

The Synod of Eastern Australia



Set to meet at the
Raymond Terrace
Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia
155 Adelaide Street Raymond Terrace
From 4th – 7th May 2021

Standing Committee Reports

“May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us,
That your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations.”

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TIMETABLE FOR SYNOD 2021

Time	Tuesday 4th May	Time	Wednesday 5th May	Thursday 6th May	Friday 7th May
	Synod to Commence with Session 1 at 4.30pm	9.00am	SESSION 3 Devotions and Prayer	SESSION 6 Devotions and Prayer	SESSION 9 Devotions and Prayer
		M/Tea 10.30am	Law and Advisory Training of Ministry	Inter-Church Relations Delegates from Other Churches	Superannuation Finance Trust Corporations Reports of Examiners of Records. Appointment of Moderator-elect Time and Place of Next Synod Closure of Synod
		12.30pm	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
4.30pm	SESSION 1 Constitution of Synod Retiring Moderator's Sermon. Thanks to Retiring Moderator Presbytery Rolls. Welcomes to new members, guests, associations etc.	2.00pm	SESSION 4 Youth and Fellowship Missions	SESSION 7 Presbytery Reports	Synod Closes at the end of Session 9 at 12.30pm Lunch to follow before delegates depart
6.00pm	Dinner	6.00pm	Dinner	Dinner	
7.00pm	SESSION 2 Election of Moderator for 2021/2022 Moderator's address. Thanks to Moderator.	7.00pm	SESSION 5 Missions Speakers	SESSION 8 Church and Nation Media (Banner & Website) Archivist	
7.30pm	Administration				
8.30pm	Close	8.30pm	Close	Close	

ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

Members: Clerk (Convener), Moderator, Moderator-elect, Treasurer

Change of Venue from Melbourne to Raymond Terrace for the Meeting of Synod 2021:

The Committee considered a number of matters:

1. Concern about the history of sudden lockdowns in Victoria and the emergency powers still held by the Premier.
2. There would be significant number of delegates affected by any such lockdown should it occur.
3. Vaccinations are proceeding at a slower rate than expected.
4. There had been personal approaches from delegates expressing such concerns.

Timetable: Synod is due to commence at 4.30pm on Tuesday 4th May and conclude by 12.30pm on Friday 7th May 2021.

Ministerial Movements: There were no ministerial movements during 2020

Expression of Sympathy: We express our sympathy to the families of the late elders Bill McKinnon (Armidale and Wauchope), John Ramsay (Northern Rivers) and Bruce Webster (Geelong).

Congregational Statistics: Whilst those statistics available are in the table appended to this report, it is noted that Presbyteries have primary oversight and should give due consideration to such as part of their reports.

Consideration of Committee Structure:

The Administration Committee strongly recommends that Committees meet at least twice a year, by video conference, if unable to meet in person. As a result, Synod resolution 5.19.4 may be simplified.

It was proposed to establish a separate Information Technology Committee to include denomination and local church web sites, and advising committees and congregations regarding video conference meetings etc.

Suggested Committee Members: Robin Tso and David Kerridge.

The Administration Committee presents the following, noting that membership of the Psalmody Committee has been nominated by the convener with the approval of those named.

Committee Structure:

Administration: Clerk (Convener), Moderator, Moderator-elect, Presbytery Clerks.

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

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

Church and Nation and Publication: GD Ball (Convener), DK Muldoon, I Hall, J Klazinga (Banner).

Information Technology: R Tso, D Kerridge, C White.

Youth and Fellowship: S Carswell (Convener), AA Miranda, T Reeve, J Forbes, Cameron Hamilton, Matthew Schmidt.

Finance: J Audet (Convener), AH Steel, DJ Ramsay, DE Kerr, G Hamilton.

Superannuation: R Tso (Convener), RS Ward, DJ Ramsay, A Steel.

Missions: ID Hamilton (Convener), DK Muldoon, JD Klazinga, J Greensill, R Tso.

Training of Ministry: D Kerridge (Convener), AA Miranda, R Tso, ID Hamilton, G Hamilton.

Psalmody: D Kerridge (Convener), DA McIntosh, GD Ball, Julie Schmidt, Esther Hamilton.

Treasurer-Elect: The Clerk of Southern Presbytery advised as follows: At the meeting of Southern Presbytery on 6 March 2021, Treasurer-elect John Audet was present and signed the Formula of Subscription, both 1952 and 2008 in the Presbytery minute book in the presence of the Presbytery as required by the pro-re-nata Synod of 2020.

Lapsing of Southern Presbytery: On 15th March 2021 the Clerk of Southern Presbytery reported that at its ordinary meeting on 17/8/2020, the Presbytery overlooked appointing the date and time of the next ordinary meeting due to the business related to Mr Manly not being completed until 11.10pm. The Presbytery has been revived but, as required by Handbook 4.14, Presbytery resolved to report the circumstances to the Synod Clerk for noting in the Administration Committee Report.

Insurances: There is a recognised need for a clear structure and reporting covering the widening requirements for church insurances. It is suggested that this be included under the responsibility of the Superannuation Committee.

Retirement of Synod Clerk: Trevor Leggott indicates that he wishes to retire from the roll of Clerk effective from September 2021. The Committee is of the understanding the Rev David Kerridge would be prepared to take on this roll if appointed.

Correspondence:

Correspondence is not included in the reports but will be available to delegates at the meeting of Synod.

1. From Priest Legal re the estate of Mrs Margaret Hockett
2. From Rev Dr RS Ward re complaint re Southern Presbytery 170820.
3. From Southern Presbytery re answers to RS Ward complaint.
4. From John Forbes re withdrawal of answers (Item 3)
5. From Northern Presbytery withdrawing Overture concerning All Nations.
6. From Southern Presbytery re Treasurer-Elect John Audet signing the Formula.
7. From Southern Presbytery re seat for Rev Ian Hall and a note indicating the lapsing of Presbytery.
8. From Southern Presbytery re ministry interest from Mr Zachary Dotson.
9. From Southern Presbytery re Dr Ward's complaint of 170820.
10. From Rev Dr RS Ward Petition against the decision of Southern Presbytery on 27th August 2020.
11. From Rev Dr RS Ward Petition against the decision of Southern Presbytery on 6th March 2021.
12. From Central Presbytery re St Georges holding and administering the bequest of the late PM Martin.

Proposed Deliverances:

1. Correspondence Items 1 be received and dealt with in the NSW Trust Corporation Report.
2. Correspondence Item 2 be received and dealt with following the Southern Presbytery Report.
3. Correspondence Item 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 be received and noted.
4. Correspondence Item 8 be received and considered with the Training of Ministry Report.
5. Correspondence Item 9, 10 and 11 be received and dealt with following the Southern Presbytery Report.
6. Correspondence Item 12 be taken with the Finance Committee Report.
7. Synod thanks Rev Trevor Leggott for his services as Synod Clerk from the 1st September 2005 for the last 16 years, and acknowledges his retirement from that roll to be effective on 1st September 2021.
8. Synod now appoints Rev David Kerridge to the position of Synod Clerk with that appointment to be effective from the 1st September 2021.
9. Synod resolves that Church Insurances will be included under the oversight of the Superannuation Committee.
10. That the following examiners of records be appointed:

Northern Presbytery	Rev D Muldoon and Narre Warren elder.
Central Presbytery	Rev D Kerridge and Knox elder.
Southern Presbytery	Rev R Tso and Brisbane elder.
11. Synod confirm the Committee Structure as listed in the report.
12. That the Synod Clerk no longer be required to collect congregational data for report to Synod.
13. Synod strongly recommends that Committees meet at least twice a year, by video conference if unable to meet in person, and in preference to only communicating by email.

CONGREGATIONAL STATISTICS AS AT 31.12.20

	Elders/ Deacons	Communicants				Typical Attendance of different persons each Lord's Day		Church Community By Age Total attendance if everyone present who worships at least once a month plus the household but not including visitors passing through.							Baptisms	Sunday-School classes/ pupils	Youth midweek participants	
		2019	+	-	2020	Deaths	2019	2020	<4	4-11	12-18	19-30	31-45	45-64				65+
Brisbane	2/1	33	9	42	0	47	50	*	4	8	*	*	33	9	56	0	3/16	0
Nhan Rivers	4/4	39	2	36	1	34	30	1	3	0	0	2	4	35	46	1	0	0
Hastings	3/1	28	0	25	3	51	45	4	9	6	3	7	7	27	63	0	2/9	0
Northern Pres	9/6	99	11	103	4	132	125	5	16	14	3	9	44	71	165	1	5/25	
Manning	5/3	47	0	40	2	48	44	0	0	0	3	3	18	33	47	0	0	0
Hunter	1/5	46	3	49	1	65	65	3	7	3	6	9	11	26	65	1	2/9	0
St George	3/3	34	0	33	1	70	45	1	4	0	0	16	18	16	55	0	0	0
Mt Druitt	2/1	36	1	36	0	45	45	4	12	8	8	6	10	13	61	0	4/16	0
Central Pres	11/12	163	4	158	4	225	199	8	23	11	17	34	57	88	228	1	6/25	0
Knox	2/0	28	1	29	0	43	43	0	3	8	2	7	11	12	43	0	2/8	13
Narre Warren	3/0	24	0	23	1	42	33	1	0	1	2	2	14	13	33	0	0/0	0
All Nations	2/0	63	5	68	0	105	105	8	18	26	23	19	20	9	123	0	2/28	8
Carrum D	0/0	9	2	9	0	16	19	0	3	1	2	5	4	7	22	0	1/4	0
Geelong	1/0	12	0	10	2	11	9	0	0	0	0	0	1	8	9	0	0/0	0
Ulverstone	1/3	23	0	23	0	35	35	5	1	3	11	4	8	7	39	0	2/5	15
Southern P	9/3	159	8	162	3	252	244	14	25	39	40	37	58	56	269	0	7/45	36
TOTAL	29/21	421	23	423	11	609	568	27	64	64	60	80	159	215	662	2	18/95	36

The 2020 Report has yet to be considered by Synod but in line with the advice of the Synod Clerk it is not repeated here. The following Supplementary Report is provided limited to necessary updating.

SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT FOR SYNOD 2021

1. Insurance

The Redress Scheme was recommended in the 2020 Report and the PCEA was duly registered and this action, taken to meet Insurer's requirement, formalised by the special Synod on 4 August 2020. The necessary historical information required by our Insurers had been duly discussed and disclosed in Committee. The work of providing the locations of the church in the past and present for the redress Scheme was something done by the Convener, who is also the Archivist, consulting with congregations as necessary. The various trust bodies are included. The General Insurance Scheme has been handled by Mr Ward for many years as he was formerly Senior Account Executive at Marsh the world's largest broker. If there was urgent need of a backup his oldest daughter (Fiona) also worked for Ansvar and for Marsh and also as Risk Management Officer for a local council. He receives no remuneration for this work, there have been no complaints and adding it to a Committee at this point is just to add extra specialist work to already overworked and under-resourced committees.

2. Handbook

The production of the Handbook is always a little imperfect given spelling and layout issues. During the past period several issues have been noted that can be corrected in the next print.

(a) Mr Forbes has noted that Section 6 and 7 under 'Motions' in Synod Standing Orders have dropped out.

6. When the recommendations of Standing Committees are in the hands of members as prescribed by Synod, any amendments, alternative proposals, or additional motions relevant to the business of that Committee shall be given in writing to the Clerk not later than the evening sederunt on the day preceding that on which the business of that Committee is taken up by Synod and shall be read to the court before the close of Synod on that day.

7. To ensure careful consideration and wise decision making, copies of correspondence for transmission to Synod shall be supplied with the Reports. Any non-procedural proposal that arises from late correspondence or on the floor of the Synod that is not already anticipated in the prayer of an overture or petition regularly before the Synod, or the subject of a notice of motion in terms of clause 6 of this Act, shall be held over until the next session and, if contentious or of complexity, referred to a representative ad hoc committee for report to the next or later session, before being debated. (*Synod 2008*)

(b) on 27/8/2020 the Rev Jim Klazinga drew to the Committee attention what he regarded as a significant error namely the insertion of the words "nor may they install any person who has not pledged adherence to the Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct of the PCEA" stating "we must not allow for the mistaken impression that this is what is currently required of us when it has not been enacted by synod". One member of the Committee considered this a "blatant error" requiring reissue of the book. In fact such alarm is not warranted. Mr Klazinga is correct that additions should not be made. I think I'm the cause of the error through mislabelling my files while the words complained about I think were a proposed editorial comment meant to be in square practices and italics. They simply state what is an obligation under our Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct so there is no issue on that score and will be corrected in the next print.

3. Synod of Eastern Australia Property Act (1918 as amended 2002)

By letter dated 10/4/2019, (Ref 758135) the Office of the outlined various proposals we might want to consider given that under the rules adopted some years ago the Government would be most unlikely to allow amendment. The only and easiest option left to us is to utilise the provisions in the existing Act to administer the Act as near as possible to the amendment to the Act unanimously adopted by Synod 2013. The provision are these:

6 Synod may make regulations

The synod may make regulations for the management, leasing, mortgaging, sale, and disposition of any property held by the trustees, and also for the purchase of any property by the trustees, and for the investment of any funds of the synod, and for any other matter or thing concerning the said property howsoever.

14 Power to appoint agents and others

The trustees may employ all agents, assistants, receivers, servants, and others in the performance or carrying out of any of the duties, work, or circumstances arising hereunder, and direct or authorise payment of any moneys payable to them, to any corporation, bank, institution, account, or person as they may deem expedient, and the receipt of any such corporation, bank, institution, account, or person shall be the same as if given by the trustees or the majority of the trustees themselves, and in like manner discharge the person or persons paying therefrom and from all responsibility of seeing to the application thereof or being answerable for the loss, misapplication, or non-application thereof.

A proposal to this effect follows.

SUPPLEMENTARY DELIVERANCE

1. NSW Property Act

Synod resolve that as the unanimous desire of Synod 2013 cannot be conveniently fulfilled by Parliamentary amendment to the Synod of Eastern Australia Property Act (1918) under current Government rules, the Synod resolve that pursuant to Sections 6 and 7 of the Act, the Act shall be henceforth operated in all possible

respects as if it read in terms of the Amendment to the Synod of Eastern Australia Act approved unanimously by Act of Synod 2013, with the persons additional to the Moderator, Clerk and Treasurer being assistants, the interpretation given to the supplement of \$300 by Synod 2018 being operative, but without power to operate a Common Fund or vary trusts except in terms of NSW law inclusive of the 1918 Act.

LAW & ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Alternative Majority Report (2021) - Safe Church Matters

Tom Reeve, John Forbes, David Kerridge

1. Minor Amendments to Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct (See Appendices 1 & 2)

Remit by unanimous agreement of Synod in 2019:

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. (Synod minutes 19.24.2)

In seeking to fulfil this remit the committee carefully reviewed existing legislation in all the relevant Australian states, studied the report and recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, and appraised itself of the specific requirements of the Church's insurer, in order to ensure that PCEA Safe Church standards are fully compliant with all of these. Appropriate minor amendments were proposed and approved by the majority of the committee. These are set out in Appendices 1 and 2 of the alternative L&A report and submitted to Synod for approval.

However a completely new "Safe Church package" was submitted to the committee by its convener on 2nd March 2020, just two weeks before the deadline for submission of committee reports for that year. We were told that it had the support of two other members of the six-man committee. Three members of committee dissented from the convener's action and proposal, regarding it as contrary to the committee's remit, and maintaining that to introduce a completely new Policy and Code at this stage was unwarranted.

The following observations are also relevant:

- a. No significant problems have been identified with the existing Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct by any member of the committee.
- b. The existing Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct have now been in use by all congregations of the PCEA for three years, having been passed as an interim-act by Synod in 2018 and ratified in 2019.

2. Complaints Handling Procedures (See Appendix 3)

The Royal Commission's report recommends that institutions should have a clear, accessible and child-focused complaint handling procedure that sets out how institutions should respond to complaints of child sexual abuse. Its Standard 6 recommends that: "*The institution has a child-focussed complaint handling system that is understood by children, staff, volunteers and families.*"

They recommend that the complaint handling policy and procedure should cover:

1. Making a complaint
2. Responding to a complaint
3. Investigating a complaint
4. Providing support and assistance
5. Achieving systemic improvements following a complaint.

It is apparent that the current procedures contained in Act 1, Class 1, 2014 do not meet the new standards and should now be repealed and replaced. New Complaints Handling Procedures are set out in Appendix 3. They were initially developed for inclusion in the new Handbook chapter but are now submitted to Synod to be adopted as a separate Act. It is not necessary that these Complaints Handling Procedures be passed as a Class 1 Act since the key constitutional requirements of confidentiality, reporting to civil authorities, and disciplinary outcomes are already contained in the PCEA Safe Church Policy.

3. Handbook Changes

Remit by unanimous agreement of 2019 Synod:

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).

