk 3 and asked the question: What do we do when the road ahead is full of challenges? He focussed on three points from the prayer of Habakkuk: The time for prayer, the cry of the prayer, and the ground of the prayer. The Moderator led the court in prayer.

#### **19.13 MINUTES**

The minutes of Session 2 were read and confirmed.

#### **19.14 CORRESPONDENCE ITEM 4 (CONTINUED)**

It was moved and seconded that the Overture be received. After discussion it was resolved that the Overture be received. After discussion it was resolved that the prayer of the overture be granted as follows:

The Northern Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia overtures the Synod of Eastern Australia to switch and revise sections 5.35 and 5.36 of the PCEA Handbook of Practice and Procedure, so that the current section 5.36 will become section 5.35 and read as follows:

“The Synod takes up and deals with overtures, references, appeals, complaints, petitions and other correspondence, and committee reports subject to the provisions of 5.2-25 and to Synod Standing Orders (5.46). Correspondence from the Sessions and the Presbyteries will take priority over other correspondence and over committee reports. Overtures may also originate in the Synod itself,”

and the current section 5.35 will become section 5.36 and read as follows,

“In recommending the order of business for each sitting of Synod, the Administration Committee takes care to recommend a timetable that gives priority to correspondence from the sessions and presbyteries

of the church, but also allows reports of standing committees to have a place that allows due consideration. In accordance with Synod Standing Orders, causes are normally held over until the last day of Synod, other than appeals or complaints against transmission which, depending on the circumstances, may be taken up with the Administration Committee's report."

Mr Ward and Mr Leggott tendered simple dissents.

#### **19.15 PRESBYTERY REPORTS**

The report of Central Presbytery was presented. After some additional comment from Mr Muldoon it was resolved that the report be received. Mr Miranda led the court in prayer.

The report of Southern Presbytery was presented. After comment from Mr Ward it was resolved that the report be received. Mr Carswell led the court in prayer.

The report of Northern Presbytery was presented. After comment from Mr Kerridge it was resolved that the report be received. Mr Reeve led the court in prayer.

#### **19.16 CORRESPONDENCE ITEM 12**

An Overture from Northern Presbytery regarding the sale of Lismore Church/Hall. It was resolved that the Overture be received. The prayer of the Overture was granted as follows:

That Synod authorizes the sale of the Church/ Hall property at 20 Phillip St, Goonellabah, by the said Deacons' Court, for not less than \$300,000, or in accordance with current fair market value obtained by professional opinion at the time of sale; The Synod direct and authorise the Trustees to sign and seal the necessary documents accordingly; and for the said Deacons' Court to apply the proceeds as follows: (1) the sum of \$200,000 be reserved for the benefit of the Brisbane congregation towards the purchase of a Manse and invested in the interim by the Northern River's Deacons' Court (2) the remainder to be applied at the discretion of the Deacons' Court, for the capital purposes of the Northern Rivers Congregation including maintenance and repair of existing property held for Northern Rivers Congregation.

#### **19.17 CORRESPONDENCE ITEM 11**

An Overture from Northern Presbytery seeking stipend relief for the Brisbane congregation. The content of the Overture was noted.

#### **19.18 CORRESPONDENCE ITEM 13**

An Overture from Northern Presbytery regarding sale of the Brisbane manse. It was noted that this request had been forwarded to the Finance Committee for action.

#### **19.19 LAW AND ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

The Convener Mr Ward presented the report. It was resolved that the report be received. The Convener presented proposed deliverances and it was resolved:

1. That Handbook 7.2 be amended as stated in the Report.
2. Congregations and other church entities are recommended to seek deferral of the application of the Single Touch Payment system of remitting salary and PAYG deductions to the Australian Taxation Office until 1 January 2020, and meanwhile notice be taken of suitable measures to operate the system at minimal cost and burden on Church Treasurers.

#### **19.20 CLOSURE OF SESSION**

The session was closed with the Mr Yoa leading in prayer at 12.30pm.

TI Leggott  
Clerk

R Tso  
Moderator

The session was opened at 1.50pm with praise from Psalm 1 and the Moderator leading in prayer.

#### 19.21 MINUTES

The Minutes of Session 3 were read and confirmed.

#### 19.22 CORRESPONDENCE ITEMS 1, 2 AND 3

Remits from Presbyteries re Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct.  
It was resolved that the remits from Presbyteries be received and noted.

#### 19.23 LAW AND ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CONTINUED)

The convener continued with proposed deliverance 4:

4. The Synod transmit the following overture to Presbyteries under the Barrier Act 1697, for approval or disapproval, with Presbyteries to note any specific areas of disapproval in the proposed legislation when sending in returns and to indicate approval or disapproval of each of points 1, 2 and 3 in the overture. The returns to be in the Clerk of Synod hands by 30 November 2018, and meantime Synod passes the overture as an Interim act in force until next Synod.

Whereas Christians are required by the Lord to think, speak and act in ways that are God-honouring, biblically obedient and motivated by the Christian values of love, mercy and justice; and

Whereas the incidence of child and other abuse in the community in church and welfare institutions has been highlighted of recent years; and

Whereas there is considerable laxity among many professing Christians as to the norm Scripture requires in the matter of personal relationships, including sexual relationships and domestic violence; and

Whereas the measures the PCEA already has in place address the problem, particularly the mandatory reporting of abuse and the interviewing of vulnerable children and adults, but do not take full account of recent civil legislation or adequately spell out the standards Scripture requires;

Therefore Synod

1. Adopt for the PCEA Australia-wide the Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct set out in Appendix 1 of the Law and Advisory Committee Report 2019 and direct that it be carefully followed by all Presbyteries, Congregations, Committees and organisations of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia.

#### 19.24 NOTICE OF MOTION FROM MR REEVE RE SAFE CHURCH POLICY

It was resolved to consider motion 1. (Below) against proposed deliverance 4.1 (Above) Mr Reeve presented his notice of motion.

Synod, with the consent of a majority of Presbyteries, enact and ordain as follows:

*WHEREAS Christians are required by the Lord of the Church to uphold the Biblical values of love, mercy and justice;*

*AND WHEREAS unacceptable incidences of child and other abuse in the churches, community and other institutions have been brought to light in recent years;*

*AND WHEREAS the measures the PCEA have in place already address their responsibilities, particularly the mandatory reporting of abuse and the interviewing of vulnerable children and adults, but do not take full account of recent civil legislation;*

*AND WHEREAS the need for improved preventative measures has been highlighted, requiring us to further specify standards in this area;*

*AND WHEREAS documented policies and procedures are to be accessible and easy to understand;*

**NOW THEREFORE Synod enact and ordain, for the PCEA Australia-wide, the Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct set out in the Law and Advisory Minority Report 2018.**

The Court preferred Mr Reeve's motion over against the proposed deliverance 4 of the Law and Advisory Committee. Mr Ward dissented with the following reason: Mr Ward does not believe that the legislation passed is adequate at this time.

It was resolved to accept the motion of Mr Reeve as set out above.

The Committee fell from proposed deliverances 4.2 and 4.3 and accepted the proposal of Mr Reeve. It was resolved as follows:

2. Synod DIRECT that the full wording of this Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct be included in the Synod minutes with the above Act. (See Appendix 1)
3. Synod DIRECT that the minor amendments to the PCEA Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct which are proposed by Northern Presbytery (as set out in their remit in Correspondence Item 1), as well as any other minor additions or amendments, be brought for consideration at the next meeting of Synod, with advice from the Law & Advisory Committee.
4. Synod DIRECT that Presbyteries arrange for the printing of the Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct for distribution to all office-bearers, workers and families in their congregations and for organisations providing services to the children of their churches.
5. Synod DIRECT the revised Guidelines for Church Workers and other proposed changes regarding child protection in the PCEA Handbook of Practice and Procedure, as set out in the Law & Advisory Committee Report 2019, be re-worked (re-drafted) by the Law & Advisory Committee for the next meeting of Synod, according to the current Interim Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct (if passed into the law of the church).
6. Synod PROMOTE a fuller consideration of the proposed changes for the admission of new church members as set out in the Law & Advisory report 2019 (Items 2.12, 2.13, 2.14, 2.15 and 2.18), and DIRECT that Presbyteries carefully assess these proposals, submitting their comments and recommendations to the Law & Advisory Committee by November 2019.

#### **19.25 NOTICE OF MOTION FROM MR STEEL RE NSW PROPERTY ACT**

Mr Steel presented his notice of motion.

Synod notes the report of the Convener of the Law and Advisory Committee regarding changes intended by the NSW Parliament whereby it will no longer be possible to make amendments to the Synod of Eastern Australia Property Act 1918. Synod therefore, before taking any alternate action awaits their official advice that our current proposed amendment already submitted to them will not be made. The law and Advisory Committee to report to Synod 2020.

#### **19.26 NOTICE OF MOTION: LAW AND ADVISORY RE NSW PROPERTY ACT**

Mr Ward presented the notice of motion. The moderator put the two notices of motion against each other and the motion of the Law and Advisory Committee was favoured. It was resolved as follows:

That the Moderator, Clerk, Treasurer and Mr Steel together with the Law and Advisory Committee, meet to discuss the matter of the proposed amendment to the NSW Property Act and report to a later session.

#### **19.27 TRAINING OF MINISTRY COMMITTEE**

The Convener, Mr Kerridge, presented the report. It was resolved that the report be received. It was resolved to move into closed court. It was resolved to move into Committee.

After considerable discussion the Convener presented the proposed deliverances and it was resolved:

1. That Synod recognize and applaud Mr Duncan Hickey on the completion of his formal studies for the M. Div. degree to a consistent and exemplary high standard. That we thank the Lord for His providence for Duncan over this period of formal training and through his bereavement, and commit Duncan and his family to prayer for the days to come.

2. That Synod recognizes that Mr Duncan Hickey has met all requirements of the Training of Ministry Committee for a normal course of study, that the Committee certifies the same, and that his further training with a view to licensing is placed in the hands of the Central Presbytery (in accordance with Handbook 4.49 and 4.50).

It was resolved to move into open court. Mr Hickey was introduced to the moderator and commended for completing his studies. Mr Hamilton led the court in prayer commending Mr Hickey to the Lord for his future. Mr Kerridge continued with the proposed deliverances.

3. That Synod authorize the continued development of a stated curriculum under the Candidate Placement Scheme to augment formal studies over the entire student candidacy.

4. That a draft Student Handbook, for the use of student and evaluator to orient and guide the candidacy, be produced.

5. That Synod thank the All Nations Session for their proposal to train Elders and encourage applications to the Committee for any men they feel are suitable for training as Home Missionaries or Candidates.

### **19.28 NOTICE OF MOTION RELATED TO TRAINING OF MINISTRY**

Mr Ward presented a notice of motion: That Synod allocate \$5000 towards the upskilling of elders of the South Sudanese background so as to be prepared for acceptance for future training as Home Missionaries. The court resolved in favour of the motion.

### **19.29 INTER-CHURCH RELATIONS COMMITTEE**

The Moderator, being Convener, vacated the chair and Mr Yoa took the chair. Mr Tso presented the report. It was resolved that the report be received. Mr Tso read from a letter recently received from Rev Andrew Stewart asking the PCEA to support an application for a labour agreement in relation to calling a minister from overseas. Rev Graeme Hart added some comments of explanation.

Mr Tso presented the proposed resolutions. It was resolved that:

1. The Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia gives thanks to God for the churches with whom we have formal fraternal relations and for those churches with whom we have contact and resolve to pray for the Lord's blessing upon their work and witness.

2. Synod encourages the Committee in further discussions with the Southern Presbyterian Church regarding deepening our inter-church relations, with a view to the possibility of mutual eligibility.

3. Synod, without being drawn into the debate over the merit or otherwise of the division in the Free Church of Scotland in 2000, approve mutual eligibility with the Free Church (Continuing) subject to confirmation by their General Assembly.

4. Synod commends the Dr Ward's organisation with the CRCA's Ecumenical Committee of the ICRC Asia-Pacific Regional Conference to be held in Melbourne 1 to 3 October 2019 and encourage our ministers and office-bearers to attend.

### **19.30 CORRESPONDENCE ITEM 10 RE SPEAKING ON BEHALF OF THE CHURCH**

Overture from Northern Presbytery regarding delegates speaking on behalf of the Church. Mr Kerridge presented the overture and it was resolved that it not be received.

### **19.31 CLOSURE OF SESSION**

Notices of motion were called for and the session was closed with Mr McCallum leading in prayer at 6.02pm.

TI Leggott  
Clerk

TW Yoa  
Moderator

The Moderator Mr Tso resumed the chair. The session was opened at 7.00pm with praise singing from Psalm 67 and Mr Ian Hamilton leading in prayer.

**19.32 MINUTES**

The minutes of Session 4 were read and confirmed.

**19.33 NOTICE OF MOTION REGARDING THE EPCA AND THE SPCA**

Notice of Motion from Ian Hamilton regarding EPCA and SPCA meeting on 30 March 2019. Mr Hamilton presented the motion and it was received. It was resolved as follows:

Synod note and give thanks to God for the joint statement of reconciliation signed by the Presbyteries of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia (EPCA) and the Southern Presbyterian Church of Australia (SPCA) on the 30/3/2019 at Launceston.

**19.34 DELEGATES FROM OTHER CHURCHES**

Mr Tso introduced Rev Graeme Hart, delegate from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Australia, and invited him to address Synod. Mr Hart brought greetings from his church, and his address is included as an appendix to the minutes. Mr Kerridge led the court in prayer.

Mr Tso introduced Rev Bruce Martin, delegate from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North, and invited him to address Synod. Mr Martin brought the greetings of his church and spoke of the history of his church and their vision to have 100 hundred congregations by 2020. With God's blessing the number has grown to 104 this year. The church has been blessed by a number of good men over the years, especially Johannes Vos and Ken Smith. Bruce shared about the book With Him by Ken Smith, relating to discipleship training. Bruce spoke of the practical ministries of the church including pastoral care, theological training, and Crown and Covenant Publications. Bruce shared that the church now has two presbyteries in East Asia largely commenced with the help of the Reformation Translation Fellowship. He noted that the church has grown dramatically under the hand of God after the early missionaries had all passed on. Recently mission effort has been undertaken in South Asia and Pakistan. Mr Ward led the court in prayer.

Mr Tso introduced Rev Ian Hall, delegate from the Southern Presbyterian Church, and invited him to address Synod. Mr Hall brought the greetings of the church and commented on the positive way the PCEA wishes to interact with the SPC. The church was pleased to have Robin Tso speak at their recent church camp, which saw a number of Reformed Churches represented there. Mr Hall spoke warmly of the recent reconciliation between the SPC and the EPC. Mr Hall commented on Habakkuk 3 shared earlier in the day that, despite the difficulties encountered the prophet could say, "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord." Mr Steel led the court in prayer.

Mr Tso introduced Rev Lourens Nel, delegate from the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia, and invited him to address Synod. Mr Nel brought the greetings of his church and his address is included as an appendix to the minutes. Mr Klazinga led the court in prayer.

Mr Tso introduced Rev Rev Don Burgess, delegate from the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia, and invited him to address Synod. Mr Burgess brought the greetings of his church and his address is included as an appendix to the minutes. Mr Smith led the court in prayer.

Mr Tso introduced Rev John Macleod, delegate from the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), and invited him to address Synod. Mr Macleod brought the greeting of this church and was very glad to see progress with mutual eligibility with the PCEA. He shared about the strength of the church at Scotland and noting particularly that a number of overseas based church have joined the FCC. Mission work has grown encouragingly overseas and there is a focus on Asia with the work coming to the church. Lecturers visit to teach in the underground churches. Relationships with other churches are seen as very important, with a number of ministers going to other churches as well as others coming to the FCC. The Federal Relations Act with the PCEA is seen as very important. Mr Forbes led the court in prayer.

### **19.35 CLOSURE OF SESSION**

Notices of motion were called for and the session was closed with the singing of Psalm 133 and the Moderator closing with a benediction at 8.55pm.

TI Leggott  
Clerk

R Tso  
Moderator

## **SESSION 6**

**THURSDAY 9<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2019**

**9.00AM**

The session was opened with praise singing from Psalm 25. The Moderator read from 1Kings 19 and spoke of the Lord addressing Elijah in relation to Elijah's depression over his circumstances, under the three heads: The troubling circumstances, the trying causes, and the tender care. The Moderator led in prayer.

### **19.36 MINUTES**

The minutes of Session 5 were read and confirmed.