Significant work was carried out in furtherance of this remit and it was proposed that the Handbook have a new chapter dedicated to Safe Church matters. This was based on the existing Safe Church Policy and Code with the additional minor amendments that were proposed. It had the full support of four committee members up until March 2020 when the convener revealed his alternative “Safe Church Package”. At that time the committee became divided 3-3 and the focus of debate was moved backwards. Under these circumstances it is not possible to submit proposals for Handbook changes.

It is of deep concern that an unauthorised change relating to Safe Church matters was incorporated into the 2019 Handbook. The following phrase was added to Handbook 2.7, “*nor may it install any person who has not pledged adherence to the Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct of the PCEA*”. Synod has never required its ministers or office-bearers to “pledge adherence” to the Safe Church protocols. This unauthorised Handbook change was noted and brought to the attention of the L&A Committee by the Brisbane Session in August 2020 following appointment of new Deacons. The responsibility for updating the Handbook each year lies with the Synod Clerk and Administration Committee (per 2018 Synod Minutes 18.6.1). In practice it appears that this is done by Dr Ward without the scrutiny or approval of any committee. Upon discovery of this irregularity it was requested that a corrected version of the Handbook be reissued but the Synod Clerk and Administration Committee have apparently not taken any action to remedy this situation.

4. Church Insurance

Since the 1980s the PCEA has had public liability insurance that includes cover for incidents of molestation. This, as well as our participation in the National Redress Scheme, requires that disclosures of relevant confidential information about known incidents, including historic incidents, be made to the insurers from time to time. At present such disclosures are not part of the remit of any committee but are in the hands of Dr Ward alone. This is not good practice as it is essential that there should be accountability in such matters. It is proposed therefore that all decisions and disclosures relating to church insurance be put under the remit of an existing committee of the Church.

PROPOSED DELIVERANCES

1. Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct (2021)

Synod transmit the following overture to Presbyteries under the terms of the Barrier Act and meantime pass the same as an interim act in force until next Synod. Returns are to be in the hands of the Clerk of Synod by 30 November 2021:

WHEREAS Synod is committed to the careful development and refining of its Safe Church standards, AND WHEREAS minor amendments to the 2019 Safe Church Policy and Code were suggested by the Northern Presbytery, and further amendments and additions have been advised by the Law & Advisory committee following its review of state legislation, insurance requirements, and the recommendations of the

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse,
NOW THEREFORE Synod, with the consent of presbyteries, enact and ordain, for the PCEA Australia-wide the amendments to the existing Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct (Act 1, Class 1, 2019) as set out in Appendices 1 and 2 of the Law and Advisory Alternative Majority Report 2021.

2. Complaints Handling Procedures

Synod adopt the Complaints Handling Procedures contained in Appendix 3 of the alternative Law and Advisory Report 2021, as a child focussed and accessible standard to be used throughout the PCEA.

3. Repeal of Act 1, Class 1, 2014

Synod transmit the following overture to Presbyteries under the terms of the Barrier Act. Returns are to be in the hands of the Clerk of Synod by 30 November 2021:

WHEREAS the Procedures for Dealing with Allegations of Child Abuse and Sexual Misconduct contained in Act 1, Class 1, 2014 are not considered to be suitably accessible to children, families and volunteers,
AND WHEREAS all the key constitutional aspects of complaints handling, including requirements for confidentiality, reporting to civil authorities, and disciplinary outcomes are already contained in the PCEA Safe Church Policy,

AND WHEREAS the 2021 Synod has adopted new Complaints Handling Procedures which are more child-focussed and accessible,

NOW THEREFORE Synod repeal Act 1, Class 1, 2014 (Procedures for Dealing with Allegations of Child Abuse and Sexual Misconduct).

4. Handbook Changes - Safe Church matters

Synod instruct the Law & Advisory Committee to draft proposals for the incorporation of Safe Church matters into the Handbook and to bring these proposals for the consideration of Synod at its next meeting.

5. Unauthorised changes to Handbook

Synod require that no changes to the Handbook of Practice and Procedure are to be made without the consent of Synod except that relevant Acts of Synod, which have been titled, listed and numbered by the Synod Clerk so as to facilitate citation, may be incorporated into the Handbook with the approval of the Administration Committee.

6. Insurances

It is resolved that all matters relating to church insurances, including the completion of renewal questionnaires and disclosure of relevant confidential information, be placed under the remit of a Synod committee – to be determined.

APPENDIX 1
MINOR AMENDMENTS TO EXISTING SAFE CHURCH POLICY

Remit to L&A committee per Synod minutes 19.24.2

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.

All additions with underline - additions

All deletions with strikethrough – ~~deletions~~

SAFE CHURCH POLICY (2021)

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, young people, and the vulnerable 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 identifies 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 as well as the unregenerate. 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 principles which values value children, young people and the vulnerable. We believe 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)~~ 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
- regularly reviewing the implementation and effectiveness of this policy and updating as required 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 Risk of Significant Harm: This is a term for situations where a reasonable person has concerns about the safety, welfare and wellbeing of a child.

4.5 Abuse categories: Each of the following constitutes a reportable offence

(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.~~

4.6 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. Registers are also to be kept showing attendance records of all those participating in youth activities, and these are to be retained for at least 25 years. 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. Confidential records are not to be stored electronically, nor to be communicated electronically except where there is a statutory requirement to do so. Presbytery clerks and session clerks are authorised to release relevant confidential information for insurance purposes upon receipt of a written request from the person or committee that organises the Church's insurance renewal.

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 who have been regular attenders for at least one year (less time approved only if they are well attested from another congregation of the PCEA with at least two referees' reports)
- 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. Information about how to make a complaint can be found in our COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURES (Act ?, Synod 2021) which also sets out how the Church will respond and investigate the complaint.

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.

When session becomes aware of a complaint of abuse it must immediately assess the risks of harm that exist and take steps to ensure that those risks are minimised in order to protect the safety of children and vulnerable.

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 behaviour, 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.

Following investigation by the Church, any leader found guilty of sexual abuse will be immediately removed from office and from all other positions or roles they may hold within the Church.

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

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

- not pushing the child or young person to disclose details of the alleged assault
- not attempting to investigate the allegation
- assuring the child person 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 to discuss the case
- 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 behaviour 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. Managing Known Offenders

If the Church become aware that any person attending any of its services or activities is the subject of a substantiated complaint of child sexual abuse, or has been convicted of an offence relating to child sexual abuse, they must make this known to the session.

On receiving such information the session must assess the level of risk posed to children by such a person's ongoing involvement in church activities and take appropriate steps to manage that risk. Such steps may require that the known offender always attend meetings under the supervision of a responsible individual named by session. The Church's insurer must also be informed as soon as possible.

14. Working with a Body External to the Church

Using the services of another organisation 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.

15. Training

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

It is required that those working with children and the vulnerable be given appropriate training in Safe Church matters. 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.~~

APPENDIX 2
MINOR AMENDMENTS TO SAFE CHURCH CODE OF CONDUCT

Remit to L&A committee per Synod minutes 19.24.2

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.

All additions with underline - additions

All deletions with strikethrough – ~~deletions~~

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. When transporting children in vehicles, no leader is to be alone in a vehicle with a single child or young person.
 - c. There shall ~~always~~ be at least two approved leaders at any activity (except for crèche where a sole female carer is acceptable). On occasion a parent present as an observer may suffice as a second adult. 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 recognised 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.
 - d. 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.
 - e. 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.
 - f. Initiations and secret ceremonies are forbidden.
 - g. Any activity involving children or young people is open to observation by parents and other adults with a legitimate reason.
 - h. 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.
 - i. If any personal counselling is required, it shall be carried out within the sight of other people (preferably another leader).
 - j. The consumption of alcohol ~~or illegal drugs on the church grounds~~ or during a church or youth activity is forbidden with the exception of communion services where wine is ordinarily used. 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.)~~
 - k. In any physical contact with young people or children, leaders will respect the feelings and privacy of those persons. Physical violence of any kind is forbidden.
 - l. Where a protocol cannot be followed due to an emergency or unexpected situation, the session (or supervising body) must be notified in writing as soon as practicable. A temporary variation may also be approved in advance. In both cases the supervising body must determine whether or not the circumstances justify the departure from protocol and must carefully document its finding.

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, grooming behaviour, 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 of 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 (per 4 above)

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, together with your date of birth.

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 3 COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURES

1. MAKING A COMPLAINT

If you are a child, young person or vulnerable adult who has been abused then it is important that you tell someone about it.

Anyone who has reasonable grounds to believe that a child or other vulnerable person has been abused or is at risk of abuse should also report this.

1.1 Who should you speak to? You can speak directly to the minister or one of the elders, or you can speak to any leader of a church activity such as a Sunday school teacher or youth leader. All our leaders have been trained to listen to your complaint, to take it seriously, and to report it to the session. You also have the right to go directly to the police or relevant government agency to report abuse.

1.2 What if the abuser is one of the church leaders? As a Church we try to be very careful about who we appoint to leadership positions but it is a sad reality that sometimes even a person who was trusted to be a suitable leader may use that position of trust wrongly to abuse others. This is unacceptable and it is important that it is reported to another leader in the Church, or directly to the police or relevant government agency.

1.3 What if the abuse happened somewhere else? Even if the abuse happened somewhere else, such as at school, or at a friend's house, you can still speak to the leaders at your church about this. They will listen to you and seek to help you.

1.4 What if the victim is now an adult?

Abuse by a church leader should be reported even if it happened a long time ago. It may not be easy for a victim to speak about the abuse they experienced but the Church should seek to ensure that help and support are provided to the victim, who should be encouraged to bring a report to police.

1.5 What is abuse?

Children and vulnerable people have a right to be safe, protected, and looked after in their family, daily life and at church activities. Abuse is when a leader, adult, or even another young person, uses their power or position of trust in a wrong way to hurt or exploit by doing things to a child or vulnerable person, or making them do things, that are inappropriate or distressing. It can take many forms, including physical, sexual and emotional abuse, as well as neglect and exploitation.

2. OUR RESPONSE TO A COMPLAINT OR DISCLOSURE OF ABUSE

2.1 We will treat all disclosures seriously and record the details - Our Church is committed to processes that strive for truth and confidentiality and will treat all allegations seriously and act upon them. A child or young person may disclose, deliberately or inadvertently, that he/she is a victim of abuse. Alternatively there may be reasonable grounds to suspect that a child or young person has been or is being abused. 'Reasonable grounds' is a subjective concept, but this does not remove responsibility from a person to act. In all cases, details will be recorded of what happened, when and where it happened, details of persons present or witnesses, using the complainant's own words as far as possible.

2.2 We will be compassionate - 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.

2.3 We will report abuse to the relevant church body and the proper civil authorities - Leaders and any others in the congregation who hear such disclosures or have reasonable grounds for concern should report the matter to the minister or an elder. You also have the right to go directly to the police or relevant government agency yourself and can ask advice from the congregational Protection Officer. From that time the session (or the presbytery if the allegation is against a minister), 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.

2.4 We will not let fear of being wrong prevent us from reporting abuse - The fear of being wrong is not sufficient ground for not reporting the concerns.

2.5 We will take immediate steps to minimise the risk of further harm - As soon as the session becomes aware of a complaint of abuse they must carry out a risk assessment to identify risks of harm that exist and

they must take steps to ensure that those risks are minimised in order to protect the safety of children and vulnerable.

2.6 We will keep careful and confidential records – Confidential records (as a record apart) will be kept by the session clerk and controlled under the privacy legislation of the Church. These records will 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) attached. Copies will 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 will be lodged with the presbytery clerk.

3. INVESTIGATING A COMPLAINT

3.1 Initial stage - At the initial 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 behaviour, this must be investigated first by the police.

3.2 Confidentiality - 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 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).

3.3 Precautionary suspension - Any church leader or worker who is accused will be stood down by the session or presbytery from his/her position until the police investigations and Church investigations are concluded.

3.5 Investigation according to Biblical standards – When any police investigation is concluded the Church will conduct its own investigation. It is possible that charges arising from the police investigation may not be proved to the satisfaction of the civil court. Nevertheless, the standards of conduct required by the Word of God are to be maintained by the Church. Irrespective of any other action that may be taken, the Church reserves the right to exercise its own powers of discipline over adherents, members and office-bearers.

3.6 Disciplinary action – Following investigation by the Church, any minister, office-bearer or other leader found guilty of the sexual abuse of a child, young person, or other vulnerable person, will be immediately removed from office and from all other positions or roles they may hold within the Church.

4. PROVIDING SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE

4.1 We will seek to provide appropriate support to victims - Appropriate sensitive pastoral care will be extended to any child, young person or vulnerable adult who has made a disclosure of abuse, by the following protocols:

- not pushing the child or young person to disclose details of the alleged assault
- not attempting to investigate the allegation
- assuring the person 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 to discuss the case.
- maintaining confidentiality by speaking only to those parties recommended by the police (or delegates), even though this may cause emotional tension.

4.2 We will provide ongoing care and support for victims and their families – This is the responsibility of the session and will normally be carried out by the minister or an elder. The Church should also assist victims and families to find information and obtain help from sources outside the Church if desired.

5. REVIEW OF PROCEDURES

5.1 Commitment to review

We are committed to regularly reviewing and improving our Safe Church standards to ensure that our Safe Church Policy, Code of Conduct and procedures are effective in protecting children and the vulnerable from harm. We also want our stated procedures to be clear, accessible and easy to follow for all.

An internal review is to be carried out after a complaint process has been concluded. Any causes of systemic failure should be identified and the views of leaders, complainants, and the victim or their family should be sought wherever possible. Details of the review are to be retained as confidential records.

Safe Church training events may provide a regular opportunity for presbyteries to review, with leaders, how well they are able to understand and implement the Safe Church standards in their congregations.

Observations, comments and suggestions should be forwarded to the relevant Synod committee to facilitate

improvements to the Church's policies and procedures.

5.2 Review with leaders

Questions to leaders who were involved in reporting or investigating a complaint may be along the following lines:

- a. Was there some inadequacy or systemic failure in the Church's procedures, or in the implementation of these procedures, that resulted in harm to a child or other vulnerable person under your care?
- b. Were you as a leader/session clear about your duties?
- c. Was the complaint process easy to understand and follow?
- d. Was there anything unclear in the Safe Church Policy, Code of Conduct or complaints procedure, or anything in these documents that requires to be clarified or to be updated?

5.3 Review with complainants, victims or their families

The views of complainants, victims or their families should be sought wherever possible in the review process. This will require particular care and sensitivity depending on the nature of the case. They may wish to submit responses in writing or prefer to meet with an appropriate person who has been appointed by the Church to talk with them and record their views. If it has not been possible to obtain these views then the reasons for this should be stated in the report. Questions may be along the following lines:

- a. Was the complaint process easy to understand and follow?
- b. Did you feel listened to and was your complaint taken seriously?
- c. Did you feel the Church handled the complaint appropriately?
- d. Did the Church take proper steps to protect children and the vulnerable from harm?

TRAINING OF MINISTRY COMMITTEE

The Committee had no new matters before it in 2020. This report was circulated to members for reference and discussion early in 2021.

MR DUNCAN HICKEY

We thank the Lord for the news of Mr Duncan Hickey's successful completion of trials for licensing in the Central Presbytery in 2019 and remind delegates in 2021 of Mr Hickey's status. We understand that Duncan is living with his family in South West Sydney, currently in full-time secular employment. We pray that the Lord will bless him and his family as Duncan seeks to serve the Lord and His church.

[From Synod 2020 report] Handbook Section 4.52 ADMISSION OF MINISTERS FROM CHURCHES WITH WHOM THERE IS NO MUTUAL ELIGIBILITY [Synod 1983, Act 18, as amended 2004, 2012]

As a result of the procedure involved in Rev. Hall's admission, decided at the *pro re nata* Synod in 2020, we received from Rev. Dr Ward a proposal to (1) change the name of the Committee to Training of Ministry and

Admissions Committee; (2) to increase our number to 6 members, two from each Presbytery; and (3) to change the above Act.

For information regarding item (3) the proposed new Section 4.52 is as follows:

Proposed Rule:

4.52 ADMISSION OF MINISTERS & LICENTIATES OF CHURCHES WITH WHOM THERE IS NO MUTUAL ELIGIBILITY

Replacing Act 18 Class 2, Synod 1983 as amended 2004, 2012

(a) Applications for ministerial standing are addressed to the **Presbytery** but are regulated so as to require a wider deliberation. Application for admission as a minister or licentiate must be made on the **application form** prescribed by the PCEA to the Presbytery in which the applicant resides or proposes to reside. It must include copies of academic transcripts, ordination (or licensing) evidence, dates of induction or appointment to fields of pastoral labour, evidence of clearance to work with children, and the names of at least three referees. These details must be given in summary form in the Presbytery minute together with other background information including any personal knowledge of the applicant known within the presbytery, and the applicant's philosophy of ministry. Special prudence and care is needed in assessing applications from those without at least 5 years experience, those without a settlement, those outside Australia, and/or those from a non-Presbyterian background.

An **interview** must be conducted (normally including the applicants wife) covering specifically at least the following topics: *Family*: wife's support or otherwise of the application, family needs, health; *Personal background* - upbringing, conversion, work experience; *Doctrinal* views, particularly on matters of current concern, any difficulties with the teaching of the Confession of Faith, any idiosyncracies, his love for Christ and for people; *Practical and pastoral* issues including visitation practice, ability in conducting worship and preaching, evangelistic focus, ability to relate well to others, leadership skills, understanding of Australian society, acceptance of PCEA practice; *Church History*: familiarity with issues in 1846, our attitude to PCA type Declaratory Statements; *Vows* required by the PCEA. *Reasons* for application. *Existing church*: Is he in good standing? Is he well regarded? Has he experienced conflict? Details of the interview in each area are recorded in the minutes together with the result of the verbal interviews with referees.

The Presbytery then records its **decision** on the application, including the actual vote. If the application is viewed favourably, the Presbytery sends the complete minutes concerning it (a) to the Clerk of the other Presbyteries with the request that any comments on the application be forwarded within 10 days to the Training of Ministry and Admissions Committee with a copy to the originating Presbytery.

(b) At the same time the Presbytery sends both the original application and the minutes concerning it to the **Training of Ministry and Admissions Committee**, which shall include two members from each Presbytery. The Committee makes sure all needed information has been covered, and makes such other enquiries as seem appropriate and, takes into account any comments received. Its actions and finding are minuted.

If there are no adverse comments about the life and conduct of the applicant and his ability to integrate and work harmoniously within the PCEA, and if the Committee judges the applicant well qualified and wholeheartedly committed to the authority of Scripture and to the doctrinal position of the PCEA, then, normally no later than 30 days from it receiving the application, it advises the Presbytery that it may proceed to admit the applicant subject to him signing the Formula in the usual way, and the Presbytery advises other presbyteries of its proposal to do so.

However, if dissent has been recorded at Presbytery and/or reservations expressed in Committee, the Committee consults the originating Presbytery and gives opportunity for it to review its initial decision. If the issue is resolved by the Presbytery providing further information to satisfy the Committee or by reversing its earlier approval, there the matter ends. If the Presbytery retains its original position, and the applicant wishes to continue the Committee may decide to refer the application to the next Synod or, if the issue of difficulty is not one having much support or of much importance, it may take the matter to a poll of Synod members to secure a resolution.

(c) **Notwithstanding (b) above**, if the applicant comes from a denomination not a member of the ICRC or from one with which we do not have fraternal relations, or from a denomination that does not have the Westminster Confession and/or Three Forms of Unity as one of its Standards, the Committee will submit its report and recommendation to the next ensuing Synod for its decision. It should be understood that such an applicant would normally be expected to have had involvement in the PCEA for a significant period before application.

[END OF PROPOSED RULE]

After consideration of the matter, the Committee were agreed that:

1. Our numbers are presently small, and retirement of Ministers from a number of charges is foreseen in the near future. We know of no new student candidates considering Ministry in the PCEA. Whilst our work as a Committee in coming years may very well be focussed on the *admission* of men from other denominations with whom we have Mutual or fraternal relations, a change of name may seem to take away the focus from where we should be concentrating our efforts: on encouraging, receiving and helping to *train* students, especially those from Australia and more particularly from within our own denomination. Both roles of training and admission already exist in our remit. We do not see a need for a change of name but leave this to the mind of Synod.
2. Our work regarding Mr Duncan Hickey has finished. There remain some ongoing administrative and development tasks for the Committee. However, there is no pressing demand that would call for more manpower. Due to our small number, Synod members are already called to be involved, perhaps overburdened, in many areas of Synodical work and as such we don't see an expansion of the Committee to be needed at present. The only argument that the Committee saw in favour of a six-person Committee was in giving each Presbytery a clear view of the ongoing work of the Committee, something that should be transparent in any case. We leave this matter to the business of the Administration Committee in appointing members of Committees.
3. The Committee reviewed the proposed changes to Handbook Section 4.52 and agreed that we could not support it in its current form. We have reservations about the scope of the application of this legislation to include those beyond churches with whom we have fraternal relations. We see that, whilst a streamlined process is advantageous, especially given our projected near-future dearth of Ministers, such a process may yet be troublesome as it bypasses, in the main, detailed and considered review by a convened Synod, whether at its annual meeting or *pro re nata*. We ask that we be allowed to refine this legislation and return to the matter at next Synod.

Proposed Deliverances

1. That the Synod continue in prayer for our Licentiate, Mr Duncan Hickey and his family.
2. That the Synod consider a change of name of the *Training of Ministry Committee* to *Training of Ministry and Admissions Committee*.
3. That the Administration Committee note, and Synod consider, the possible expansion of the Committee to include 6 permanent members, two from each Presbytery.

YOUTH AND FELLOWSHIP COMMITTEE

Members:

S. Carswell (Convenor), A. Miranda, A. Kerridge, T. Reeve, C. Hamilton, J. Forbes and S. Smith

In 2020 the Y&F committee continued to focus on ministries to strengthen fellowship among the youth and families in the church, as well as encouraging Bible study and scripture memorisation for covenant children.

Youth Camp 2020

Due to government restrictions and border closures due the pandemic the committee, reluctantly, cancelled the 2020 Youth Camp, that was to be held over the Easter long weekend at John and Judy Greensill's property at Maclean in Northern Rivers congregation.

It is planned that the 2021 Youth Camp be run over Easter weekend in Northern Rivers with Rev Tim Attwood, Maclean Evangelical Church (reformed Baptist), as speaker. The camp is for 15-30 year olds and has in the past had young people from Brisbane, Northern Rivers, Hastings, Manning, Hunter-Barrington and Ulverstone. It is hoped that young adults from other congregations might also be able to attend in the future.

Family Camp 2020/2021

Again, due to the pandemic the 2020/2021 Family Camp scheduled to be held at YWAM Tahlee, NSW from 29 December 2020 to 1 January 2021 was postponed and is now proposed to be held 28-31 December 2021 or in early January.

It is hoped that the decision to move to Tahlee and reduced costs will encourage more people to attend. Tahlee is approximately 30-40 minutes from Newcastle airport, with direct flights from Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney. Vehicle transport from the Hunter-Barrington congregation will be available.

As the venue is not catered Rev. Robin Tso has agreed to coordinate the planning of meals and the purchase of food. It is hoped that the cost of the camp will be approx. \$200 per person, with capped family rates available. The committee believes that the Family and Youth Camps are an important event in the life of the church, providing opportunities for strengthening fellowship and deepening our love for God and His Word and would encourage the members to attend, as they are able.

Essays

In 2020, the essay topic focused specifically on the doctrine of God's forgiveness. 14 essays were submitted from the Brisbane (5), Hastings River (2), Manning (4) and Ulverstone (3) congregations. The ages of the children and young people who presented their works start from six to seventeen years old. All the writings demonstrate depth of thought and a clear understanding of the nature of God.

Each essay not only receives a gift card but also evaluation comments that interact theologically and pastorally with the content of their work. The children and Sunday school teachers appreciated the comments from Andres Miranda regarding the work.

Prescribed Youth Work 2020

The prescribed work, memorisation and essay questions were published in the Banner and sent to each congregation earlier this year. Certificates were sent to Brisbane for Scripture memorisation, while the Hawkesbury-Nepean (Mt Druitt) congregation reported:

This year was to be the first for attempting the Prescribed Work, but the Virus curtailed the memorisation in class. However, one family was very enthusiastic and learnt the Proverbs passage at home.

Since Sunday School resumed, they have learnt all the OT Books as well. The NT should be completed by December.

Certificates for scripture memorisation, psalmody or catechism are available from the Convenor.

Birthday card Greeting

The Y&F Committee is grateful to Nic and Amelia O'Dell who have continued the role of sending birthday card greetings to the children of the church.

Search Work

The Committee is thankful to Irene Steel for her continued commitment to the Search Work. Irene was pleased to report that she received answers from 12 children last year, after the numbers were down to 2 or 3 for a few years. Ages ranged from 7 to 17 years old. There were 3 from Ulverstone; 7 from Brisbane & 2 from the Hastings. There were 8 in the Senior Section, 3 in the Intermediate & 1 in the Junior section.

The Committee encourages congregations to utilise the Search work, Essay and Memory work in the teaching and building up the children and youth of the church.

Proposed Deliverances:

1. Synod recognises the importance of giving special attention to children and youth in the Church and commits to continued prayer for the work of Sunday-school teachers and youth leaders as they serve God in our local congregations.
2. Synod upholds Nic and Amelia O'Dell in prayer as they continue in sending birthday greeting to the children of the church.
3. Synod thanks Irene Steel for her dedication to the scripture search work and acknowledge God's blessing for her commitment and encouragement in continuing this role.
4. In addition to their responsibilities of shepherding God's flock, both young and older, Synod members are asked to encourage church members to participate in future Family Camps and Youth Camps.
5. Members of Synod commit themselves to continued prayer for the spiritual development of the children and youth in our congregations. We are mindful of the temptation of the world and sin that can draw our young people away from the truth of the gospel and the faith. Therefore, constant intercession should be made on behalf of our young people, so that they will have the courage to stand firm in the Lord, to resist worldly pressure, find their identity in fellowship with Christ, and participate joyfully in their local churches.

MISSIONS COMMITTEE

D.K. Muldoon (convener), J. Greensill, T.I. Leggott, J.D. Klazinga, R. Ball

The committee did not meet in person because of travel restrictions. Updates from the various fields of mission work and support are included in this report. Most work has been impacted by the global pandemic but continues by the grace of God. We in the PCEA have continued with prayer and financial support.

Introduction to Shekinah and ministry at Project Video (from Shekinah in 2019) For the past two years, I have been working towards the process of going back to Thailand. Earlier, in 2015, when I had gone there to work as a Media and Communication Assistant in Project Video, I learned a lot. Their mission is to share the word of God through video amongst people that cannot read or write, which is phenomenal! Reaching out to the people and sharing the word in their vernacular language is marvellous. The best part of doing this mission I feel is that I can use my talent and study of making videos. Earlier when I had gone I was able to go to the churches in the villages of Thailand and see how God was working amongst them. I had the opportunity to visit a Lahu village. The people over there are strong Christians and have a lot of talent. The best part is that they use their talent for the glory of God. They were doing so much with just the little they had. Also, Project Video aims to teach the people from the community who have already accepted Jesus so they can go and create videos and share the word in their languages amongst their community.

My work in Project Video when I return is going to be a little different. This time, I will be working as a Video Editor and helping in video making as well. It will be a whole new experience for me as I have not really worked as an editor before. I have spent much of these last years understanding how God made this way for me to return. I had never imagined that it would be possible to return to this mission. God has made a way when there seemed to be no way. Going back is a long term plan. This will be my full-time work, and in mission it's impossible to survive without the support of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Prayers, friendship, family, spiritual, and emotional support is vital in the field. I am thankful for this opportunity to share this mission with all of you. I look forward to travelling to Thailand in 2020. It will be for a period of two years initially.

Update: this introduction was in last year's Synod report. Synod met by video conference in June 2020 and agreed to support Shekinah as short term missionary to Project Video in Thailand, with \$10,000 in 2020/21 and \$5000 in 2021/22. Travel restrictions because of the pandemic have prevented Shekinah from going to Thailand at the date of writing. We pray the Lord to open the way soon.

MISSION FIELD REPORTS Contents:

- 1. Australian Indigenous Ministries**
- 2. Dumisani Theological Institute**
- 3. Taleem centre, India**
- 4. Dr Dickson, India**
- 5. Central India**
- 6. Mukti**
- 7. Annie Soper School**
- 8. Christian Witness to Israel**

1. Australian Indigenous Ministries (from Peter Smith)

As of the 15th of February 2021 we have a new General Director – praise the Lord! Lloyd Ollerenshaw has taken up the role in a part time capacity, as he still has responsibilities amongst Baptist circles until the end of June. In July Lloyd will be able to put his hand to the plough, as he takes up the full position of General Director.

As reported in the recent AIM Magazine, Lloyd spent much of his early years on an apple orchard in NSW, where he attended Sunday school run by Audrey and Jim Davey, who had been AIM missionaries at Philip Creek and Newcastle Waters in the NT. They became spiritual parents to Lloyd. Through them he began his journey of awareness of the needs for ministry amongst Indigenous Australians so that, from the age of eleven, he had a sense of call to this work.

After the death of Lloyd's father the family moved to Canberra, where he was to meet his wife Clara. Eventually, Lloyd trained as a teacher and Clara a pre-school teacher. Because of their scholarships they were obligated to serve in the NT and did so in various Aboriginal communities. After marriage they found themselves teaching in some of the communities where Baptist mission work was carried out. This led ultimately to Lloyd training at the Baptist College in Queensland where they gained some pastoral experience then joined the Baptist mission serving in the NT for eighteen years. This was followed by a return to NSW and service at the Shellharbour Baptist Church for nineteen years.

A commissioning service for Lloyd is to be held at Wagga Wagga Baptist church on the 18th of April.

Many of the delegates would remember Harold and Kay Dalywaters from Elliott, NT, as Harold spoke at a Synod a number of years ago. Tragically, his daughter Jolene died after being released from Alice Springs hospital as she waited for a taxi. She suffered a large asthma attack. It was a real shock to Harold and Kay, however, they are comforted in that Jolene knew the grace of the Lord Jesus as her Saviour. Please pray for Harold and Kay in their loss and as they care for three of the five young children, who no longer have a mother.

Pastor Henry Louie, who some will also know, is currently ministering to a group in Pilliga, Western NSW. Pilliga is a town approximately 200km north of Gilgandra. In God's marvellous providence, some people there were asking to know more about the saving gospel of Jesus Christ! Henry is ministering to around 10 to 12 adults, some of whom have entered God's kingdom; and with the help of Sydney Koreans, has run many Kid's Clubs in school holidays. The Korean input allows Henry and his wife, Maria, opportunities to engage with the parents, who drive their children in from outlying areas. Please pray for two things. Firstly, that the Lord will reap a wonderful harvest amongst the Pilliga people. Secondly, that Henry and Maria are seeking a home in Pilliga through Aboriginal Housing, as the cost of fuel to travel regularly from Gilgandra for ministry is prohibitive. Please pray that the Lord will provide a suitable house in his perfect timing.

Pastor Ike Gordon and his wife, Eileen, ministering in Brewarrina commence the yearly NSW River Convention on Easter Friday. Some of those who will be supporting Ike during the Rivers Convention are Henry Louie, Across the Divide team, led by Rob Alley, Paul and Erin Strahan from Moree along with others from Sydney and Gosford. The convention covers seven towns over 16 days starting in Brewarrina, then Enngonia, Weilmoringle, Goodooga, Lightning Ridge, Walgett and finishes at Dubbo.

Finally, following the Royal Commission into Child Abuse, the people organizing the Redress Scheme determined that AIM did not have sufficient finances to join. However, this does not prevent future law suits targeting AIM" directly, including two current cases.

Pease pray that the Lord will abundantly bless and further the ministry of AIM to his glory and praise.

2. Dumisani Theological Institute and Bible School (from Jack C. Whytock)

Dear Christian Friends in the PCEA. Greetings in the Lord Jesus Christ. Thank you for this opportunity to bring a short report from Dumisani for the year 2020. However, first we want to say a sincere word of thanks from everyone at Dumisani, the staff, trustees and students to PCEA for your kind support through your financial assistance but also faithfully praying for us last year. 2020, as for you as well, will certainly be remembered for some time.

We had our largest graduation in the history of Dumisani in early March, 2020 and had our annual March Workshop for local pastors and evangelists but by March 23rd we were closed. We did manage to complete all of term one in the classroom but then terms two and three and most of four were forced to distance mode (on-line, old style correspondence, hybrid- whatever some students could manage etc). Unfortunately, by going this route we have seen some students drop-out due to no electricity and internet. It seems that our diploma students fared much better as they are year two and we did not see the decrease in that programme like we did for our first-year certificates.

A real highlight was our Summer School in November, 2020; we were able to have a full face-to-face in-class course taught by Dr Johannes Aucamp of South Africa teaching on Christian Apologetics and Evangelism. This course went very well and the lecturer was very well received. So, we can say the year ended on a very positive note.

Our acting registrar, Rev. Vernon Vera became our registrar in July, 2020 after a six-month initial period as acting-registrar. In 2020 we were able, by an anonymous donation, to complete the remainder of the replacement of the floor in our Library building and to also do some electrical wiring upgrades in that building.

It was a very good year for Christian literature distribution despite Covid-19 restrictions. We had one large book sale and continued with our Bible distribution work. We are now around the 3,000 mark for *ESV Global Study Bibles* being distributed around the Eastern Cape.