### **19.37 YOUTH & FELLOWSHIP COMMITTEE**

The Convener, Mr Carswell, presented the report. It was resolved that the report be received. The Convener presented the proposed deliverances and it was resolved that:

1. Synod recognises the importance of giving special attention to children and youth in the Church and commits to keep praying for the work of Sunday-school teachers and youth leaders as they serve God in our local congregations.
2. Synod thanks Margaret Kinder for her years of service to the Lord and His church for sending Birthday card greetings to the children and that Synod upholds Amelia O'Dell in prayer as she continues in the role. Synod thanks Irene Steel for her dedication to the scripture search work over the years and acknowledge God's blessing for her commitment and encouragement in continuing this role.
3. In addition to the responsibilities of shepherding God's flock, Synod members are also asked to encourage church members to participate in future Family Camps and Youth Camps.
4. Members of Synod commit themselves to keep praying for the spiritual development of the children and youth in our church. We are conscious of the lure of the world and sin that can draw our young people away from the truth of the gospel and the faith. Therefore, constant intercession be made on behalf of our youth, so that they will have the courage to stand firm in the Lord, to resist secular pressure, find their identity in fellowship with Christ, and participate joyfully in their local churches.
5. Synod express its appreciation to Mrs Irene Steel for the provision of Search Work for many years and her willingness to supply Search Work to those who request it.

**19.38 MISSIONS COMMITTEE**

The Convener, Mr Muldoon, presented the report. It was resolved that the report be received. It was resolved that:

1. The Synod gives thanks to the Lord for the opportunity and privilege to be involved in the work of missions at home and abroad, both in giving, in praying and being directly involved during this past year.
2. Synod thanks Rev Klazinga for editing the bi-monthly prayer notes and encourages congregations to use these notes.
3. That the bequest proforma for the Missions Relief Fund, approved by Synod 2018, be included in the PCEA Handbook of Practice and Procedure.
4. That Synod adopt the Missions Committee Budget 2019-20 and expresses its general agreement with the estimates for this period.

**19.39 NOTICE OF MOTION RE REV TREVOR LEGGOTT OAM**

Mr Ward presented his proposed motion and it was received and resolved as follows:

Synod congratulate the Rev Trevor Leggott on his receipt of the well-deserved award of membership of the Order of Australia (OAM). Synod further expresses its appreciation of his diligent attention to his responsibilities as Clerk of Synod since 30 September 2005 and his related duties as a member of trust bodies. As a token of appreciation Synod votes as honorarium of \$1000 for this year and subsequent years to be drawn by our brother at his request, in instalments related to work load if desired.

**19.40 CHURCH AND NATION COMMITTEE**

The convener, Mr Ball, presented the report. It was resolved that the report be received. Further discussion was deferred until after the Mission Speakers were heard.

**19.41 CLOSURE OF SESSION**

Notices of motion were called for and the session was closed with Mr Miranda leading in prayer at 12.30pm.

TI Leggott  
Clerk

R Tso  
Moderator

The session was opened with praise singing from Psalm 96 and the Mr Kerridge leading in prayer.

**19.42 MINUTES**

The minutes of Session 6 were read and confirmed.

**19.43 MISSIONS SPEAKERS**

The Convener of the Missions Committee was invited to introduce speakers. Mr Muldoon read from Matthew 28:18-20 and spoke briefly on the ongoing need for mission.

MERF: Mr Muldoon introduced Dr Noel Weekes, national chairman of Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF)

Mr Weekes introduced the work in the Middle East and noted that the ministry is being blessed where it is under stress. The Arabic internet presents two levels of interest of which level one is introductory, whilst the second directs to more involved doctoral programs. In the first case level 100,000 people connect every month. Noel shared about the thinking behind Islam and the relationship between Church and State. Islam lacks detailed law. So laws are created by using tradition and over time having them written down. This situation leads to great variation in belief and practice and tension between different groups. If you live in that sort of uncertain world and with current technology people are likely to go looking for certainty. This they can find at the push of a button today. After giving this insightful talk Noel answered a number of related questions.

Taleem Centre: Further to the information given in the reports there was a video shown with Mariam bringing a greeting and giving an update of the current situation.

Dr Dixon: Further to the information in the reports Mr Muldoon had received a video file from Dr Dixon with him and his wife Griselda speaking of their work with Interserve India.

Presbyterian Free Church of Central India: Samit Mishra had provided an update by video of the present encouraging state and growth of the church in India.

Synod resumed after afternoon tea with the singing of Psalm 100 and the Moderator leading in prayer. The Convener led in prayer and then continued with introducing speakers.

Vijai Tagore: The Convener introduced Vijai, his wife Suchitra and children Adiel and Isabelle. And the Moderator invited Vijai to address Synod. Vijai spoke of the Presbyterian Theological Seminary and his involvement there and then shared about his work. Suchitra shared a testimony about her walk in faith.

Mr Manly led the court in prayer.

**19.44 CHURCH AND NATION COMMITTEE (CONTINUED)**

Mr Ball continued with the proposed deliverances. It was resolved that:

1. Synod acknowledges the supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ over the nations and the obligation this places upon leaders and others to acknowledge and serve Him. 'Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way' (Psalm 2: 10-12).
2. Synod expresses its concern over ongoing threats to our religious liberty. We urge government to ensure that churches, schools, colleges, and all other religious institutions be allowed to operate according to biblical principles. 'Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people' (Prov. 14: 34).
3. Synod encourages every member to pray for our church and nation. The biblical principles stated in 2 Chron. 7: 14 are still relevant. 'If my people who are called by my name humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land'. Prayer and repentance must begin with the people of God.

4. Synod thank Rev. J. Klazinga for preparing daily prayer texts which assist us to pray for various ministries in the church.

#### **19.45 NOTICE OF MOTION**

Mr Forbes presented an alternate to proposed deliverance 5 and it was resolved as follows:

5. Regarding domestic and family violence Synod acknowledges that abuse manifests itself in various ways, and it declares that physical violence, intimidation or threat of violence in domestic relationships is abhorrent and in no way justified by Scripture. Any attempt to twist the Biblical teaching to support the idea that a male is permitted to rule by force or intimidation is a gross abuse of the Bible. Male leadership is to be patterned on the example of Jesus servant leadership. Nowhere in Scripture is a husband told to force his wife to submit, and nowhere is a wife told to cajole her husband to lead. This is repugnant to God, rejected by Scripture and the polar opposite of the biblical model of sacrificial love and service.

#### **19.46 CLOSURE OF SESSION**

Notices of motion were called for and the session was closed with Mr Ian Hamilton leading in prayer at 6.00pm.

TI Leggott  
Clerk

R Tso  
Moderator

### **SESSION 8**

**THURSDAY 10<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2019**

**7.00PM**

The session was opened at 7.00pm with Mr McCallum leading in prayer.

#### **19.47 MINUTES**

The minutes of Session 7 were read and confirmed

#### **19.48 CHURCH AND NATION COMMITTEE PROPOSED DELIVERANCES**

The Convener, Mr Ball, continued with the presentation of proposed deliverances. It was resolved as follows:

- 6 Synod affirms that human life is sacred from the womb, and therefore condemns the wanton or arbitrary destruction of any human being at any stage of its development from the point of conception to the point of death. The only possible grounds for an induced abortion is when the life of the mother-to-be is genuinely threatened by the continuation of the pregnancy. The Bible teaches that God created human beings in His image (Gen. 1: 26-27). In Exodus 20: 13 the Lord says in the sixth commandment, 'You shall not murder'. Little ones in the womb are defenceless human beings made in the image of God who have feelings (Luke 1: 41-44). Therefore, God forbids the destruction of human life in the womb. Nevertheless, Synod encourages its members to show Christian compassion and offer support to those experiencing unwanted pregnancies as well as those who have undergone abortions.
- 7 Synod affirm the teaching of the Westminster Confession of Faith concerning the parts of worship namely, 'The reading of the Scriptures with godly fear; the sound preaching and conscionable hearing of the Word, in obedience to God, with understanding, faith and reverence; singing of Psalms with grace in the heart; as also, the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ; are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God. Besides religious oaths and vows, solemn fastings, and thanksgivings upon special occasions which are in their several times and seasons, to be used in a holy and religious manner' (21: 5).

**19.49 CORRESPONDENCE ITEM 6**

An Overture from Northern Presbytery regarding establishing a Psalmody Committee. Mr Kerridge presented the overture. It was resolved that the overture be received. After discussion and presentation by Mr Ian Hamilton of his notice of motion, the Northern Presbytery accepted Mr Hamilton’s proposed motion. It was resolved as follows:

**19.50 NOTICE OF MOTION**

8 Notice of motion from Ian Hamilton regarding Correspondence Item 6: Psalmody Committee. Mr Hamilton presented the motion. It was resolved that the motion be received.  
Synod re-establishes the Psalmody Committee as a Standing Committee of the Synod. The committee to consist of at least one Minister and Elder, and include where possible and available a representative from each congregation, as determined by the respective Sessions. The committee to consider and recommend options to improve the praise of the denomination and to progress towards the adoption of a common and fully supported Psalter. The committee to also consult with and seek out opportunities for shared Psalm singing occasions within our own and with other churches, and to advertise these to the broader church.