Our Principal, Wilbert Chipenyu, would covet your prayers as we are now into Term One of 2021 at Dumisani. Please pray that we can rebuild the certificate numbers for first year and see a steady increase throughout 2021. Many are reluctant to return and face many challenges as congregations have been deeply impacted by this virus in the Eastern Cape in recent weeks.

3. Taleem Centre, India (from Mariam)

Greetings in the Lord to brothers and sisters in Christ in Australia.

The initial phase of Covid19 lockdown in India brought immense pain and suffering to the poor and needy. As people started walking to their villages, unable to earn money to pay rent and buy food in the city, families

suffered, children went hungry, and many died. Many tried to help and fortunately some received help but in such an enormous population many received no help.

My ministry with children in the village came to a pause; we were strictly not allowed to travel in between cities, a lot of police patrolling was always around. With support being sent regularly from PCEA, staff at the Taleem centre were given payments. This was a situation where even many churches were not able to help due to restrictions. Usually, we as believers are able to move across the country in times of natural calamities or man-made hazards. I remember my father 10 years ago travelled with a team to distribute blankets during an earthquake in Kashmir. He was among the courageous; I find inspiration remembering many adventures my dad did during his time in the mission work. As a female I always face the challenge to keep safe as we hear of many incidents happening in India.

However, we did extend a little help to people living in the river bed near Selaquie area. Rag pickers, migrant workers, and seasonal workers were the most affected but the pandemic. The rag pickers settle in dry rivers and they live in terrible conditions with poor sanitation and unsafe drinking water. One time I wanted to visit this area was sealed due rapid increase in COVID cases.

I have kept in touch with the families at the Taleem centre, asking them for their needs; the children come from farming families so are in some ways self-sufficient. The government also distributed rations, which was not a lot but some relief for the needy. **Gulfam** and **Julekha**, who have opened their home to us, have a piece of land to grow some wheat and rice, and a few vegetables. **Gulfam** worked as a bus driver but after an accident couple of years ago cannot do this work. They have opened a small grocery shop near their home. The teachers (**Seeba** and **Shabana**) also have families who have some land to grow crops for family use.

It was a pause button that we were forced to push, and now it is time to return to the children. Julekha tells me they miss their classes; we have discussed starting slowly, first on Sundays with something like a Sunday school. From there we will continue our weekly classes as usual. Some children have grown so much in the last year, so I will have to see how many will be able to join us; hopefully some new faces.

We also helped a family who live nearby in **Shining Star Academy**. This is a school where my parents started to help children over 15years ago. There were many sponsored students here until three years ago when, due to budget cuts, it was closed. In October 2020 the principal of this school Mr. Kureshi passed away. He opened his house for prayers and did not object to sharing the word. He is survived by wife, three sons and one daughter. The sons are inclined towards their religion, more so in recent times. This family had been seeking the Lord for many years since my parents did some work in this neighboring area. I try to keep in touch with **Mrs. Shakila** the mother who was our Urdu teacher; my father was adamant for us to learn Urdu. My sister **Shekinah** who is better at learning languages, picked up more than me. A couple of years ago **Mrs Shakila** went with me to visit the village; I think she will be assisting me in future. Even though my visits to the village were not possible, I was able to invite this family over after strict lockdowns were lifted. I have spent time with **Mrs Shakila** studying the word; she can read Urdu which is a benefit. Even though we children have continued in the faith after the death of our parents, many seem to feel that my family has been cursed; it is the fear of death that keeps them from understanding the word completely.

Family: I am working as a teacher for grade V in a good school. The salary is well paid and finally I feel I am not a slave! The Lord opened doors when it was least expected and I was offered this position. I was teaching grade VI- VII for the past 2.5 years but this opportunity was too good to refuse. I am teaching on teams; the school has a good online system for everything. I have adjusted well with the children; a few parents have given me good feedback, saying their kids love me as their teacher.

My brother Zechariah is working as a financial analyst for a company owned by a Christian business man; He has been working full time from July. He recently took confirmation (profession of faith) to accept the Lord as his personal savior. We lost our mother when he was only 10 years old, so it is a blessing to see him turn into young man.

Shekinah is waiting for the Embassy to open so she can get a visa for her mission work in Thailand; most of the paper work is complete. Please uphold her in your prayers that she is able to join the mission she has been working towards for over four years.

We also were given news that our church has been allowed to open at the seminary with all the precautions and every service has been given a particular slot. We are looking forward to attend it. *Isaiah 40:31*

4. Dr Dickson, India (from Dickson)

As we have crossed two months in 2021 it would be good to look back and see His goodness in our lives. I am sure everyone would agree that the year 2020 gave a big jolt to all of us. However, our God is in control (*He controls the course of world events* Dan 2:21 NLT version). The pandemic has not gone and the uncertain days are not over but our sovereign Lord is at work. Despite the pandemic, we have had a busy

Online activities during the Pandemic

The pandemic brought lot of challenges but God changed these into an opportunity to reach out to many via networking. Since the lockdown began, we moved into virtual platform to reach out the unreached with lockdown restrictions. A short summary of all our activities is included below:

- Organised **37 professional webinars** covering various topics on Animal Health, facilitated by experts who volunteered their time to benefit veterinarians and veterinary students in India and in neighbouring countries. These webinars were conducted weekly, and helped establish a network of veterinarians across India thus benefitting hundreds of veterinarians.
- A series of **seven caregivers (Rural Pastors) training** were organized every Wednesday for 20 rural leaders in Uttar Pradesh, from July 15 to August 26, 2020. This training empowered the caregivers to generate some income as their income was stopped due to the lock down restrictions. Many house churches were closed in North India
- A **goat training** for Barela and Korku tribes living in Khandwa, Madhya Pradesh was conducted with 30 farmers from different villages from 17th to 19th August 2020. Most of them were migrants and lost their support as they lost their jobs and walked hundreds of miles back to their villages.
- **Seven training sessions for goat caregivers** were conducted for 40 Odisha farmers between 28th October and 17th December. I spoke in Hindi which was translated in Odiya to benefit the FGC (First generation Christians). We distributed 50 first aid kits to those who attended the online training.
- We released a **Hindi training video on goat farming** on YouTube to benefit migrant workers returning to home villages. This was well received and initiated the rest of our online training.

Other Activities...

In addition to the online training programmes organized this year, we also had an **online interaction with Mission Leaders** to assess the need for Veterinary activities in the field and ascertain the way forward. We were also able to give medical consultation to the farmers on animal health (mostly farm animals) via **telephone**. Besides these events, we organised **15 Global Vet Chain Prayers** every second and fourth Fridays of every month with the prayer warriors across the globe. Many expressed that it was a blessing to be a part of this Chain Prayer.

Free Mask distribution

As India has opened up despite the pandemic and the new normal was introduced to curb the spread of fatal virus, we distributed free masks to the hundreds of needy people across the land but mostly in Goyla Dairy.

Women training Centre

Following all the protocols, we opened up the computer centre on October. 11 Students are taking for the 6 months training on computer skills.

Skill Development Centre

In collaboration with RSP, we opened up another centre in Goyla Dairy to empower the weaker gender with sewing, beauty parlour and bag-making training. 20 people are taking these training.

5. Presbyterian Free Church of Central India (J Greensill from Samit Mishra)

The Covid situation

For last few months, despite markets and transportation being open, there have been no positive cases in Seoni district. Also, in surrounding cities like Jabalpur and Nagpur, the numbers are rapidly going down. In fact, there seems to be no fear of Corona in people's mind. Things are back to normal with masks, social distancing, and sanitization again rare in community gatherings. In addition, the first phase of vaccination has started for all health and front line workers. Mission School Chhapara has become a busy place, as government has made it a centre for vaccination in Chhapara.

The Church and Covid

All the religious places in Chhapara have been open from October 2020. In church we do make sure to practice Covid guidelines, yet when out in the courtyard, we do forget those restrictions and enjoy the fellowship. By God's grace, this winter is the safest one because no one is suffering from cough and cold. So, the winter flu has not spread wide here.

We have not yet started House Prayer Meeting. This is to avoid close sitting in houses. But, yes, we are planning to start the same in Church building on Friday, a particular family will be the host but we will all meet in church and worship with that family.

Weekly online prayer meeting and Bible study are being regularly conducted. It is a good and very effective innovation, especially among the youth. It is vital in discipling and mentoring youth. Youth also organized an online Reformation Day Symposium and session on Baptism; these online events were attended by more than 70 leaders from across India.

Last month our State has amended a law, now called as “Madhya Pradesh Dharmik Swtnttraa Adhinyam 2020”. Using the provisions of the act, the first FIR was registered against two pastors in Seoni district, followed by few more in Balaghat and Bhopal. In fact, as I write to you there are three pastors in Jabalpur Jail, waiting to be released on bail.

The schools in Chhapara and Lakhnadon

The schools are open for High and Higher Secondary students, and the state exams are announced to be held in May 2021. Financial crisis continue in the school. Despite government and court’s favour towards fee collection, the parents are not willing to pay any fee. In cities there is no such issue but in Chhapara and Lakhnadon it is really hard to collect fees.

We are developing infrastructure in Chhapara with the help of DVN. However, the salary deficit is again increasing due to covid-chaos.

Lakhnadon School is struggling a lot. There is a plan to convert it to English Medium or else the school will gradually shut down. DVN assessment team has suggested the same and we are planning to introduce the English Medium from July 2021.

The Diploma in Theology programme

At present, we are running the third phase of the Diploma Course. There are 14 students, and the program is run in the Premnagar, Jabalpur; we have completed 12 subjects. The remaining four subjects will be covered in the next few months. Lord willing, we will be able to give the diploma in the month of April or May 2021.

Most of the students are from rural places and have independent ministries. On one hand, the course provides solid biblical (Reformed) teachings to these evangelists and church planters. On the other hand, the program also builds student’s expectations for ministry support. These rural church planters could be supported with a little amount. But we, as small denomination, are in no place to increase the strength of church planters. We often lack financial sustainability and at the moment are thinking to sustain and strengthen what we have already started in last few years.

PTS (seminary in Dehradun) is also thinking to upgrade and accredit the programme to Hindi B.Th. by 2022. This will certainly boost the programme.

Community Work

The help received from PCEA, FCS and DVN is still being used in mercy ministry and salary of the school and church staff.

- a. We have distributed more than 1200 one-month-grocery kits to needy families.
- b. There was also a phase where we distributed masks and sanitizers in the community.
- c. After the things shifted back to normal, we changed the distribution strategy and until now we have distributed more than 500 vaporizers and 300 Resprometer (Lung exerciser) to old people in the community. These items are distributed in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, in places where we have church planting work.

Kahani church construction

Kahani Church construction work has been completed 90%. This is the fifth church of PFC-CI, with land, parsonage and church building.

Update on catechisms

The modern translation of Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms has been completed and is under process of publication by Notion Press. This book also contains a Sunday School syllabus, based on Shorter Catechism. Publication is a bit expensive, but the good thing is that the book will be available always and everywhere through Amazon India/UK/USA and Flipcart. A part of the cost is already raised locally.

Hostility increase

Would you all kindly pray for the situation in Madhya Pradesh! In the past week there have been more than 10 cases registered against the pastors/evangelists, under "Freedom of Religion Act, 2020, Madhya Pradesh". It all started from our district (Seoni) and is spreading all over the State. This law is biased and against the natural justice. It was initiated upon the political argument of “Love Jihad” but has become a primary tool to trap pastors/evangelists. The registered/ established/ mainline churches will not face much of its effects, yet the people who are serving independently and have house churches will suffer a lot.

Finally, we are thankful to all of you for supporting the work here, mainly for your constant prayers and encouraging words. With many thanks, PFC-CI and Mission Schools in Chhapara and Lakhnadon!

Student Sponsorship Scheme for the Presbyterian Free Church of Central India *Mission Higher Secondary School in Chhapara* (John Greensill)

The Synod's Student Sponsorship Scheme for the Presbyterian Free Church of Central India *Mission Higher Secondary School* in Chhapara has operated since 2015 and has helped approximately 51 children that were sponsored at one time or another (not counting one who left almost as soon as the scheme set up), some cancelled and new ones taken up instead, over the life of the program (A total of 60 children were made available for sponsorship). This has helped needy families in being able to meet the cost of sending their children to the school. The school has been run by church leaders and a staff of dedicated church members. By individual sponsorships there has been a good boost in interest in the School and an increase in giving to Indian mission endeavours. The sponsorship scheme raised \$8k plus and \$6K in the last two years, by God's grace. There are currently 18 sponsors (including individual PCEA members/Congregations/Sunday Schools/Missionary Societies) sponsoring 26 students at the rate of \$240 pa, some on a monthly basis, others annually.

During 2020 the school suffered a major downturn due to COVID, and enrolments fluctuated wildly with senior classes, only recently taking students again. This situation has contributed significantly to the difficulty in administering the scheme, in keeping sponsors informed as to progress of their individual students in their education and the current status of their sponsorships. Finding suitable church personnel to assist in this task has been unsuccessful.

It is therefore considered a simple DONATION scheme for the work of the school be established in place of the individual sponsorship of children. This seems more workable, with application of donations being left to the discretion of the School in assisting needy families with school fees etc. or in running of the school as they otherwise determine from time to time. Donors to be encouraged to continue their regular support of the school as they have faithfully done via the sponsorship scheme. One specific account to be maintained in the Synod's books to channel donations through to the school without reference to individual students.

Details for a change from a sponsorship scheme to a simpler donation scheme will need to be worked out and current donors communicated with as necessary. It is felt that the matter of changing enrolments and difficulties in tracking students, some of whom have not been to school in 2020 is a convincing argument to transfer sponsorship to an ongoing donation plan.

Perhaps a subcommittee appointed by the Synod Missions Committee to oversee the change could be appointed from those who have been instrumental in maintaining the scheme to date.

Mission Awareness Tour

The mission awareness tour to India planned for the end of 2021 has been put on hold because of the pandemic.

6. Mukti

Report by Peter Smith

The missions committee have supported the Pandita Ramabai Mukti Mission through Mukti Australia for well over a decade now. The Mission has been empowering Indian women and children in India since 1889. It was founded by Pandita Ramabai, a woman described by renowned Indian social reformer D.K. Karve as "one of the greatest daughters of India." Ramabai was a pioneer in woman's education and social equality, and an outstanding linguist, author and Bible translator. She dedicated her life in service to disadvantaged and marginalised children and women. Ramabai founded Mukti Mission in Mumbai in 1889 with the opening of the Sharda Sadan, a school of learning for child widows. She then went on to establish a residential community in Pune, which sought to provide a home and loving community to all women in need.

Synod delegates and congregations can learn more about the mission in India by going to mukti.org.au on their phones or computers or contacting Mukti Australia.

Currently, the Synod is partially supporting four young girls, Shital Pandharbale, Stutti Katarnavare, Durga Ubale and Priyanka Shinde. They send letters and cards, which melts hearts! Following are the contents of a card sent from Priyanka.

Dear Uncle Peter Smith and Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia,

How are you & I hope you are will now be fine and I am in 1st year graduation now. I am appearing my final exam I joint the course of the Tally about of computer. Thank you so much for supporting me here at mukti I am very happy here at mukti. Please pray for God to guide me in my future plans. I am one of fourteen girls in the maple leaf family playing games, Bible studies and prayer, hanging out with my friends.

Please come to meet me and I would love to welcome you in our country.

Yours lovingly,
Priyanka Shinde

What more can be said. Oh how happy Priyanka is! The card has hand drawn flowers on the inside and a big smiley face. On the cover is a beautiful picture of her. Please pray for all the four girls that as they grow into young, vibrant women, they will know personally the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in their lives: that he will guide them in their future plans and provide for them Godly, caring husbands.

7. Annie Soper School, Peru (from Jim Klazinga)

We give thanks for the ongoing opportunity to support the work of the Annie Soper School in Moyobamba, Peru, primarily in prayer, but also by offering once a year a modest contribution for the purpose of helping to fund scholarships for needy students.

Our contact with Annie Soper, Mrs. Pilar Urquieta, continues to be gracious and faithful in providing us with prayer requests for inclusion in our bi-monthly Mission Prayer Notes Newsletter. She has been forwarding matters for prayer from the school Director Mrs. Mariquita Chumbe. We are very thankful for both of these godly women and their continued service for the Lord during what has been a very difficult time for them, for the school, and for the country of Peru.

Rev. David MacPherson, a minister of the Free Church of Scotland currently serving as Executive Director of Operacion San Andres in Collique, Peru, recently wrote:

“The school year had only just begun when face to face classes ground to a halt due to the pandemic and resultant lockdown. As a result, the whole school year, just ended, has been conducted remotely. The staff and pupils are to be commended for meeting the challenge face on and, despite the many difficulties, getting through the year. A highlight of the year was to witness the final year class of 18 pupils graduating. The name chosen by the pupils for their graduating class is ‘Kerygma’; the Greek word for ‘proclamation’. Our prayer is that the lives of these young people be dedicated to proclaiming in word and deed the good news concerning Jesus Christ. Many thanks to our friends in Australia for your continuing support for Annie Soper.”
To access their Facebook page, go to: <https://www.facebook.com/colegioanniesoper/>

8. International Mission to Jewish People (from Rhoda Ball)

Mark and Rahel Landrum have been ministering to Sydney's Jewish community with this organisation since October 2019. Mark came to faith in Jesus as a youth in Atlanta, USA, while Rahel began following Jesus at 18 years of age shortly before her Israeli military service. It wasn't long before both felt convicted to share the gospel with their own Jewish people and began following that call. They have widespread experience, having shared the gospel with Jewish people in Israel, Europe, N. America and Australia. Their work involves discipling as well as meeting on a regular basis with unsaved Jewish people. Despite the difficulties of connecting physically during Covid 19, they maintained contact via Zoom and WhatsApp. They are thankful to be able to resume meeting in person again and grateful that Christians are putting them in touch with Jewish friends. In terms of financial support, they are supported by individuals and churches, including financial support from their home church, Bondi Anglican, but have a very long way to go to raise their desired financial support. They send out regular newsletters and are available to speak in churches.

Joseph Steinberg has been the CEO for seven years. Since January 2021 CWI is now known as ‘International Mission to Jewish People,’ and has a new logo - the menorah and the olive tree. Steinberg says this name change was not taken lightly but to better reflect the following things: -

- To reflect the focus we have to share the gospel with Jewish people by preventing us from being side-tracked

into conversations about politics or land issues.

- To better reflect our global reach. We are blessed to be able to take the gospel to Jewish people in places like the UK, Europe, USA, Australasia, and Israel.

- To avoid confusion with other charitable organisations focused on gospel mission.

It has been a challenging year but a good year for the mission. The missionaries have continued to build relationships with Jewish people who became more thoughtful and searching. The mission has expanded with the addition of four new missionaries: Misha Vayshengolts working in Israel, Igor and Galina Barbanel working in Ukraine, Sergio Danon from Rio de Janeiro, and Ida Tam from Hong Kong. There have been 45 professions of faith including, drug addicts, the homeless and those with a religious background.

Virtual missionary meetings are currently being offered to churches and small groups via Zoom or your preferred video conferring software, or even a pre-recorded message. For more information on this contact - info@imjp.org - I haven't confirmed how this will work for us in Australia.

Special packs containing 'Pray, Give and Share' cards have been produced inviting us to recommit to the work of telling Jewish people the gospel. This can be done in a number of ways.

1. Using the monthly prayer points on the Vision Card.
2. With the monthly prayer diary 'Praying Always' distributed with the bi-monthly Herald, and by email request in the intervening month.
3. Help your church pray by receiving and sharing the weekly prayer update, containing one story to encourage your prayers each week.
4. Sign up to hear directly from any missionary - each send out three prayer letters a year.

There is a part-time administrator in the Sydney office who sends out the Herald magazine, though this is usually weeks after the magazine is emailed from the UK office!

Let us recommit ourselves to Jewish evangelism under this new name, 'International Mission to Jewish People', and pray that God will bless His mission and that we will see the lives of more Jewish people transformed by the gospel of grace.

PROPOSED DELIVERANCES

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 Synod approve a subcommittee consisting of John Greensill (chair), David Kerridge and Alex Steel to manage the sponsorship/donation scheme for students at the Mission Higher Secondary School, Chhapara, India.
3. That Synod adopt the Missions Committee Budget 2021/22 and expresses its general agreement with the estimates for this period.

Missions Budget 2021										
General Funds	Budget 2019	Actual	2020	Budget 2021	Estimate 2022					

Balance 1 Jan 2020		21815		21815		24481		20581
Income: Investments	14000		11331		12000		12000	
Giving Miss General	4000		1306		1200		1200	
Transfer from Synod Gen Funds			0					
Income	18000	18000	12637	34452	13200	37681	13200	13200
Expenditure								
CWI	100		0		100		100	
AIM (Peter Smith)	3000		3000		3000		3000	
Visiting Miss expenses	500				500		2000	
Dumisani Theo, Institute & Bible School	3000		3000		3000		3000	
Admin: Postage, bank fee	500		638		500		500	
Interserve-Shekinah	10000		3333		10000		2000	
Total Expenditure	17100	17100	9971	9971	17100	17100	10600	10600
Closing Balance		22715		24481		20581		23181

Missions Relief Fund								
2021								
MRF Working Account	Budget 2020		Actual 2020		Budget 2021		Estimate 2022	
Balance 1 Jan 2020		8196		8196		8434		7534
Income Investments	13000		4738		5000		5000	
Other (Donation)			0					
Transfer from Equities Ac			10000		5000		0	
Income	13000	21196	14738	22934	10000	18434	5000	12534
Expenditure								
Lakhnadon Christian Hospital	1000		1000		500		500	
Lakhnadon Mission School	800		0		800		800	
Chhapara Mission School	1000		5000		1000		1000	
Annie Soper Scholarships	1200		1200		1200		1200	
Dr Dickson Delhi	1300		1300		1300		1300	
Taleem Centre (Mariam)	5000		5000		5000		5000	

Mukti child sponsorships*3	1000		1000		1000		1000	
Fees and Charges	270		0		100		100	
Total Expenditure	11570	11570	14500	14500	10900	10900	10900	10900
Closing Balance		9626		8434		7534		1634

Equities Account	Budget 2020		Actual	2020	Budget 2021		Estimate 2022	
Balance 1 Jan 2020		153960		153960		147626		147626
Income Revaluation of shares & Managed Funds	15500		3666		5000		5000	
Income (Retained Investment Income)	0		0		0		0	0
Total	15500	169460	3666	157626	5000	152626	5000	152626
	323420				300252			
Expenditure								
Transfer to McSwan Working Account	5000		10000		5000		5000	
Revaluation			0		0		0	
Total	5000	5000	10000	10000	5000	5000	5000	5000
Closing Balance 31 Dec		164460		147626		147626		147626
Total Funds Held McSwan Missions Relief Fund		171994		147626		147626		147626
Net Movement from previous year		9600		-6334		0		0

INTERCHURCH RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 2019-2020

Members: R. Tso (Convener 2017), G.D. Ball, J. Forbes, T.I. Leggott, R.S.Ward, J. Klazinga

1. ICRC Asia-Pacific Regional Conference, Melbourne 1-3 October 2019

The ICRC Asia Pacific conference took place in Melbourne with about 40 attendees from Australia Thanks are due to Rev. Dr Rowland Ward for his part in organising this conference along with Rev. Lourens Nel, then of Melbourne, and the CRCA Committee whose other members were interstate. Five PCEA ministers were able to be present and benefit from the addresses and fellowship with ministers from throughout the Asia-Pacific region. A fuller report and picture appeared in The Presbyterian Banner for November 2019.

2. CHURCHES WITH WHOM WE HAVE FRATERNAL RELATIONS.

2:1 Free Church of Scotland (FCS). 1954 and 2005.

2:2 Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) (FCC). 2018 Mutual Eligibility

It will be recalled that the Mutual eligibility with the FCC was approved by our Synod subject to the FCC's confirmation at their 2019 Assembly. An Act along the lines of those we have with FCS, OPC and RCNZ has been drafted and appears in our proposed deliverance. The words in italics are proposed under 4 below for our existing arrangements with the FCS, OPC and RCNZ.

2:3 The Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ). 2002.

During the ICRC Regional Conference Messrs. Ball, Forbes and Yoa had opportunity to meet with representatives of the RCNZ on 2nd October 2019 to discuss past correspondence, present relations and future prospects. The RCNZ expressed a desire that the mutual eligibility arrangement between our churches would involve a greater level of interaction. They would value brotherly conference with the PCEA regarding areas where the views of our churches may diverge. Accommodation can be provided to PCEA ministers who may consider a preaching "holiday" at one of their vacant churches, and an invitation was extended for the PCEA to send a representative to the RCNZ Synod in Hamilton, from the 12th to 18th of September 2020.

2:4 The Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC). 2007.

2:5 The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Australia (RPCA). 2004.

2:6 The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland (RPCI). 2006.

Fraternal relations with RPCI were formally agreed following a request of Synod in 2006. It was mistakenly stated in the Inter Church committee's report in 2018 and 2019 that a request for mutual eligibility had also been made to the RPCI at that time. It is clarified here that no such request was made.

2:7 The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA). 2008.

Dennis Muldoon advised the Convener that the RPCNA is planning to send short-term missionaries to Sydney, to run a Bible club over the winter holidays in July. The Hunter session has also agreed to receive them to have similar events. This seems an admirable ecumenical endeavour.

2:8 The Presbyterian Free Church of India (PFCI). 2010.

2:9 The Southern Presbyterian Church of Australia (SPCA). 2014.

We look forward to welcoming to Rev David Lachman of Hobart as fraternal delegate to Synod. Mr Forbes was invited to speak at their family camp in Feb 2019, and talks have resumed regarding deepening our fraternal relationship.

2:10 The Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA). 2014.

2:11 The United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA). 2015.

3. CHURCHES WITH WHOM WE HAVE CONTACT.

3:1 The Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia (PRCA).

3:2 The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia (EPCA).

Jim Klazinga was able to attend a portion of the EPCA 2019 winter presbytery meeting held in Brisbane [They have two presbytery meetings each year, with the summer meetings held in Tasmania]. He was personally acknowledged and well received. He did not present formal greetings, as the EPCA does not have provisions for this.

3:3 Presbyterian Church of Australia

The Convener was overseas but as Rowland Ward had an historical research task in Sydney at the time of the General Assembly of Australia, he represented us at the GAA held in the Hurstville PCNSW and there was no cost to us. A report appears in *The Presbyterian Banner*, March 2020.

3:4 Associated Presbyterian Churches of Scotland. 2018

4. Mutual Eligibility Rules

Our present rules do not include a requirement that other Presbyteries be advised of a proposed call being extended to a minister of a denomination with which we have mutual eligibility. We propose accordingly.

5.1 The International Conference of Reformed Churches.

From Rev James Visscher, the Corresponding Secretary of ICRC, "Recently the Co-ordinating Committee of the ICRC held its regular annual meeting and it also reviewed the timing of the General Meeting of the Conference that was scheduled to be held in October of 2021. After taking into consideration the state of the

COVID-19 pandemic around the world, the suspension of air travel and the uncertainty of the vaccine rollout, **it was decided to re-schedule the General Meeting of the ICRC to be held in Windhoek, Namibia, until October 12-19, 2022**”

5.2 The World Reformed Fellowship (WRF).

PROPOSED DELIVERANCES

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 resolve as follows:

“The Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA) recognises in the Free Church of Scotland Continuing (FCC) a church whose doctrines and contendings are largely similar to its own with adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith a major requirement for office bearers. Synod, while declining to enter into the merits or otherwise of the division in the Free Church of Scotland in 2000, reaffirms the approval of mutual eligibility approved by PCEA Synod 2019 and notes that the FCC General Assembly in May 2019 the FCC reaffirmed the relation established by the pre-2000 Free Church of Scotland.

The Synod of the PCEA understands and is satisfied that FCC Presbyteries may issue calls to ministers of the PCEA, and likewise affirms the right of the PCEA Presbyteries to process calls to FCC ministers. In neither case does this mutual eligibility impinge on the right and responsibility of the relevant FCC or PCEA Presbytery to require the usual application for admission to be fully and satisfactorily completed and full and satisfactory Presbyterian certificates of character and attainment before admission. These include clearance under any relevant child protection legislation, and assurance that any incoming minister is familiar with the history, doctrine, and practice of the church so that he is able to subscribe to the formula of subscription intelligently and heartily and participate harmoniously and constructively in the life of the church.

The other presbyteries are promptly advised of a proposed invitation, and any response by them should be given without delay.

Where a FCC minister is potentially or actually under call or appointment by the PCEA, he must, *inter alia*, (a) have read the history of the PCEA and also its Handbook of Practice and Procedure, and have answered satisfactorily questions on them; (b) assure the presbytery that he will maintain the simplicity and purity of the PCEA form of worship; and (c) answer satisfactorily concerning his adherence to the teaching of the Confession of Faith as per Formula of Subscription. His satisfactory compliance with this admission procedure is to be minuted by the Presbytery and must be met before a call or invitation is transmitted so that the minister may know that his acceptance will enable his admission.”

This Act may be cited as Mutual Eligibility (Free Church of Scotland Continuing) 2020.

3. Synod resolve that words “*The other presbyteries are promptly advised of a proposed invitation, and any response by them should be given without delay.*” be inserted in the mutual Eligibility Acts with the FCS, OPC and RCNZ.

NORTHERN PRESBYTERY

Brisbane

We give praise to God for His continuing purposes being worked out in the life of our congregation during 2020.

Services:

Services were held each Sunday at our Emma Street building at 10 am and 5 pm up until 22 March, and then resumed being held there on 7 June. Of the ten Sundays we were not able to meet in the building, two of the

Sundays were 'combined' electronically with other PCEA congregations (29 March with Northern Rivers, and 3 May with Hunter), whereas for the other eight Sundays, we held our own 'services' via livestream and phone. The livestreaming of services that began with the lockdown continued after services resumed being held at the church.

We continued to accommodate a growing number of seniors needing to join in worship via their phones, including three people living in the Rockhampton area, and two from the Redcliffe section of Brisbane.

The Lord's Supper was celebrated only three times last year, twice before the lockdown and once after (11 October).

The congregation has been blessed by the consistent presence of visitors at our worship services, some of whom have been attending regularly.

Membership

The congregation rejoiced in the wedding of Ben and Claire Klazinga, held on 21 March.

The Richards family was blessed in October with the birth of their seventh child and second son, Gideon.

Currently, they reside in Northern Queensland, where Taylor has a teaching job.

Their membership continues to be held by our congregation.

No members of the congregation died, and no disjunction certificates were requested during 2020.

Session

The congregation has two elders and the pastor serving in session. Elder Wes Hanna serves in the role of Clerk of Session, while Elder Stewart Carswell serves as the representative elder at Presbytery and synod, and as the Safe Church officer. Mr. John Greensill of the Northern Rivers congregation stands ready to serve as an assessor elder, but we did not need to call on him in 2020.

Deacons' Court

Two new members were added to the Deacons' Court with the ordination and induction of Micah Klazinga and Matthew Schmidt to the office of deacon on 23 August.

Stewart Carswell continued to serve as treasurer, and Micah Klazinga was appointed as assistant treasurer.

Much time and effort had been spent in earlier years on finding and purchasing a manse. Possession of a property in Boondall took place in early 2020, with the Klazingas moving in shortly thereafter.

Thanks to the generous giving of our members, and the fact that we no longer have to make rent payments for the manse, we are no longer operating on a deficit. Our surplus has made it easier to make some necessary repairs on the church property.

Education and Fellowship

Our Sunday morning pre-service psalm singing class was suspended at the beginning of the lockdown, and resumed being held on 19 July.

Efforts were made to have Sunday School classes online during the time we were restricted from meeting at the church property. After we returned, Sunday school was put on hold until 19 July.

The young adult group met when they could for study and fellowship, led by Julie Schmidt and Matthew Schmidt. A younger youth group also met, led mainly by Lawrence and Mary Buckingham.

Two fortnightly mid-week Bible Studies met on alternate weeks. At the beginning of the lockdown, the studies began to be held on Zoom, and this method of meeting has continued ever since.

The minister led the occasional Pastor's Class during the Sunday School time, and a men's Discussion Group, held occasionally following the Sunday evening worship service. Women would meet in a separate group, convened by Mrs. Julie Klazinga.

The pastor continued his practice of sending text messages up to six days a week to members via their mobile phones, informing the congregation of matters for prayer, focussing mainly on the members and activities of the congregation. He also continued to send texts focussed on denominational prayer matters to leaders and members throughout the PCEA.

Camp Drewe

The Annual Family Camp was held at Lennox Head in December. We were blessed by the ministry of Rev. Paul Seiler, who led a series of talks on Isaiah.

Northern Rivers

“All Your works shall praise You, O Lord, And Your saints shall bless You. They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom, And talk of Your power, To make known to the sons of men His mighty acts, And the glorious majesty of His kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And Your dominion endures throughout all generations.” (Ps 145 10-13 NKJV)

The Coronavirus impacted church life in 2020 both detrimentally and positively. From February to July we were unable to gather in the normal manner. Each congregation in the Presbytery was forced to adapt to the situation, rapidly learning new ways of using technology to keep connected. Northern Rivers had an advantage in that the congregation was already utilising phone services for those isolated in nursing homes and at a distance. People did not have much to learn to be able to stay in touch. We were able to add streaming audio and, for a while, uploaded videos of services. Zoom meetings on Wednesday nights became a welcome fellowship. These continued after lockdown finished for some time until resumption of the morning Bible study. Whilst the technological learning curve was a positive experience, the detrimental effect became evident in isolation, loneliness and the felt loss of a gathering of the body. It was a blessed relief to get back to worship services in July.