Mr Ball continued with the proposed deliverances.

9 Synod records its thanks to the editor of the Presbyterian Banner, Rev. Dr. R. S. Ward, for his industry in producing the magazine over the past year. Synod commends this ministry to the prayers of the church.

**19.51 CORRESPONDENCE ITEM 8**

An Overture from Northern Presbytery regarding All Nations Congregation. Mr Kerridge presented the overture and it was resolved that it be received. Mr Leggott tendered a simple dissent. Mr Ward tendered dissent with the reason that it was improper procedure. It was resolved to move into closed court.

It was resolved to suspend standing orders to conclude this item of business.

After much discussion it was resolved not to approve the overture.

**19.52 CLOSURE OF SESSION**

Notices of motion were called for and the session was closed with the singing of Psalm 20 and Mr Ball leading in prayer at 9.20pm.

TI Leggott  
Clerk

R Tso  
Moderator

**SESSION 9**

**FRIDAY 11<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2019**

**9.00AM**

The session was opened with prayer by the Moderator at 9.00am who then read from 1 Kings 19:9-18 and spoke regarding the Lord speaking to Elijah under the four points: The drawing compassion, the dejected complaint, the divine control, and the directing call. The Moderator led in prayer and the Court joined in praise singing from Psalm 73. Mr Smith brought a vote of thanks to the Moderator for his addresses.

**19.53 MINUTES**

The minutes of Session 8 were read and confirmed

**19.54 THE PRESBYTERIAN BANNER REPORT**

The Editor, Mr Ward, presented the report and it was resolved that the report be received.

### **19.55 WEBSITE**

The Convener, Mr Kerridge, presented the report. It was resolved that the report be received.

The Convener presented the proposed deliverance and it was resolved:

1. That the Synod commend the PCEA website to delegates and congregations and they be encouraged to participate in the life of the church online by active registration, collaboration and comment.

### **19.56 ARCHIVIST**

Mr Ward presented the report. It was resolved that the report be received.

### **19.57 SUPERANNUATION COMMITTEE**

The Moderator, being convener, stood down and Mr Yoa took the chair. Mr Tso presented the report. It was resolved that the report be received. The convener presented the proposed deliverance and it was resolved that:

1. Synod request Sessions and Deacons' Courts to keep a close eye on ministers' leave entitlements to ensure ministers do not suffer burn out through failure to take it, and that Presbyteries keep this in mind in the annual examination of records to ensure outstanding entitlement is minuted at least once a year.

Mr Tso returned to the Moderator's chair.

### **19.58 FINANCE COMMITTEE**

The Convener, Mr A Steel, presented the report. It was resolved that the report be received. The convener presented the proposed deliverances and it was resolved that:

1. We record our thanks to God for sufficiency in the provision of the ministry for another year.
2. a. Adjustment of the Minimum Stipend, Cash and Non-cash components (Excluding Manse, Car and Telephone) for 2020 be made on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020 in line with the movement in the latest *Wage Price Index* as published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. In the event of a negative movement in the index no adjustment be made.  
b. Future reviews of Minimum Stipend paid be made on an annual basis as at 31<sup>st</sup> December in lieu of half-yearly.
3. Stipend Assistance of up to \$20,000 for 2019/2020 be granted to Brisbane Deacons' Court as follows:
  - Strictly on a quarterly needs basis.
  - Applications be submitted to the General Treasurer on a calendar quarter basis ie commencing 1<sup>st</sup> January/April/July/October and be accompanied with a Budget for the quarter being applied for.
  - Be subject to the availability of funds.
4. a. Synod approve in Principle to gift to the Brisbane Congregation up to \$466,000 from the *Synod Capital Assistance Fund* to assist in the purchase of a suitable manse for the Congregation.  
b. In addition, Synod approve in Principle an interest free Loan of \$200,000 from the *Synod Capital Assistance Fund* if required to complete the purchase prior to receipt of a donation for like amount from the Northern Rivers Congregation.

Subject to –

- c. Approval being granted by the Brisbane Session, Congregation and Northern Presbytery when a suitable property at a purchase price no greater than \$750,000 is found.
- d. If an interest free loan of \$200,000 is required prior to receipt of a donation for this amount from Northern Rivers Congregation, an extract minute from Northern Presbytery is to be forwarded to the Synod Treasurer stating all approvals have been obtained viz. Synod for sale of Lismore Church property, Northern Rivers Deacons' Court/Session have agreed to make the donation of \$200,000 and Brisbane Deacons' Court/Session and Congregation agreed to take up the loan from Synod.

### **19.59 GENERAL TREASURER'S REPORT**

The General Treasurer, Mr DP Smith, presented his report. It was resolved that the report be received.

### **19.60 NOTICE OF MOTION RE FINANCIAL REPORT AUDIT**

Mr Steel presented a notice of motion to give thanks to the Synod auditor. The Motion was received and it was resolved:

1. Synod accept the *Review* of the books of account and financial statements for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018 by Mr GP Azzi, Principal of GPA Accounting, Chartered Accountants of Punchbowl NSW in lieu of an *Audit* by Mr Richard W Partlett A.C.A., of the same practice.
2. Synod agree future annual Financial Reports be *Reviewed* by Mr GP Azzi, Principal of GPA Accounting, Chartered Accountants of Punchbowl NSW.
3. The Clerk convey Synod's thanks to Mr Richard W Partlett A.C.A of 27 Polo Street, Kurnell NSW 2231 in the following terms: "The Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia wishes to convey to you its most sincere appreciation of you services for the past 25 years. Examination of our records indicates you have audited the financial statements of the Synod since 1992 and have given professional advice as required from time to time to our Treasurer, Mr Alex Steel during this period. Your prompt attention to the auditing of our books of account and financial statements to enable Alex to meet church deadlines has been of great assistance to him. We have also appreciated your willingness to carry on with our annual audit for a number of years since retiring from fulltime practice. Alex wishes to personally convey his thanks to you and your wife for the friendship and fellowship he has enjoyed with you both at the time of the annual audit visits. Thank you Dick."

### **19.61 REPORTS OF EXAMINERS OF RECORDS**

The minutes of the Northern Presbytery for 2017-2018: It was reported there were some matters that needed attention but, with those understood, it was resolved to attest the record. The minutes of Central Presbytery for 2017-2018 were reported to be in order. The minutes of Southern Presbytery for 2017-2018 were reported to be in order. It was resolved that the reports be received and the records attested.

### **19.62 NSW TRUST CORPORATION**

The Clerk presented the report on behalf of the Trustees. It was resolved that the report be received.

### **19.63 CORRESPONDENCE ITEM 14**

Reference from Central Presbytery regarding the holding of bequest funds by St George Session. Mr Steel presented the Reference and it was received.

### **19.64 NOTICE OF MOTION**

Mr Reeve presented his motion in regard to Correspondence Item 14 regarding the estate of the Peter McIntosh Martin bequest. It was resolved:

4. That Synod gratefully receive the bequest of the late Peter McIntosh Martin.
5. That Synod direct that a substantial portion of the bequest funds be allocated to the St Georges congregation to hold and administer subject to application and approval of Synod next year.

Mr McCallum noted that there had been no legal case involving St George's in relation to the above bequest as indicated in the Report from the NSW Trustees, and the Clerk apologised for the error.

It was resolved to suspend standing orders until the balance of the business was concluded.

### **19.65 CLOSURE OF SESSION**

The session was closed with Mr Reeve leading in prayer at 12.25pm.

TI Leggott  
Clerk

R Tso  
Moderator

The session was opened with singing praise from Psalm 130 and Mr Martin leading in prayer at 1.00pm.

**19.66 MINUTES**

The minutes from session 9 were read and confirmed.

**19.67 QUEENSLAND TRUST CORPORATION**

The Clerk presented the report on behalf of the Trustees. It was resolved that the report be received.