The now-annual PCEA Youth Camp to be held at John and Judy Greensill’s property on Palmer’s Channel over the Easter long weekend was postponed. At the time of writing this report, Northern Rivers is scheduled to host the 2021 Camp over the Easter long weekend. The speaker is to be Pastor Tim Attwood of Maclean Evangelical Church. We pray that this event might continue and that there would be an increase in young people attending, especially from Sydney and Melbourne.

Following the lockdown, the congregation resumed services in Maclean only, each Lord’s Day at 11am and 4pm, with a reduced attendance for the morning service (approximately 8-10 in the afternoon). Grafton services have not resumed due to very low numbers. It was agreed in Session to suspend Grafton services indefinitely. Mid-week Bible Studies resumed late in 2020, 10am Wednesday in Maclean. The Live Telephone Service continues to be used by members in Ballina and Evans Head who are unable to attend, as well as occasional listeners from further afield. Again, towards the end of the year, the Minister was able to resume a now-fortnightly service in Whiddon nursing home (previously only requested monthly).

In August, the Minister conducted a memorial service for a beloved member and esteemed elder of the congregation, Mr John Davis Ramsay who died in Lismore on 7th August, 2020. A memorial Minute has been recorded in Session and Presbytery’s records describing John’s long association with, and service to the church in the Northern Rivers. We thank the Lord for John’s life and service.

We praise the Lord that the Maclean Manse is used as an Op-Shop and raises substantial funds to support the work of the Lower Clarence Christian Education Association (LCCEA). In turn the LCCEA makes a donation to Northern Rivers Congregation. We again remind PCEA congregations that part of this money (approx. \$5,000) is available for assistance to other congregations or worthy causes by agreement with our Deacons’ Court.

The Bethesda Retirement Units are operated by a management committee under the supervision of the Deacons’ Court. All units have been occupied throughout the year and there is a long waiting list.

We pray for the Lord’s blessing in 2021 after a year of trial and tribulation in 2020.

Hastings

Wauchope Services and activities

Public worship services are held in Wauchope each Lord’s Day at 10am and 4pm. These are now broadcast live on Youtube for those who are unable to attend. The minister generally preaches consecutively through books of the bible. This year the studies have been in Matthew’s gospel at the morning service, and in 1 Samuel and 1 Corinthians at the afternoon service.

A prayer meeting and study is held on Wednesday mornings at 10am followed by coffee, and we have also recently started a Wednesday evening prayer meeting for the benefit of those who are working during the day.

Sunday School & Youth

A number of the children of the congregation received awards at the end of 2020 for memorisation of Scripture and Catechism, and the Sunday School resumed in 2021 with an increased roll and a new teacher.

Kindee

A monthly service is held in Kindee on the 3rd Lord’s Day of each month, regularly attended by 8 locals from Kindee and Long Flat. Some others travel from Wauchope to support (approx 40km).

People

There were a few changes to the congregation in 2020. We said farewell to Andrew & Matilda Hamilton and daughter Kyra, who moved to Tasmania in March. The Lord has since blessed them with the birth of a son, Lewis Glen Hamilton, born in July. We pray they will be a blessing in their new home. There was one baptism, Hadassah Grace Freebairn was baptised in January 2020. Also, sadly, three of our members died in 2020 – Margaret Hockett (nee Ramsay) as well as Penny McKinnon and her husband Bill McKinnon, one of our elders. Tributes were published in The Banner in August 2020 and February 2021.

CENTRAL PRESBYTERY

Moderator: Rev. Dr. Dennis Muldoon. **Clerk:** Rev. George Ball.

Mount Druitt: By the grace of God, the work in Mount Druitt congregation (Sydney West) has continued for another year. Although disrupted for several months, services were available via telephone link from the beginning of April 2020, and this facility has continued since we began to meet again in June. Special thanks to Rev. Robin Tso for setting this arrangement in place. Many of the Tongan members began to listen to on-line services in their own mother language.

Most of the people have returned to regular worship services, with the congregation split between the church building and hall because of the recommended four-square metre spacing. Our minister continues to provide expositions morning and evening from the Old and New Testaments, being on Exodus and I Corinthians at present. These sermons and monthly messages are available on-line at our new website – www.pceasydneywest.org.au

The Friday afternoon youth activities did not operate during 2020, but the Sunday School operated for the whole year, with parents supervising lessons at home from March to June. Learning the books of the Bible and Scripture memory (Proverbs 3:1-13) was achieved by some students, and learning the Shorter Catechism was encouraged by our minister during the children's segment of the morning service. One nursing home service held on Friday mornings by our minister continued by Zoom during the lockout, but visitation/ services to others were curtailed for much of the year. A lunchtime Bible study and prayer meeting on Fridays at Mount Druitt was held as usual throughout the year by office-bearers, followed by checking of the property, maintenance and visitation (outdoors on verandas). One of our local men has kindly maintained the grounds and was also received into membership during this time.

The Manning: 2020 was a challenging year with the Covid 19 restrictions. Public worship services and midweek activities were curtailed for a time. While we couldn't meet publicly the services were broadcast via telephone link. Since we have been able to meet physically, we have installed an on-line video facility to record and broadcast the services. We were able to hold Communion services while still observing Covid 19 restrictions.

The elders meet monthly - and together with the pastor - share the congregational oversight. There are presently 41 members and a number of adherents, with an average total attendance of about 48 persons for both services on the Lord's Day. A few have left, but others have joined. A few of our aged members in aged care homes were unable to attend services because of the Covid 19 restrictions.

We recognize that our numbers are in gradual decline and feel the need for younger people and families to find a spiritual home among us. How we need the blessing of God! We're thankful for the good spirit of fellowship that exists among us. We continue to support Scripture teaching in our local Primary and High Schools. The Ladies Missionary Society have been active and generous in their support of a number of worthy missionary activities.

The Hunter: Due to the covid-19 restrictions Lord's Day worship services were conducted for an extended period via video link. Once restrictions were relaxed and physical attendance permitted, worship services resumed as usual at Raymond Terrace (am) and Cardiff (am & pm). Rev Tso preached through the Gospel of Matthew and 2 Kings in the mornings, followed by the Ten Commandments in the evenings. Our sick, aged and other interested persons accessed the Lord's Day worship services in increased numbers. A combined count of audio and video listeners/viewers was about 3,700 in 2020 compared to 1500 in 2019. Some of the persons accessed services from interstate, the United Kingdom and North America. We are thankful for Rev Tso's faithful and challenging ministry. Combined Raymond Terrace-Newcastle area prayer meetings/Bible studies were conducted mid-week via video link. Rev Tso led helpful studies from Habakkuk, Romans 1-5, Colossians, and the life of John Knox.

Prayer for spiritual maturity, local and world mission and our sister PCEA congregations have been priorities. Ladies Bible studies were suspended due to the covid-19 restrictions.

Rev Tso conducted the baptism of Phoebe Oringo, infant daughter of Alfred and Amy Oringo.

The conduct of the Cardiff All Age Sunday School was also significantly limited. When restrictions were relaxed the infants and junior primary groups resumed in the afternoon prior to worship.

Limited young people/young adults fellowship was conducted by the Minister and his wife in their home. We are grateful to the Lord for their hospitality.

New members included: Dr Henry Fang, Mrs Tosia, and Mr. Brendan Cribbin. Membership increased to 49 persons in 2020 (47 in 2018). Typical Lord's Day attendance remained static at an average of 65 during both 2019 and 2020.

Local mission activities generally were impeded by the pandemic restrictions. Some 140 Samaritan's Purse boxes of donated gifts were collected at Raymond Terrace which operated as a collection centre for the area. Mission presentations including the Creation Ministries International and Mission to the Samburu (Mr Michael Alley) provided helpful insight into the challenges and blessings of such endeavours.

The preaching by visitors Rev. George Ball, Rev. John Forbes and Rev. Don Burgess was appreciated.

New Office-Bearers: Three new deacons were ordained and inducted - Mr David Barnes, Mr Ken George and Dr John Fluit. Members of Session and Deacons' Court shared responsibility in maintaining contact with the congregation. The valuable contribution of Mr Alex Steel (Assessor Elder) in the work of Session and Deacons' Court is gratefully acknowledged.

We gratefully acknowledge our almighty, sovereign God, who has graciously blessed and kept us throughout 2020. 'Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all you who hope in the LORD' (Psalm 31:24).

St. George's: We thankfully acknowledge that our gracious Heavenly Father has enabled us to continue to represent His cause in the CBD of Sydney. Because of the Covid 19 restrictions we were unable to meet physically during April to June 2020. The services however were broadcast via the telephone link and website. In July we were able to resume physical meetings again. The congregation meets three times per week: Lord's Day 10.30 am and 6 pm, and the midweek gathering on Wednesday at 7 pm. No Bible class or Sabbath school, or psalmody practices were held. Many of our members travel a distance - and visitors travel from near and far. The website has played an important function in attracting visitors. Many of our minister's sermons are being listened to, downloaded, and appreciated. Since returning to public worship attendance on the Lord's Day morning has been between 30-35, and in the evening 20-21. Attendance at the midweek service is between 16-18. Some of the aged and infirmed are no longer able to attend. There are four children attending with their parents. Repairs and restoration work to the steeple are progressing. The congregation continues in good spirits generally. We are thankful to God for His grace in providing for us the means whereby we can gather together for public worship.

SOUTHERN PRESBYTERY

Here are the Reports submitted to Southern Presbytery on 6 March 2021. Rowland Ward, Clerk

All Nations

The year 2019 had been difficult for a variety of reasons as stated in our last report, but 2020 started off very well with good attendances and giving reflecting, it seems, the teaching given on stewardship. However, the impact of CoVid-19 from 22 February 2020 meant we could not meet physically from 29 March to 22 November (35 weeks). Only for the last five Lord's Days of 2020 were we able to meet physically and then with the 2m2 rule which limited numbers in the church to about 60. Activities planned to address issues of family relationship, financial literacy, suicide prevention etc. in the community had to be abandoned. Many of our people were in jobs that were impacted, while the situation in South Sudan is still bad. December marked a tentative recovery, but with uncertainty as to how things will progress, such as the 5 day lockdown in February and the requirement of masks indoors.

When in lockdown we discontinued the smaller morning service (resuming when we came out of lockdown), but maintained the 2.30pm service by livestream. During this difficult time the church benefited from the '*Digital Enhancement for Faith Communities*' programme provided by the Victoria Multicultural Commission. With the recognition of our strategic role in the African community we were encouraged to apply for a grant and did so, also assisting more than a dozen other small African churches with their needs as well as purchasing equipment for ourselves. Our livestream service has reached a very wide audience here and overseas as far as Finland, with sometimes over 1,000 listening in. The extension and upgrading of the building was delayed by State Government budget issues and Co-vid 19, but a year later than expected the already permit-approved proposal is now before the Minister for final approval of the grant that will make it possible.

As much as I teach the principles of Christian ethics in giving, only a portion of the congregation's faithful members have recognised the importance of growing strong spiritually in their Christian life through difficulties and experiences during the closing of the year. Ordinary offerings were \$44,052 – about \$15,000-\$20,000 less than we had hoped. However, we did not need so much assistance from Knox as the congregation was eligible for JobKeeper and hence was able to meet all financial obligations with a useful amount to meet liabilities in 2021. When we were able to resume physical meetings in November there was an enormous amount of visiting necessary, and our Pastoral Care ladies also made an excellent contribution. There were no baptisms during the year. The Lord's Supper was observed twice and the Session met in a formal way only twice. Safe Church requirements are carefully monitored. The number of attendees has not returned to the usual number yet due to the concern in the community. Given many listen in to the livestream we have left the statistics unchanged from 2019 until a return to greater normality re Covid-19 issues.

Carrum Downs

Mr Hall officially commenced duties on 15 February 2020, just a few weeks prior to lockdown so with a newish work and restrictions it was a difficult period but he was able to work in with Knox for mutual benefit via livestream and lead a midweek with folk from Knox and Carrum Downs attending via Zoom. Knox had budgeted \$40,000 towards support and this was duly received. Session, which also acts as Deacons' Court met three times in 2020. Mr Hall's report is as follows:

On 29th November 2020 the Carrum Downs congregation resumed in person public worship subject to ongoing state government restrictions. The congregation has readily accommodated itself to the ongoing restrictions and as restrictions have slowly eased, people have appreciated the return to a more normal worship service. Attendance at the services are in line with pre-covid restriction numbers, although a number of folks are irregular in their attendance and we are much in prayer for them. Our morning service averages 15-17 attendees and our afternoon service which was begun on 29th November has a very regular attendance of 11-12 people. Overall we have 22 people who attend at least one service per month. We have been encouraged by a new regular attender in our afternoon service.

As well as adding a second service on the Lord's Day, we have launched a Facebook page for Carrum Downs

and our services are live streamed to that page. The page has attracted a steadily growing number of followers both here in Australia and overseas. A man in the United States regularly watches and comments favourably on the morning service.

On 21 February 2021 a Sunday school was begun with two classes. Presently one family is committed to attending the school. Efforts are being made to encourage other families. Regular outreach goes on week by week. In January & February this has mainly taken the form of letterboxing invitations in the Carrum Downs area.

Geelong

Session reports – By the grace of God, the Geelong congregation has been upheld through a particularly difficult year in 2020. The 10:00 am worship services have continued every Sunday, where permitted by COVID-19 restrictions, through the provision of supply by Reformed Theological College students, local ministers, lay preachers, and our Interim Moderator, Rev Andres Miranda. Our small numbers, typically 10,

have allowed us to meet for worship when larger congregations were not permitted to gather. We have had access to recorded and live-streamed services from many congregations throughout Victoria, New South Wales, and Queensland, which would not have been possible under different circumstances. However, not all of our elderly members had the technology or skills to benefit from these services. Our commitment to one another and a strong desire for corporate worship and fellowship has grown out of these challenging times.

The final decision of Presbytery to remove an Elder from his position, after much prayer, many meetings, and careful consideration of God's Word, was difficult for everyone. However, the conviction that God is sovereign in all situations has helped us to continue to love and serve Him, and to support each other through this time. Your continued prayers for the unity of the congregation would be much appreciated.

This year has also seen two dearly loved and long-term members of the congregation go to be with the Lord. Mrs Gwen Mackenzie, who had been a member in Geelong since 1970, and at St Georges before that, passed in January. Mr Bruce Webster, who was a member in Geelong since 1955, Elder, Session clerk, and a member of Presbytery and Synod for many years, passed in July. Their many years of faithful service is an example and encouragement for us all to persevere.

Despite our small numbers, the congregation has generously supported the work of the local church and various mission works, including a child in Uganda through Compassion. God has also graciously provided for the church through the lease of the manse, with the prospect of this continuing uninterrupted for the next 4 years. We give thanks to our Lord and Saviour for his blessings and protection throughout 2020 and pray that he will enable us to remain faithful to Him in the year ahead.

Knox

Session reports -We had the privilege of serving our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in the local congregation of his church in Knox during 2020 – a year of significant change with the impact of Covid-19 - but one that again reminded us of God's faithfulness in sustaining us through challenging circumstances.

It is hard to begin elsewhere but in the impact of the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions on the life of our congregation. Up to 15th March we held our regular church services and activities, being supplied with visiting preachers and the preaching of our interim moderator Rev Dr Rowland Ward. On 22nd March we held in-person services at Knox with limited numbers of people and social distancing but then were unable to do so again until the resumption of the morning service on 28th Nov again with limited numbers and social distancing in effect. As we moved into December, the restrictions reduced. The impact also meant we also only observed the Lord's Supper twice during the year rather than the usual four times.

During the approximately 8 months of lockdown from 29th March to 22nd Nov, we moved to having online services each Lord's Day which were live-streamed from the church building and made available on our website. Our Interim Moderator preached 46 times at Knox in 2020 as it was difficult to secure other pulpit supply during the Covid crisis. We supported the ministry of the Rev Ian Hall at Carrum Downs who arrived mid-February and were grateful for Mr Hall's assistance in providing a livestream afternoon service for much of the year.

We adjusted to the new situation by gradually introducing some meetings via Zoom – chiefly a 1 hour Zoom fellowship time for all congregants held after the morning service, but also Sunday School before the service, our Wednesday evening Bible study and prayer time, and the Young Men's Fellowship on Sunday evenings. Though the lockdown presented many challenges, yet all these meetings were well attended and, in many ways, we got to know each other better than we had previously. The bond of fellowship we have in Jesus was evident and we thank him for preserving and even growing us by his Spirit during this time.

Offerings at Knox rose 8.7% compared to the previous year. The Deacon's Court met 4 times during 2020. Missionary support to Dumisani was again given via Synod. We continued our sponsorship of girls through Mukti. We were not able to do the Samaritan's Purse programme because of Covid's impact in Victoria on it. We also supported Reformed Translation Fellowship and MERF together with All Nations, which needed much less support than previously. We also contributed non-perishable food to the local Knox Community Christmas support program.

The communion roll is 29. We welcomed the wife of one of our members into membership. The typical attendance of different persons each Lord's Day has remained the same at 43, even through the extended period of online services. The Session met 9 times in 2020 and that we were able to hold a physical Annual Congregational Meeting on 4 July before lockdown in Melbourne commenced. Elders' visits were carried out during the year, and these were replaced with calls during lockdown and hard copies of the magazine in a number of cases. The weekly publication of the Knox News sets out our regular activities but also is used to inform members of the challenges we face in this day and age.

Narre Warren

Pastoral

Narre Warren, like all Christian churches in Victoria, have faced enormous challenges during the global outbreak of the virus. None of us was prepared for a situation like this and the uncertainty of the future has forced us to carry out pastoral responsibilities outside of the conditions to which we were used. God, however, has not allowed all this to have a negative impact on the church. During this crisis we have had the opportunity to strengthen our confidence in God, we have deepened the bonds of Christian fellowship, we have grown in the ministry of love, and the hunger for the Word has been richly blessed with a spiritual stability that has not

been affected with the ups and downs of our current health crisis. Although emergency lockdowns have stretched the emotional stamina of many and have also produced mental exhaustion, especially in some of the elderly members of the church, the elders of our local congregation have carried out their pastoral duties with diligence, love and perseverance to create encouragement, patience and even joy in the midst of our trials.

We also thank God that church neighbours have shown an interest in learning more about the church and in attending our worship services in the future. The Narre Warren church leaders continue to pray for the situation in Victoria so that we can soon have the joy of public worship without the risk of contamination, to resume Bible studies in homes, and to anticipate a future without uncertainty.

Ulverstone

The Ulverstone congregation gives thanks for the many blessings received from God. These are evident in being able to gather each Lord's Day at the regular 10:30 AM worship service and all the other ministries that take place on either the Lord's Day or during the week. We have received service supply over the last year from a number of men both local and visiting. Many of those visiting come from Launceston or Hobart, with our Interim Moderator Rev Andres Miranda travelling from Victoria when he can. The impact of the virus pandemic was felt by way of lockdown between late March and the end of June. During this period we held online Zoom services with RPCNA student Mr Zach Dotson leading us. He and his wife Wilma and son Archie were able to visit the congregation just before lockdown. We are currently exploring a ministry interest with Zach.

The congregation is blessed with a healthy mix of ages and a number of young families. Our oldest member, Mrs Jean Hearps is now 98 and in nursing home care. She continues to inspire us all with her cheerfulness and witness to Christ.

The congregation has been active in Christian ethics with a number involved in communicating messages of importance to our law makers on issues such as euthanasia and gender conversion. Our mission's interest continues with weekly publishing of the prayer notes, prayer time at our midweek meeting, child sponsorships and the work of the women's missionary union. The fellowship continues to be active with events such as the winter car rally, bonfire nights and overnight camps.

We are also blessed with good interchurch relations within the state and regularly receive visitors from other churches. We are now approaching four years of our current vacancy and have been praying for the Lord's answer to this need. Our concern is for faithfulness to the service of Christ amidst the many challenges facing us as individuals and as a church, and for a true and active witness to a needy world.

CHURCH AND NATION AND MEDIA REPORT

Members: G.D. Ball (Convener), D.K. Muldoon, J. Klazinga (Banner), D. Kerridge (Website), T.W. Yoa.

One of the most overused words this past year has been 'unprecedented'. We've seen international borders closed and travel halted; interstate borders closed; states in lockdown; travellers quarantined; businesses closed; schools closed; churches closed; aged-care homes in lockdown - all as a result of Covid 19. It's been a difficult year. Unprecedented! While Australia has escaped the worst effects of the pandemic, the full impact, in terms of economics, social and family, have yet to be revealed. The full impact on our congregations is also yet to be revealed.

We've also been introduced to many new words and phrases that are now in common use e.g., 'the woke culture', 'the cancel culture', 'gender fluidity', 'transgenderism', etc. When we begin to investigate their meaning, we begin to understand where we are as a society. Superficially being 'woke' sounds good. It involves being aware and attentive to important issues such as race and social justice. However, the underlying philosophy of 'wokeness' is profoundly anti-Christian. It's just the latest expression of rebellion against God's created order. It's another gospel (Gal. 1: 6-9). The Bible teaches that every human being is made in the image of God (Gen. 9:6); that everyone is descended from Adam and Eve (Acts 17:26 and Romans 5:12); that everyone irrespective of the colour of skin is deserving of honour and should be treated with dignity and

respect. The Bible teaches that God made man binary - male and female (Gen. 2: 21-24). Both are equal before God, yet both are obviously different - designed for different roles and functions (1 Cor. 11:3 and 1 Tim. 2: 11-15). The 'woke culture' (and BLM - Black Lives Matter) deny this fundamental teaching. They deny the image of God in man. They deny the inherent equality of the races. Black is deemed superior - the white man is the problem. They deny the different roles of male and female.

When we get into the area of gender fluidity, gender identity, and transgenderism it's obviously easier to see how this departs from Biblical teaching. But how did we get to this point? Carl Trueman in his book, *'The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self'* helps us to see that the moral collapse hasn't been overnight, but is the result of the writings of atheistic philosophers over the past couple of centuries e.g., Rousseau, Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud. As a result, we now define ourselves - not by objective external markers - such as male or female - or by family and occupation - or by race or colour - but by one's internal feelings. To paraphrase Descartes, 'I feel, therefore I am'. We are now defined by what we feel. Trueman states, 'The ability to act outwardly as one feels inwardly - even to the point of having fluid gender - captures where we are as a culture'. Man's chief end is now to fulfil his internal desires - especially his sexual desires - which is how Freud identified the essence of being human. This helps explain the current emphasis on inner feelings and sexuality.

Some of us who are older wonder how this sexual revolution could have happened so quickly. The answer is probably found in social media. The message via You-tube and Instagram spreads instantly like a virus around the world. Every teenager now has his or her iPhone or smartphone and is tuned in to the world's philosophy and the god of this world.

This has obvious challenges for us who seek to communicate the message of the Gospel in a relevant manner. Words are our vehicle of communication. But as Humpty-Dumpty famously said, 'When I use a word it means just what I choose it to mean'. In our post-modern world there is now no objective truth. There is 'your truth' and 'my truth'. Concepts such as love and freedom, redemption and salvation, and equality can be redefined to mean almost anything. It should however convince us that the world's greatest need is to know the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life; the One never changes; and Who is still as true today as He was 2,000 years ago.

Our message however puts us on a collision course with the world. It is even deemed to be downright morally offensive. To maintain Christian teaching on (say) sex and marriage is to engage in speech that is considered hateful and damaging to self-identity - and therefore to society in general. Christianity is now perceived as one of the greatest threats to the common good, which must therefore be silenced or 'cancelled'.

One of the great disappointments during the year was the passing in Victoria of the, '**Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020**'. This Bill criminalises conversation and/or prayer by any person directed towards any second person on the basis of the second person's sexual orientation (or gender identity) where the conduct is intended to 'suppress or change' the second person's sexual orientation (or gender identity) or induce the second person to suppress or change their sexual orientation (or gender identity), even if the conduct was sought and consented to by the person, and even if that person considered the conduct beneficial (*Clause 5:1*). The Bill drives a wedge between the sacred relationship of children and parents; children and relatives; children and friends. It also effectively muzzles the Pastor, the Principal, the Teacher, the Elder, and the church member from providing advice, instruction, or prayer to people in relation to sexual orientation or gender confusion, even when such help is sought. If they do, they will be deemed guilty of an illegal act, and subject to criminal prosecution.

In the final vote, just seven Victorian politicians had the courage to vote against the Bill. Bev McArthur was one of just two Liberals who voted against it. In her speech, she said in part, 'I cannot, in good conscience, vote for the Change and Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020. This isn't about electric shocks; this is about free individuals seeking advice on deeply personal matters that have irreversible and life-changing consequences. Governments need to get out of our bedrooms, churches, kindergartens and stop telling us what conversations we can and can't have, what advice we can and can't give to our children and allow individuals to live their own lives free of political intrusion.' While we may not have used the same phrases in our criticism, nevertheless we commend those members who courageously opposed this Bill. The Victorian Government has made it clear that the underlying problem is the Christian view of sexuality. The Government's LGBTIQ Commissioner explained, 'The proposed law is quite clear in countering any teaching that says that homosexual sex is wrong.' The passing of this Bill (though not implemented until next year) will have major implications for religious freedom - not only in Victoria - but across the country. We'd like to thank those, especially the Victorian members, who wrote to their State MP and the Victorian Government in protest of this Bill.

Another of the recent disappointments is the passing of **The Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill** in the Tasmanian Lower House. It's expected that Tasmania will be the third state to legalise euthanasia after Victoria and WA.

Queensland is hot on Tasmania's heels, with the ALP pushing for a short implementation timeframe for their proposed assisted suicide laws. Let's be clear: God's Word commands us not to take the life of another human being as they are made in the image of God (Exodus 20:13, Genesis 9:6-7). Euthanasia laws enable people to actively and intentionally kill the elderly and the terminally ill.

THE HUMAN RIGHTS (CHILDREN BORN ALIVE PROTECTION) BILL 2021

We commend George Christensen MP (Lib/Nat QLD) for sponsoring this Bill designed to save the life of a baby born alive as a result of an abortion. It requires medical practitioners to take action to save the child's life. If they do not, they will face significant financial penalties and probable deregistration as a medical practitioner. Between 2005 -2015, 204 babies were born alive as a result of abortion in QLD. It seems none were provided with life-saving medical care. In 2016 in Victoria, 33 out of the 310 babies aborted after 20 weeks were born alive.

Proposed Deliverances: -

1. Synod prays for the spiritual well-being of our nation that men and women will seek the Lord while He may be found and call upon Him while He is near (Isa. 55:6).
2. Synod urges members to pray for the reformation and revival of the church and nation. The principle stated in 2 Chron. 7: 14 is 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'.
3. Synod affirms the Bible's teaching that every human being is made in the image of God (Gen. 9:6); that everyone is descended from Adam and Eve (Acts 17:26 and Romans 5:12); that everyone irrespective of the colour of skin is deserving of honour and should be treated with dignity and respect.
4. Synod regrets the passing in Victoria of the, '**Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020**'. Synod recognises that the passing of this Bill will have significant effects on religious freedom. Synod affirms that the Bible is a book about transformation, about how God can set people free and make them into new persons with new desires (2 Cor. 5:17). Synod recognises that because Christians are often at the forefront of offering help in this area they should therefore be prepared to suffer for their faith (1 Peter 2: 20-21).
5. Synod records its sorrow at the eagerness of States to legalise euthanasia. Synod affirms that God's Word commands us not to take our own lives, or the life of another human being, as we are made in the image of God (Exodus 20:13, Genesis 9:6).
6. Synod awaits with some apprehension the release of the Religious Discrimination Bill. Synod reminds rulers of their responsibility, 'to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good' (1 Peter 2:14).

7. Synod records its thanks to the editor of the Presbyterian Banner, Rev. Jim Klazinga, for producing an attractive and informative magazine, and resolves to pray for him in his ongoing work and for the witness of the magazine.
8. Synod records its thanks to Rev. David Kerridge for his oversight of the website during another year.
9. Synod records its appreciation to Rev. Jim Klazinga for encouraging members to pray by sending daily prayer texts.

PRESBYTERIAN BANNER REPORT

Subscriptions:

For 2021, there are 103 paid subscriptions, and 15 mailed out at no charge, making for a total of 118 subscriptions. This is an increase of 13 over 2020.

Congregations that are featured in the cover photos are sent an extra four copies. Currently, 130 copies are printed each month.

12 congregations now have bulk subscriptions. For 2021, one congregation added a new bulk subscription, three congregations increased their subscription, and no congregation decreased their subscription.

Currently, a pdf copy of the magazine is sent to 162 email addresses. Pdf copies of each issue are also available on the PCEA website.

Banner Finances:

Bank account balance inherited by the new editor - \$3326.13

Income:

- Seven Anonymous Donations totalling \$1210.00
- Subscription Payments - \$1905.00
- Bank Interest - \$1.50

Expenses:

- Printing & Mailing Costs – \$2121.26
- Bank Fees - \$0.70

Balance as of 12 March - \$4320.67

2021 Subscription fees owing as of 12 March - \$1230

Estimated Costs for rest of year - \$2727

Estimated Balance at the end of 2021 - \$2825

While the estimated costs per issue (based on expenses to this point) are about \$18 higher than income brought in by 2021 subscriptions (assuming everyone pays up), anonymous contributions have more than made up for

this deficit. Therefore, there was no need to increase subscription costs for 2021, and, even without further anonymous donations, I don't anticipate needing to increase subscription costs in 2022.

Deliverances:

- 1) Synod continues to endorse the Presbyterian Banner as the official magazine of the PCEA, and encourages members and adherents to read it and contribute material to it.
- 2) Synod expresses thankfulness for the assistance of the Presbyterian Banner liaisons from each of the congregations and encourages them to continue in this work.
- 3) Synod supports the continuation of printing and mailing paper copies of the magazine, along with continuing to make pdf copies of the magazine available.

WEBSITE REPORT

Marshall McLuhan said once in the days of the rise of the television “The medium is the message”. His argument was that the medium of transmission of ideas (then radio and TV, now internet) was far more important than the content (normally the “message” that the medium carried). That has proved to be prophetic as, these days, our vivacious appearance on Facebook is far more important than any of the meaningless posts we put up. The number of followers a person has on Twitter is too often in inverse proportion to the sensible things they say. Virtue signalling by #illconcievedopinions has replaced reasoned argument and the calm presentation of ideas for perusal and constructive comment. No one wants to read a blog post longer than 500 words or they lose interest, but they will surf the internet for hours skipping from one idea or factoid to another, absorbing and recalling none. Marshall McLuhan saw TV as eroding the intellect of people in his day. It is evident in our time, and the internet is the medium of a change to our whole perception of reality. The medium is now the message. We seem to have devolved into a society in which a riot breaks out over toilet paper because social media tells us to panic. People commit suicide over a trollish Tweet. In more recent times, and perhaps more troubling, social media giants have sought to curtail free speech and even delimit government by blockade or threat. Most recently in Australia, Facebook is a proven case in point in denying Australian news feeds through their services. Our sources of information curated, curtailed and redirected, we risk becoming drones spouting the latest corporate doublespeak, diverted from reality.

Notwithstanding all this intended challenge to our understanding, we remain on the internet in the hope that God’s Truth may be presented there and our church represented to a world lost in the medium of the internet, blind to the greatest message.

Our website is still proving useful and is used regularly (as statistics and download records below show), but it may be that other ways of delivering content may be the way to proceed in future. I believe that it is more important than ever to still present not just basic information on our site but have regular articles, more in-depth information combined with shorter newsy blog posts.

The table below shows trends over the last few years in visitors to the site:

	U n i q u e Visitors	N u m b e r o f Visits	Pages	Hits	Bandwidth
2016	14,921	27,320 (1.83/ visitor)	477,158 (17.46 pages/ Visit)	741,281	28.61 GB (1097.97 KB/ visit)
2017	22,625	45,780 (2.02 visits/visitor)	6 4 0 , 4 6 1 (13.98 pages/ visit)	987,776	3 6 . 6 3 G B (838.99 KB/ visit)

2018	19,865	36,277 (1.82 visits/visitor)	212,890 (5.86 Pages/visit)	526,581	29.29 GB (846.76 KB/Visit)
2019	11,276	26,089 (2.31 visits/visitor)	194,021 (7.43 Pages/Visit)	347,683	14.18 GB (569.88 KB/Visit)
2020	26,215	49,581 (1.89 visits/visitor)	197,679 (3.99 Pages/Visit)	498,951	14.72 GB (296.88 KB/Visit)

This year there has been an upturn in visits from 2019 levels, the lowest in six years. The number of visits per visitor has remained steady. Those who do come, come back: 74.8% of hits on the site are from people entering the full address of the site, using a bookmarked link or linking from emails – i.e. people who know about us or have been to the site before; 8.9% of hits are from people using search engines such as Google; 15.6% of people have found us from a link on another site (eg. 26 hits from St George’s congregational website, 18 people found us from a link to us on the Southern Presbyterian Church website). As always, most attention from visitors is paid to the Congregations, Downloads (mostly *Banner* and archives), and News and Views pages.