**19.68 THE TRUSTEES FOR VICTORIA**

The Clerk presented the report on behalf of the Trustees. It was resolved that the report be received. Mr Leggott presented the proposed deliverances and it was resolved that:

1. The investment allocation approved by Synod 2004 be amended to permit up to 80% in shares/units predominantly in listed investment companies, and the balance in cash.
2. Synod commend to our people giving by bequest to aid the extension of the Gospel in Australia and overseas.

**19.69 NOTICE OF MOTION LAW AND ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

Mr Steel presented the motion and it was resolved that it be received. It was resolved:

That the L&A Committee continue its remit regarding the proposed amendment to the Synod of Eastern Australia Property Act 1918 in light of recent communications from the NSW Parliament.

**19.70 NOTICE OF MOTION**

From the Clerk regarding a letter of response supporting the request of the RPCA as reported above. (19.29). It was resolved to receive the motion and it was resolved that:

The Clerk be authorised to provide the letter in response to the request from the RPCA.

**19.71 NOTICE OF MOTION RE COMMITTEE STRUCTURE**

Mr Ian Hamilton presented the motion and it was received. It was resolved as follows: That Synod Handbook re Committee structure be modified as follows:

5.19 Synod Committees: membership and method of operating [Act 7 Class 2 Synod 2011]  
“Synod appoints such standing and occasional Committees as deemed appropriate.

2. Most Synod Committees shall consist of five members, and given the prevalence of electronic means of communication, these members do not normally need to be geographically close to each other. Some Committees may have more than five members (eg: Missions or Youth and Fellowship) or less than five members (eg: Superannuation) and these are determined at the discretion of the Synod. Some committees (eg: Administration) may be comprised solely or in part of positional memberships at the discretion of the Synod (eg: Moderator, Moderator-elect, Clerk). It is desirable that Committee membership is made up where possible of at least one representative from each of the geographic areas of the Presbyteries. Members are expected to serve on their Committee for at least three years unless otherwise decided by Synod.

The Administration Committee proposes a committee composition for each Synod however delegates and courts of the church are welcome and encouraged to also propose changes to the committees, either by previous contact to the Administration Committee or by petition, overture or notice of motion at Synod. Sessions are encouraged in particular to search out, foster and cultivate suitable people from their congregations to serve, within their God given interests and abilities on Synod committees.

3. It is courtesy that parties being proposed for new membership of committees be informed of and agree in advance of their appointment (to be referred to as ‘entry courtesy’). It is also courtesy that parties who are currently members of committees be informed of and agree in advance to their names

being removed (except in cases of church discipline, or other established reason. This to be referred to as 'exit courtesy').

4. Committees have the power to seek assistance and advice from other qualified persons if considered appropriate.

5. All members of a Committee have a responsibility to contribute promptly to its deliberations and proposals. When using emails the subject line should include reference, in an agreed form, to the Committee concerned. 'Reply to all' should be used in all responses so that each member is aware of the responses of all other members and can interact accordingly, just as if they were personally present. Members have the responsibility of advising of any change to their email address. The use of employer-provided email addresses should be avoided. When using a conference call (audio or video) care must be taken to give each member opportunity to contribute, and decisions arising out of such hook-ups are to be very clearly expressed at the time and circulated in written form immediately thereafter.

6. The Convener of a committee is to ensure that the proposed report to the next Synod is distributed to all members of the committee and this is done sufficiently in advance to incorporate changes. In the event of significant disagreement or alternate opinion then committee members are entitled to submit minority reports to the Synod. It is expected that this is the exception rather than the rule – with all members endeavouring to work in Christian harmony so far as is possible.

7. Committees are encouraged to begin their work soon after each Synod and where appropriate to divide the work among themselves. Committees may elect a Vice-convener to understudy the Convener so as to maintain the work if the Convener is not available.”

Since Synod 2013 standing committees have been arranged as follows:

Administration, Law and Advisory, Finance, Superannuation, Inter-Church Relations, Church and Nation, Media, Youth and Fellowship, Missions, Training of Ministry.

## **19.72 COMMITTEE STRUCTURE**

There was some modification suggested for the Committee Structure. After some modification it was resolved that the Committees be as follows:

**Administration:** Clerk (Convener), Moderator, Moderator-elect, Treasurer.

**Law and Advisory:** RS Ward (Convener), T Reeve, S Loudon, T Leggott, D Kerridge, J Forbes.

**Inter-Church Relations:** R Tso (Convener), GD Ball, T Leggott, RS Ward, J Forbes, JD Klazinga.

**Church and Nation, Media:** GD Ball, (Convener Church and Nation), DK Muldoon, RS Ward (Banner), D Kerridge (Website), TW Yoa.

**Youth and Fellowship:** S Carswell (Convener), AA Miranda, T Reeve, J Forbes, Cameron Hamilton, Stephen Smith, Mandy Kerridge.

**Finance:** AH Steel (Convener), DJ Ramsay, T. Buck, DE Kerr.

**Superannuation:** R Tso (Convener), DJ Ramsay, GD Ball, A Steel.

**Missions:** DK Muldoon (Convener), TI Leggott, JD Klazinga, J Greensill, Rhoda Ball.

**Training of Ministry:** D Kerridge (Convener), AA Miranda, D Manly, R Tso.

**Psalmody:** JD Klazinga (Convener), Glen Hamilton, DA McIntosh, (Mr Klazinga to arrange the balance of committee in line with resolution 19.50.8 above, and notify the Clerk.)

**19.73 GENERAL TREASURER**

The Clerk reported that Rev DP Smith had indicated that he would resign as Treasurer at the rising of Synod. It was resolved to accept the resignation with thanks for his labours in difficult circumstances.

The Clerk moved that the court accept the offer of Mr Alex Steel to continue in an interim role as General Treasurer, until a replacement General Treasurer can be appointed, and that this be recognised as an urgent matter, and that Mr Smith be appointed Assistant Treasurer. It was resolved to agree.

**19.74 MODERATOR-ELECT FOR SYNOD 2020**

The Clerk nominated Rev GD Ball. It was resolved that Mr Ball be appointed Moderator-elect for Synod 2020.

**19.75 TIME AND PLACE OF SYNOD 2020**

The Clerk reported that he had been informed that the All Nations Congregation had offered to host Synod in 2020. It was resolved that Synod 2020 be hosted by the All Nations Congregation at Mulgrave from 4.30pm on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> May 2020 to 12.30pm on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> May 2020.

**19.76 TREASURER’S REPORT RE COSTS INCURRED BY SYNOD 2019.**

The General Treasurer, gave an indication of costs incurred by Synod 2019.

**19.77 THANKS**

The Moderator expressed the thanks of Synod to all who had provided food and accommodation for their generous hospitality.

The Moderator thanked the delegates for their help and encouragement during Synod. The Moderator was thanked for his leading of the meetings and for his devotional messages.

The Clerk was thanked for his work during the year and at Synod.

**19.78 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES**

The minutes of this closing Session 10 were read and confirmed.

**19.79 CLOSURE OF SYNOD 2019**

Synod 2019 concluded with praise, singing from Psalm 72:17-19 and with the Moderator leading in prayer at 3.10pm.

TI Leggott  
Clerk

R Tso  
Moderator

**ACTS OF SYNOD 2019{tc "ACTS OF SYNOD 2005"}  
Appended by the Direction of Synod (09.50){xe "Principal Acts"}**

**Class 1 (Barrier Act Procedure)**

<b>No</b>	<b>Act</b>	<b>Reference</b>
1	Safe Church Policy	19.24

**Class 2 (Others)**

<b>No</b>	<b>Act</b>	<b>Reference</b>
1	Changes to Practice re Order of Synod Business	19.14
2	Amendment to Handbook re Safe Church Policy and Working with Children	19.19.01
3	Mutual Eligibility with Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)	19.29.03
4	Inclusion of Mission Relief Bequest Proforma in Handbook	19.38.03
5	Approval of Honorarium for Synod Clerk	19.39
6	Re-establishing the Psalmody Committee	19.50
7	Gift/Loan to Brisbane Congregation for Purchase of a Manse	19.58.04
8	Victorian Trustees Changes to Investment Strategy	19.68.01
9	Committee Structure	19.71
10	Appointment of General Treasurer	19.73
11		
12		
13		

## APPENDIX 1

# PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF EASTERN AUSTRALIA

## SAFE CHURCH POLICY AND CODE OF CONDUCT

### Act of Synod 2019 19.24

*WHEREAS Christians are required by the Lord of the Church to uphold the Biblical values of love, mercy and justice;*

*AND WHEREAS unacceptable incidences of child and other abuse in the churches, community and other institutions have been brought to light in recent years;*

*AND WHEREAS the measures the PCEA have in place already address their responsibilities, particularly the mandatory reporting of abuse and the interviewing of vulnerable children and adults, but do not take full account of recent civil legislation;*

*AND WHEREAS the need for improved preventative measures has been highlighted, requiring us to further specify standards in this area;*

*AND WHEREAS documented policies and procedures are to be accessible and easy to understand;*

*NOW THEREFORE Synod enact and ordain, for the PCEA Australia-wide, the Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct set out in the Law and Advisory Minority Report 2018.*

### As Below:

## SAFE CHURCH POLICY

### 1. Introduction

Christians are required by the Lord of the Church to think, speak and act in ways that are God-honouring, biblically obedient and motivated by the Christian values of love, mercy and justice. Unfortunately, perpetrators of crimes often seek out churches because they are welcoming, while Christians can also backslide into serious sin. Accordingly, the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, in applying the principles of God's Word, has adopted this fuller Safe Church Policy and the associated Code of Conduct for Church Workers.

This policy is a public document highlighting our resolve to maintain a safe church for all who attend our ministries. It is a privilege to serve Christ in working with all those who entrust themselves to our care, particularly children and young people, as we help them to become and to mature as disciples of Jesus Christ.

However with this privilege comes responsibility. We have a high calling to protect the vulnerable among us, especially the young, and it comes from the Lord Jesus Himself. *“Let the little children come to me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say unto you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter in.” And He ... blessed them.* Mark 10: 14-16. Just as those first century children felt safe and secure with Jesus, so all children should feel safe and secure in our care. Their parents should also feel confident in leaving their children with us, knowing that we shall protect them from harm, whilst sharing the love of Christ in word and deed.

Parents have the primary responsibility to teach and to protect their children and they need to be assured that church leaders will similarly teach good things and protect their children. Church leaders undertake their task with responsibility towards parents and towards God. This policy seeks to fulfil the expectations of parents as well as society in these matters. These are set down in state laws but biblical standards are even higher, particularly when it comes to the care of children (including the unborn), the disabled and the elderly.

## **2. A Biblical Perspective**

Firstly we recognise that sin not only affects our relationship to God but also our relationships with one another. The Bible defines and deals with the problem of sin as the root cause of the abuse and miseries we see in society. The institutional church is not free from such abuse as it is comprised of sinful people at varying levels of Christian commitment. But the church should be conforming to God's standards.

In His teaching summarising the Ten Commandments, Jesus said, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Luke 10:27). Jesus pronounced severe punishment upon anyone bringing offence or harm to 'one of these little ones' (Luke 17:2). The church therefore should always be ready to help the poor, the young and the vulnerable and to defend them from harm and exploitation. This teaching underlies our Safe Church practices.

In the law given through Moses there were many regulations designed to provide for, and to protect, 'the stranger, the fatherless and the widow' (Deuteronomy 14:29, 24:17-22, 26:12-13, 27:19, Psalm 82:3-4, Isaiah 1:17, Jeremiah 7:5-7, 22:3, Zechariah 7:9,10). This law reflected the heart of God himself, and Jesus reflected the same heart of love. He was moved with compassion for the widow of Nain (Luke 7:13), and for little children (Matthew 19:14). James writes, 'Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.' (James 1:27).

Biblical standards include those of justice as well as mercy. These standards make provision for false allegations of abuse, either mistaken or deliberate, which may arise in the Church. This is also a serious offence (Deuteronomy 19:16-21) as persons falsely accused in public can suffer loss of reputation and health. Therefore, when an accusation is made it is important that we, as a church, judge with righteous judgment (Proverbs 17:15). 'The house of God, which is the church of the living God, (is) the pillar and ground of truth' (1 Timothy 3:15).

The Bible requires us (as per the principle in Deuteronomy 22:8) to do our best to foresee possible sources of danger and put in place reasonable safeguards. We also recognise the need in doing this to strike a sensible balance between taking precautions on the one hand and, on the other, not being unreasonably oppressive when it comes to guarding against possible scenarios.

## **3. Outline of Principles and Practices by the PCEA and its Congregations**

As a national organisation, the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia is committed to safe ministry by the following principles and practices:

- advocating Biblical ministry which values children, young people and the vulnerable.  
This will result in a safe, friendly and nurturing environment
- complying with Government requirements concerning all vulnerable people
- carefully appointing and monitoring leaders who oversee church ministries
- appointing a 'Protection Officer' in each congregation to promote safe church matters and to keep records
- providing initial and regular follow-up training on safe church matters
- delivering (reporting) to the civil authorities any whose conduct infringe criminal codes
- disciplining (by documented procedures) and counselling any who exploit children, young people, the vulnerable or those who make false accusations
- reviewing and updating this policy on a regular basis (This responsibility will continue under the oversight of the Synod Law & Advisory Committee.)

## **4. Some Definitions**

**4.1 Child:** A person under the age of 16 years (some laws, under 18 years of age)

**4.2 Young Person:** A person from 16 to 18 years of age

**4.3 Vulnerable Person:** A child or someone who by reason of mental incapacity or other disability, age or illnesses may be unable to take care of or protect themselves against harm or exploitation by another person

#### **4.4 Abuse categories**

**(Serious) physical abuse** occurs when a child or vulnerable person is severely and/or persistently hurt or injured. It can occur in the context of domestic violence. This constitutes a reportable offence.

**Sexual abuse** occurs when a child or vulnerable person is exposed or subjected to sexual behaviours or threat to commit such behaviours that are exploitative or inappropriate. This constitutes a reportable offence.

It usually occurs when a person uses their power and authority to take advantage of another's trust to involve them in sexual activity. Sexual abuse does not necessarily involve physical contact. It includes any act which erodes the sexual boundary between two persons. It may appear to be consensual, but the validity of consent is negated by the power differential.

**Emotional (psychological) abuse** occurs when a child or vulnerable person is repeatedly treated in ways that damage their ability to feel, express their feelings and develop self-esteem. This does not automatically constitute a reportable offence.

**Neglect** is a legally defined term and occurs when a child or vulnerable person is deprived of the basic physical and emotional necessities of life (such as freedom of movement, food, medical care, clothing, housing, education). This may constitute a criminal act and hence may be a reportable offence.

**4.5 WWCC:** A Working With Children Check is carried out by State Governments, using a national database, to provide a clearance to work with children based on police records. For voluntary workers such clearances are valid for five years and a number is issued. Two forms of identification will be required and an on-line application process is used now.

#### **5. Positions for Ministry**

These include the minister and any other paid employees, elders, deacons, carers (including the crèche), Sunday School teachers and helpers, Kid's Club leaders and helpers, Youth Group leaders and helpers and Scripture Teachers (SRE). Most of these positions are voluntary.

#### **6. Code of Conduct for Church Workers 2018**

This is an associated document to be followed by all leaders and office-bearers. This Code may be updated from time to time by the Synod through its Law & Advisory Committee.

#### **7. Protection Officer**

The Session of each congregation will appoint a suitable Protection Officer (or Officers) who will be responsible for the following:

- promoting to the congregation the details and importance of the Safe Church Policy including the Code of Conduct
- being readily available to answer queries and to provide information to the congregation and others (e.g. parents) when required
- keeping the non-confidential records such as the WWCC documentation and training records for each leader (and other records as outlined below)
- checking on the training of all leaders and liaising with the Clerk of Presbytery concerning training courses
- providing a report to the Clerk of Session annually, or as required

#### **8. Record-Keeping**

Within each congregation there will be two sets of Records kept in books or folders (and not to be stored electronically).

**8.1 Non-Confidential records** showing the list of approved workers, dates of appointment to positions, Working With Children Check approval numbers and dates and training programmes attended; also to be recorded here are the training course programmes delivered to the congregation with name of the providers, objectives, content, dates of delivery and attendees. These records are kept by the congregational Protection Officer.

**8.2 Confidential records (as a Record Apart)** kept by the Session Clerk and controlled under the privacy legislation of the Church. These records are to contain the details of any alleged abuse and the steps taken to process the alleged abuse with the resolution of the process and any conditions placed on the parties involved with all relevant supporting documents (or attested copies) to be attached. Copies are to be kept with the Session records for 50 years and then archived at the direction of Synod. A duplicate certified copy of the above records should be lodged with the Presbytery Clerk.

## **9. Selection Process for Church Workers**

This is a critical aspect in preventing harm and requires care and patience, with prayer. The most important thing is to appoint godly leaders who are well known members of the congregation. When Paul chose Timothy to be his assistant ministry worker he obtained the opinions of the local church members at Lystra/Iconium (Acts 16:2). We also should be encouraging those who have the gifts for service and leadership.

For those who will be working with children and young people, the following protocols apply:

- applicants must be members of the congregation for at least one year (less time approved only if they are well attested from another congregation of the PCEA)
- applicants for leadership positions must be approved by the local Session
- before they commence working as a leader they must have a WWCC clearance
- they must undertake initial and follow-up training as prescribed by Presbytery
- they must continue regularly at the public worship in the congregation
- they must have ongoing supervision and mentoring by an elder

## **10. Procedures for Dealing with Alleged Abuse**

(Please refer to the PCEA Handbook of Practice and Procedure: **7.51 PROCEDURES FOR DEALING WITH ALLEGATIONS OF CHILD ABUSE AND SEXUAL MISCONDUCT**. Act Class 1 of Synod 2014)

Our church is committed to processes that strive for truth and confidentiality and will treat all allegations seriously and act upon them. A child may disclose, deliberately or inadvertently, that he/she is a victim of abuse. Alternatively there may be reasonable grounds to suspect that a child has been or is being abused. 'Reasonable grounds' is a subjective concept, but this does not remove responsibility from a person to act.

We are to ensure as far as possible that a compassionate response is a priority in all reported allegations especially at the time when details are sketchy and it is not yet certain that the allegations are accurate. At these times, when emotions may run high, leaders are not to pass judgment but to offer care and support to the aggrieved person(s) and, if practicable, to the alleged offender. Pastoral care at all stages is very important (see further under Item 11).

Leaders and any others in the congregation who hear such disclosures or have reasonable grounds for concern may go directly to the Police and/or report the matter to the Minister/Interim Moderator or an elder. From that time the session will appoint a suitable elder who will be the only one to have carriage of the matter for reportable conduct and will become the liaison person with the Police and/or relevant Government agency. This procedure shall also apply if a child discloses that the abuse has occurred somewhere else other than the church.

At this stage, allegations of child sexual abuse when the alleged victim is still under 18 years of age must not be further investigated by the church, and neither should the child/young person or the accused be questioned by the church. When the matter involves criminal behavior, this must be investigated first by the Police.

There will be no disclosure to any interested parties connected with allegedly abused child to avoid contamination of evidence and prejudice of investigations. Although the church minister (or interim moderator) and session are to be advised, at this stage it will not become a matter for session to act upon nor of presbytery involvement (unless a minister of the church is the accused).

Any church leader or worker who is accused will be stood down by the session from his/her position until the investigations are concluded. Irrespective of any other action taken by bodies outside the church, the PCEA church discipline procedures, if necessary, will apply according to the Handbook of Practice and Procedure following the conclusion of Police investigations and the outcome of any Court or other legal proceedings.

### **11. Pastoral Care for Children & Young People who are Alleged Victims of Abuse**

Appropriate sensitive pastoral care will be extended to any child who has made a disclosure of abuse, by the following protocols:

- not pushing the child to disclose details of the alleged assault
- not attempting to investigate the allegation
- assuring the child that they are understood; that their disclosure is being taken seriously; that what has happened is not their fault and that they are correct in disclosing the incident.
- not making contact with the alleged offender
- maintaining confidentiality by speaking only to those parties recommended by the Police (or delegates), even though this may cause emotional tension

### **12. False Allegations**

Accusations of abuse raised due to ignorance, by unwarranted suspicion or malice may prove to be false. Reputations can be irrevocably tarnished by a false accusation which is clearly forbidden under the ninth commandment, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.” Exodus 20:16.

False accusations may themselves constitute criminal behavior and as such, redress may be contemplated by the aggrieved. But it is preferable that false accusations should be dealt with by the Session with counselling and seeking of forgiveness.

However, the fear of being wrong in reporting situations where it is believed that abuse has occurred is not sufficient ground for not reporting the concerns.

### **13. Working with a Body External to the Church**

Using the services of other organisations in child related ministries (e.g. at camping, conference and other sites) is allowed if that organisation agrees to uphold the policies contained in this document.

Decisions to enter into agreements with other churches or organisations for the provision of advice on child protection issues or to conduct appropriate training for church workers will be made by Presbyteries.

### **14. Training**

Mandatory training in child protection for all leaders in organisations who care for children is being enacted by State Parliaments.

The Clerk of Presbytery will organise approved initial and ongoing training for all leaders and office-bearers in the congregations of their jurisdictions. Records will be kept and details provided to Government agencies as required. Records also are to be kept by the congregational Protection Officers (see item 8.1 above).

A different programme of training applies to Scripture teachers in State Schools (Special Religious Education) and an “Annual Assurance” declaration is currently signed by our Clerk of Synod for NSW. All Scripture teachers in State Schools should ensure that they undertake the required annual training with an approved provider and that the details are recorded with the Clerk of Presbytery.

## SAFE CHURCH CODE OF CONDUCT

1. As a person in a position of leadership within the church you must always be concerned about the integrity of your position and remember that you are representing the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. You should avoid situations where you will be vulnerable to temptation and where your conduct may be construed to be a breach of God's holy standards.
3. With regard to young people and children, appropriate conduct includes the following protocols:
  - a. When visiting children in their homes, or transporting children in vehicles, leaders will only do so if a parent or another appropriate adult is present.
  - b. There shall always be at least two approved leaders at any activity (except for crèche where a sole female carer is acceptable). Preferably there should be male and female leaders for mixed groups with male leaders for boys groups and female leaders for girls groups. It is recognized that there may be occasions where there is a sole leader when breaking up into small groups; but in such cases, the small groups will not be out of eyesight or earshot of others.
  - c. A camp or other activity involving overnight accommodation should include "camp parents" (ideally a married couple over the age of 25 years, of known maturity and Christian commitment) approved by the church. In such overnight accommodation there will be a strict segregation by sex, with the exception of married couples and families. Supervision of children and young people must be provided by a person of the same sex.
  - d. A biblical pattern of behaviour is to be observed with respect to modesty and standards of morality. Adults and children are to respect the privacy of others during activities that require undressing and changing clothes. Leaders are to set an example by protecting their own privacy in similar situations.
  - e. Initiations and secret ceremonies are forbidden.
  - f. Any activity involving children or young people is open to observation by parents and other adults with a legitimate reason.
  - g. Leaders have the right to ask persons who do not have a valid reason to be present at child related activities to leave. Police may be contacted if such persons refuse to comply with any such reasonable request.
  - h. If any personal counselling is required, it shall be carried out within the sight of other people (preferably another leader).
  - i. The consumption of alcohol or illegal drugs on the church grounds or during a church activity is forbidden. Any young person found under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs is to be counselled and removed from the activity. Any such drugs found on the church grounds are to be witnessed (by a second person) and removed. Where appropriate, police should be informed. (A small amount of wine for sacramental purposes may be stored on the premises, in a secure location.)
  - j. In any physical contact with young people or children, leaders will respect the feelings and privacy of those persons. Violence of any kind is forbidden.
4. The Bible commands us very clearly on purity of body and mind, for example in Ephesians 5:3,4, Matthew 5:27-29 and Job 31:1. This is expanded in our Larger Catechism (Nos 138 and 139). All leaders should be familiar with these standards and be prepared to uphold and encourage these values in their personal lives and in all their dealings with others. Any sexualised behaviour (apart from that within marriage as defined by the Word of God) is to be carefully avoided. What is forbidden includes, but is not limited to, the following:
  - a. inappropriate conversation, remarks and jokes of a sexual nature, coarse language, suggestive gestures and impure looks

b. pornographic literature or media of any kind (from books, magazines, newspapers, posters, videos, movies, DVDs, internet sites, photographs, etc)

5. Leaders are to the best of their ability to take reasonable action to maintain the safety of all persons in their care. This particularly applies to the young, the elderly and other vulnerable persons.

6. State Governments from time to time legislate for reportable offences in the realm of child abuse. These standards vary from state to state. When any such abuse of children and young people is seen or reported to you, these must be notified to the minister or an elder of the congregation for reporting to the Police or Government agency. You also have the right to go directly to the Police yourself and can ask advice from the congregational Protection Officer. The church's own disciplinary procedures may also apply.

You, in your position of leadership, are required to report any the following (which are defined in the Safe Church Policy):

- physical or sexual child abuse,
- a child or young person at risk of significant harm,
- a child suffering neglect, and
- any sexual misconduct by leaders

7. Before you commence working with children and young people in your position of leadership in the church, you will undertake the Government Working With Children Check (WWCC) and provide a copy of the documentation and approval number to the congregational Protection Officer.

8. Initial training and regular follow-up training in Safe Church matters must be undertaken if you are in any position of leadership. Approved training sessions will be organised by the Clerk of Presbytery.

## APPENDIX 2

### RPCA Greetings to PCEA Synod

May 2019

Mr Moderator, brothers, fellow delegates, guests.

Thank you for the invitation to attend the Synod of PCEA. It's been a real joy to meet and fellowship with you again. Once again, it is my privilege to bring warm greetings and encouragement from your brothers and sisters in the RPCA. Times like this provide many benefits: networking ideas (administration, outreach, smarter use of internet/technology), fellowship, advice/counsel, general news, mutual encouragement, and prayer.

One matter of general news is that Rev. Dr. Joel Beeke will be guest speaker at this year's Geelong Bible Conference 5-7 July (first weekend of July). He will be speaking on "Sanctification: Cultivating Intentionally Holy Lives."

Just last week our Presbytery had its equivalent meeting to your Synod. Some items of interest:

- We have new cleaner looking website. A good website is increasingly important as it forms the virtual front door to our congregations. Content needs to be added.
- Five camps were held at our Dixons Creek camp site in the Yarra Valley. However, we are facing increased challenges due to break-ins and thefts.
- Our short-term missions committee planning a mission trip to the RPCJ at the end of the year. Purpose: mutual encouragement, build relationships, serve. As you know, smaller denominations are always in need of encouragement!
- We have been in correspondence with the SPC to investigate more formal links and increased levels of fellowship between the SPC and the RPCA.
- We will also be commencing talks with the EPC as they have indicated an interest in a dialogue which might lead to increased levels of fellowship between the EPC and the RPCA.
- Last year the RPCA set aside a specific Day of Prayer seeking God to raise up pastors. This initiative has been taken up by the RP Global Alliance, which has warmly encouraged all RP churches around world to make 6 October 2019 the RP International Day of Prayer with a specific focus on 'Men for the Ministry in the RP Church.'
- Three members of Presbytery have ministered among the emerging and established RP Churches of East Asia. Some members from these Churches have come to Australia to study and are now worshipping in our congregations.
- We continue developing and implementing our Safe Church policy and procedures. This year we implement basic training in the congregations and the volunteer approval process. We are thankful for our very capable SC coordinator and congregational representatives.

2018 saw a slight increase in attendance. Not stunning. But gradual. Pleasing that decreasing trend over last few years is turning around. Praise God. Last year around 200 people gathered for morning worship each week in two locations (Frankston congregation worshipping with McKinnon). Over 60 children and young people attend Sunday School before the services. Evening worship service attendance stands at around 55% of morning attendance. Just over 100 people meet during week for fellowship or Bible study. 50% of the denomination made up of people under 30yo. So our ministry to youth and young adults is a priority (youth groups, youth camps, special youth events/retreats, discipleship weekends, young adults camp, special young adult events/studies).

Last year I reported the retirement of two elders. This year one elder was granted a year's sabbatical. We also have three current elders are older than 70 (and not getting any younger!). This has highlighted the need for more elders in our congregations. So we have been intentionally praying that the Lord would raise up men to be future elders, even from among the young boys. Being intentional is important, so we pray the behind-the-scenes work, discussions, time spent with maturing men would bear fruit, and the Lord would be pleased to raise up men for this noble task.

Along with the need for elders, is the need for ministers of the word. There are officially three congregations, but only two have ministers. Our Frankston congregation (50km south of Melbourne) is still without a minister and continues to worship with McKinnon. We continue the lengthy, complicated and expensive process of applying for a religious worker visa so we can call a minister to

pastor in the Frankston congregation and that he would also assist the Presbytery in laying the groundwork for a future church plant. We still have one man studying for the ministry - Brandon Fisher, also elder of McKinnon. He is still a few years off from completing his studies. His desire is for church planting work.

So if we are to grow, we need suitably-trained men who possess the requisite preaching gifts, who are pastorally-sensitive, Christ-centred, Spirit-dependent, church-loving men.

- Men who believe what our confession states concerning the purpose of the church: to gather & perfect the saints (WCF25.3).

- Men who believe the promise of Christ - that he will build his church (Matt 16:18)

- Men who believe the promise of God given through prophet Ezekiel...

“Thus says the Lord God: This also I will let the house of Israel ask me to do for them: to increase their people like a flock. Like the flock for sacrifices, like the flock at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts, so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of people. Then they will know that I am the Lord.” (Ezekiel 36:37-38)

May God be pleased to build up churches, bless our witness and yours as we declare the beauty and glory of Jesus Christ, the only Redeemer given to needy sinners.

God bless you brothers!

Rev. Graeme Hart  
(on behalf of the RPCA)



### APPENDIX 3

Re: Greetings PCEA

6 May 2019

Dear brothers,

Thank you for inviting a representative from the CRCA to your Synod. We treasure our relationship with you, and it is wonderful to be present with brothers that share our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and the love for the Reformed faith.

Our relationship exists for many years and we are grateful that we could exchange delegates to our Synods from as early as the 1950's. We are also grateful for the constructive discussions we could have had about differences and that we in that sense could move closer to one another. We are also grateful to be part of the ICRC and that our relationship grew so much, that we can co- host the Asia Pacific Regional Conference later this year. This promise to be a wonderful event where we all will be enriched and strengthened.

We had our Synod last year in May and it was wonderful to receive greetings from your representative Dr Rowland Ward. Thank you, brother, for encouraging us in the CRCA and for your hard work in organizing the Conference and for the many meetings we could have and will have.

Some news from our Synod, 1200 people have been converted in our congregations in the last triennium and that is good news worth celebrating. Yet 2100 people have left our congregations during a time when Australia's population has been steadily increasing. We need more evangelism and better discipleship if we are to better impact our country with the gospel to the growing people in Australia who are unchurched.

With our report on ecumenical relations a number of existing relationships were reaffirmed, with you as well and with gratitude. But with sadness we suspended ecumenical relationships with two denominations on account of synodical decisions both denominations have made with respect to homosexuality. Unless there is repentance from these churches regarding these decisions, Synod will terminate these relationships at our next Synod in 2021.

We take our relationship with the PCEA seriously, especially in seeking Biblical answers, to stay true to the Word of God as Churches, and to proclaim the gospel in a relevant matter in Australia. One specific task that we need your help is that an overture came to our table and asked if children should be permitted to attend the Lord's Supper based on their covenantal membership and exercising an age and ability appropriate understanding of God's grace and how it applies to them.

We took no action, but Synod decided to appoint a study committee to answer certain questions like for example: whether adopting children's participation in Lord's Supper is a confessional matter and to clarify whether children participating at the Lord's Supper is based on being covenant members of the church or whether the children need to demonstrate an age-and-ability understanding.

We also decided to ask the help of our Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship to ascertain: What can be learned from the CEF churches regarding children at Lord's Supper and what the implications would be of the CEF relation with churches if the CRCA moved toward having children attend the Lord's Supper.

Can you please assist our churches with these questions, give clear evidence about this matter and pray that that the CRCA will stay true to God's Word alone!

Thank you, and please don't hesitate if we can assist in any matter.  
May the Lord bless your Synod and be assured of our prayers for every congregation.

Rev. Lourens Nel Delegate CRCA

## **APPENDIX 4**

### **Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia**

#### **Greetings to Synod of PCEA 2019**

Dear Brethren

Thankyou for this opportunity. I bring cordial greetings from the PRCA.  
My wife & I have worshipped periodically with the Hunter congregation for about 30 years now.

We are a denomination of 7 congregations in Australia, from Adelaide to Brisbane.  
We have 3 congregations in Vanuatu & one in Fiji.

Over recent years we have begun to realise our responsibility to foster good relationships with other churches, where possible.

As we were reminded yesterday from John 15, we are many branches but there is only one vine and we are all connected to one another by being connected to Christ.  
That is why Graeme Mitchell, our previous Moderator, attended this Synod in 2017 & 2018 and that is why I am here this year.

At the moment, the only formal relationship we have with another church is with the RCNZ. Pieter van der Wel of the RCNZ is working in our congregation in Port Vila, Vanuatu. However, I do believe we have a good friendly relationship with the PCEA and I personally would like to see that relationship continue and even develop into something further, as the Lord may lead us.

Don Burgess