Operating on a separate and secured website, the MDSS (Missions Donations and Sponsorship Scheme) is now in its fifth year of operation on the web. The back-end administration of the scheme was put on a separate cloud-based database at the beginning of 2019 which allowed our Indian brothers to access and change student details there and keep an eye on who is sponsored. Real-time communication such as this is better than irregular reports where we have to wait to know if a student has left the school or a sponsor is no longer available. However, as there has been a major upset in enrolments and attendance at the school in 2020 due to COVID, the scheme is being reviewed by the Missions Committee and may continue in a different format.

We encourage people to login to the Community area of the site and utilize the extra resources available there. The Community pages exist to discuss church matters, fellowship and encourage one another online.

The draft Training of Ministry Committee’s Elder’s Course continues from last year to have a presence on the website under the “Elders” Menu at a subdomain <http://elders.pcea.org.au/> (It is editable as a Wiki by members of the Training of Ministry Committee and authorised persons, a facility that will be useful for continued development of the course into future editions). The component to run the wiki has had to be updated as the original wiki component caused problems with our change to a secured site this year (HTTPS). The wiki software now being used is Mediawiki – the same platform used by Wikipedia. This sub-domain is in need of collaborative effort to develop a useful resource for Elders and prospective office-bearers in the church, as well as being a resource for the wider Reformed church, in line with the remit to Training of Ministry Committee.

The Historical Magazine Archive averages about 350 downloads per publication (*The Free Church Quarterly Vol. 7 1909-1913* is still the most downloaded, grossing 881 downloads since it was uploaded 8/4/14).

All office-bearers have access to the site, and the webmaster can offer support for those who would like to contribute regularly. We again appeal for content from congregations. A website reflects the interests and enthusiasm of those it represents. Please be represented through the website, not just with contact details for your congregation, but with “likes” for articles, messages to each other, and interaction using the social media portion of the site. To be a truly useful gateway and introduction to the denomination we need your help.

Thanks to Rev. Robin Tso, electronic meetings for pro re nata Synods were able to be conducted in 2020. Last year’s enforced lockdowns gave many of us a crash course in new technologies and ways of communicating and working. Reflecting on this, in discussion with Rev. Tso, in 2020 we trialed a new Intranet system for office-bearers based on Microsoft 365. This intranet will allow us to meet as Committees (and Presbyteries) using Microsoft Teams; to have a common repository for documents (particularly Minutes and Reports, Decision Books etc) for our Synod and various Committees on SharePoint; and to have an email system through Teams and Outlook online that no longer allows miscommunications, lost emails and such. Work can be done and shared in real time on Microsoft 365 (formerly Office 365) suite online using Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, etc. Such an ability would be invaluable for collaboration on Committee reports, for instance.

Leveraging not-for profit status has also given us discounts on licenses for Microsoft software for personal use, as well as free, or near free online suite of Microsoft products for all the denomination. The draft hub of

this can be accessed at <https://pceanorthern.sharepoint.com>. While some members of Synod have already been involved in trials, all members have already been set up with Microsoft 365 accounts and email addresses in the format - initialsurname@pcea.org.au. All that is needed is the authorisation of Synod to use the system.

Proposed Deliverances

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.
2. That the rollout of PCEA Intranet and Microsoft 365 online workplace be authorized for all Synod members and the offer extended to Presbyteries.

PSALMODY COMMITTEE

Committee Mandate and Membership: At synod 2019, the following motion (19.50) was passed: “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.”

Efforts were made in 2019 to add representatives from each congregation to the committee, with some limited success. It is the opinion of the current committee convenor that the committee structure as delineated in the 2019 motion is not ideal. Having too many members can make the committee unwieldy. At the same time, it would be good to have representatives from all the congregations aware of and involved in the important work that this committee will end up doing. Therefore, it is suggested that the committee consist of five full members appointed by synod, with sessions of the congregations not represented on the committee appointing one liaison each to the committee. These liaisons will receive committee correspondence, be made aware of committee activity, and, at the convenor’s discretion, be invited to contribute to committee discussions (see deliverance 3).

Psalmody Survey:

An online psalmody survey was distributed among the congregations in January 2020.

The survey was taken by 41 people, with a variety of respondents, including office-bearers, precentors, and other members of the congregations. Members from 10 congregations participated, with the number of respondents ranging from 1 to 10 per congregation. 19 of the respondents were from the Northern Presbytery, 16 from the Southern Presbytery, and 6 were from the Central Presbytery.

From the introduction: “The following survey is intended to give the PCEA Psalmody Committee and synod some basic information on the current state of psalmody within our denomination. This should help synod to reflect on what some of the needs are when it comes to the practice of exclusive psalmody within our denomination, and what the role of the PCEA Psalmody Committee should be moving forward.”

It should be noted that the intent of this survey was simply to acquire helpful information, not to determine policy. For instance, should the survey have revealed a lack of enthusiasm for psalmody, this would not have meant that we need to rethink exclusive psalmody. But it would have impacted the direction the committee would need to take in solving such a problem.

Thankfully, though, the survey did not reveal this problem. While this may not have been a scientific survey precisely describing the opinions on psalmody in the denomination as a whole, it did reveal, at least among the respondents, a strong commitment to praising the Lord in the singing of the psalms.

Respondents were asked to answer the following questions on a scale of 1 to 10:

- How important is it to you that the PCEA practises exclusive psalmody? Average response: 9.5
- In your estimation, how important is it to the people in your congregation that the PCEA practises exclusive psalmody? Average response: 8.6

- How much understanding would you say that you have as to why the PCEA practises exclusive psalmody? Average response: 9.3
- How much understanding would you say that the people in your congregation have as to why the PCEA practises exclusive psalmody? Average response: 7.5
- How would you rate the participation, enthusiasm, and quality of singing in your congregation? Average response: 8.6

A number of questions were asked regarding the matter of a common psalter.

- Should synod adopt only one psalter to be used in all PCEA congregations? 44% answered ‘Yes’, 32% answered ‘No’, and 24% were not sure.
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how much interest would you say there is in your congregation in having synod adopt one psalter to be used in all PCEA congregations? Average response: 5.2
- If we were to adopt a common psalter for use in all the congregations, which of the following options would be most preferable? 70% answered, “We should adopt one of the psalters currently being used in the PCEA.” 27.5% answered, “We should compile and publish our own new psalter,” while one person answered, “We should adopt a different psalter currently being used elsewhere.”
- If synod were to adopt one of the psalters currently being used in the PCEA for use in all the congregations, which one should it be? 60% answered: The Combined Sing Psalms and Old Scottish Psalter; 20% answered: Sing Psalms; 7.5% answered: The Complete Book of Psalms for Singing, and 5% answered: The Old Scottish Psalter. 7.5% gave other answers.

The question was also asked, “Given what you believe is needed in your congregation, which of the following tasks should the PCEA Psalmody committee focus on (Some of these tasks are closely connected with each other. Please pick as many options as you deem appropriate).”

The following are the more popular options, along with the percentage of respondents who picked those options:

- 78% - Helping PCEA members understand the biblical rationales for exclusive psalmody.
- 73% - Helping congregations appreciate the beauty of the psalms.
- 71% - Helping congregations learn new tunes.
- 68% - Helping congregations learn more about the psalms.
- 66% - Helping PCEA members respond to arguments made against exclusive psalmody.
- 61% - Encouraging and assisting congregations in practising psalm singing.
- 59% - Helping congregations train new precentors.
- 56% - Organizing PCEA psalmody conferences.
- 54% - Educating the congregations in the history of psalm singing.
- 49% - Helping current precentors improve their understanding and skills.

Proposed Deliverances

1. Synod gives thanks for the high level of enthusiasm for exclusive psalmody among many in our churches.
2. Synod encourages the sessions, working with their precentors, to consider what they can do to continuously improve the singing of the psalms in their congregations.
3. Synod resolves that the psalmody committee structure be altered, so that it is made up of five full members. Sessions of all the congregations not represented on the committee will appoint a liaison to the committee. Should a session not appoint a liaison, the minister / interim moderator will be the default liaison.
4. Synod instructs the psalmody committee to discuss whether a single common psalter is needed in our denomination, and to make recommendations on this matter to Synod 2022.

SUPERANNUATION COMMITTEE

R Tso (Convener 2016), Messrs GD Ball, D Ramsay, AH Steel

A: SUPERANNUATION

1. Church Contributions to Superannuation

1.1 Superannuation Levy on congregations (current rates – percentage of Minimum Stipend)

- Self-supporting congregations: 16%
- Aid-receiving congregations: 9%
- Vacant congregations: 3%

1.2 Superannuation Support Fund & Superannuation Levy Account

a. **The Superannuation Support Fund (SSF) Capital Account** balance as at 31/12/19 was \$214,571. The managed funds were revalued. This was an increase of \$8,414. Balance as at 31/12/20 was \$209,515. The managed funds were revalued. This was a decrease of \$5,056.

The SSF Working Account balance as at 31/12/19 was \$24,480. There was an increase of \$9847. Balance as at 31/12/20 was \$29,696. There was an increase of \$5,216.

b. **The Superannuation Levy Account** balance as at 31/12/19 was \$20,960 after paying contributions totalling \$78,024 to ministers' nominated superannuation funds. Balance as at 31/12/20 was \$27,886 after paying contributions totalling \$86,096 to ministers' nominated superannuation funds.

2. Contributions to ministers' Superannuation accounts

2.1 Contribution Rates

- Inducted ministers (up to 70 years of age):16%
- Inducted ministers (from age 70):9.5%

3. Superannuation overview

3.1 Default Fund

All but two of our members have chosen HESTA, our default fund, for their contributions. The default for HESTA is their Core Pool Fund, which is now called Balanced Growth Fund.

3.2 Performance

The net return on HESTA Balanced Growth Fund for twelve months ending 30/6/19 was 7.25%, and the twelve months ending 30/6/20 was 0%. The historical performance as at 30/6/20 for the past 5 years was 6.27%.

B. LONG SERVICE LEAVE/ANNUAL LEAVE

We remind Synod members of the provision by Synod 2003 of an extra week of annual leave (5 weeks in all), which must be taken, or the provision of LSL at a week a year at the local level up to age 70. It is recommended that annual leave not to be accumulated beyond two years.

C. COMMITTEE'S Proposed Changes

As indicated in the 2019 report, the committee is making the following proposal of the following changes to our superannuation levy policy. As you may observe, in the past years, we have been blessed with surplus in both our SSF Working and Superannuation Levy accounts.

Superannuation Levy on congregations

- Self-supporting congregations: 15% (from 16%)
- Aid-receiving congregations: 8% (from 9%)
- Vacant congregations: 2% (from 3%)

Contribution Rates:

-Inducted ministers: 17% (additional funds required because of the reduced levy percentages will be drawn from the SSF working account quarterly)

*It is worth noting that the Government's Superannuation Guaranteed rate is to increase from 9.5% to 10%, starting from the 1/7/2021

In addition, vacant charges that are in financial difficult situations may write to the committee for exemption. The committee will liaise with the General Treasurer regarding the application.

Example:

If the proposed levy changes are approved, the actual figures are shown below:

Superannuation Levy on congregations (quarterly)

- Self-supporting congregations: 15%: \$2187 from \$2332

- Aid-receiving congregations: 8%: \$1166 from \$1312

- Vacant congregations: 2%: \$288 from \$433

Contribution Rates:

-Inducted ministers: 17%, \$2478 from \$2332

Funds drawn from The SSF Working Account will be, say 10 inducted ministers, per year: \$4956

Proposed deliverances:

1. Synod approves the committee's proposal for changes in section C above, starting from the 1/7/21.
2. 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.

FINANCE COMMITTEE

(Incorporating General Treasurer's Report)

Committee members: AH Steel (Convener), T Buck, DE Kerr, DJ Ramsay,

Business attended to by the committee included:

1. Ministers' Minimum Stipend

Level and Basis of Review of Minimum Stipend –

The basis of review was changed by Synod 2019 from the Average *Weekly Earnings, Australia (Full-time adult ordinary time earnings)* to *Wage Price Index (WPI)* as published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

After taking into account rates paid by other Presbyterian churches in NSW and Victoria, movement in the WPI, and the *Consumer Price Index (CPI)* the committee recommends the current level of the minimum stipend (\$1,118 per week - reviewed annually on 1st January) together with the present basis of review be continued.

2. Stipend Relief

Central Presbytery approved a request from Hawkesbury-Nepean Deacons' Court for Stipend relief of up to \$14,500 on a needs basis for current Synodical year (2021/2022). \$2,000 was pledged by a Deacons' Court in the Charge to offset this amount vide Handbook 3.17.d.

The Committee recommends approval of the provision strictly on the basis of need. Requests for relief to be made to the General Treasurer at the beginning of each calendar quarter supported by a budget demonstrating the need.

3. The Capital Assistance Fund

As at 31/12/20 assets totalled \$407,189 which was a net decrease of \$461,853 on 2019. The decrease resulted from the taking up of the gift of \$466,000 in January 2020 by Brisbane Congregation. Income and revaluation of investments on the remaining balance resulted in an increase in funds of \$4,147 (2.59%) to 31st December 2020.

4. General Treasurer's Report to Synod/ Estimates (Major Working Funds Receipts/Payments)

General Treasurer's Report to Synod follows the *Proposed Deliverances*.

Estimates for the major working funds to 31/12/21 – See Appendix "A"

PROPOSED DELIVERANCES

1. We record our thanks to God for temporal blessings granted especially during the time of global Pandemic restrictions during 2020.
2. Adjustment of the Minimum Stipend, Cash and Non-cash components (Excluding Manse, Car and Telephone) for 2021/2022 be made on 1st January annually in line with the movement in the *Wage Price Index* as published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. In the event of a negative movement in any review period, no adjustment be made.
3. Stipend Assistance of up to \$ 12,500 for 2021/2022 Synodical year be granted to the Hawkesbury-Nepean Deacons' Courts as follows:
 - Be strictly on a quarterly needs basis.
 - Applications be submitted to the General Treasurer on a calendar quarter basis ie commencing 1st January/April/July/October and be accompanied with a Budget for the quarter being applied for.
 - Be subject to the availability of funds.

GENERAL TREASURER

Report to Synod 2021

1. Financial Needs

All financial needs of the Synod were adequately provided for during 2020 with total funds only decreasing by \$6,841 to \$1,547,149 after allowing for \$302,312 held on behalf of others (Mission Fields, Congregation

Bequests etc.) and the gift of \$466,000 made from the Capital Assistance Fund to the Brisbane Congregation to assist in the purchase of a manse.

The net decrease in funds was minimised by the recovery in investments in equities, which, after a drop due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, returned to values at the beginning of 2020. However, income from investments and donations was down by approximately 40% mostly because of either the non payment of dividends or greatly reduced returns.

2. Synod General Working Funds

Synod General Working Funds held, as at 31/12/20 was \$34,713. This was a decrease of \$6,080 on 2019. Refer to the printed Balance Sheet and Statement of Income & Expenditure as at 31/12/20 for details.

3. Books of Account Audit

An unqualified Independent Assurance Report has been obtained from GPA Accountants, Chartered Accountants of Punchbowl NSW and is included in the published Financial Statements.

Proposed deliverances - Nil.

SYNOD FINANCE COMMITTEE Appendix "A"

BUDGET - SYNOD MAJOR WORKING FUNDS

for twelve months ending 31/12/21

as referred to in its Report to Synod

Fund	Balance	Estimated	Estimated	Estimated	Estimated	Estimated	Estimated
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	as at 31/12/2020	Income Int/Divnds to 12/21	Givings & Other	Expenditure to 12/21	Surplus (Deficit)	Credit Balance 31/12/21	Deficit Balance 31/12/21
Capital Assistance Fund	407,189	5,000	0	0	5,000	412,189	0
Church Extension	2,456	100	200	0	300	2,756	0
Stipend Relief	24,077	2,500	7,000	12,500	-3,000	21,077	0
Missions - General	24,481	12,000	1,200	17,100	-3,900	20,581	0
Miss Relief (Equities)	147,627	5,000		5,000	0	147,627	0
Miss Rel (Working Fnd)	8,434	10,000	0	10,900	-900	7,534	0
Training of Ministry	192,011	6,500	300	700	6,100	198,111	0
Youth & Fellowship	15,151	13,200	300	15,800	-2,300	12,851	0
General Funds	34,713	2,000	795,700	6,000	791,700	826,413	0

Notes:

General Funds

Estimated Givings \$1,000 Other \$794,700

A bequest of \$794,669 was received 3/3/21 from the Estate of the late Margaret I Huckett

Bequests: On 28th August 2020 the Trustees were notified through the Treasurer of a bequest from the estate of Margaret Isabel Hockett. Distribution of the estate was made on 3rd March 2021 when an amount of \$794,669.29 was deposited into Synod funds. The Trustees seek the guidance of Synod as to the use of these funds.

Glenridding Cemetery: Despite inquiry by the clerk seeking relevant information from the UCA this matter has not been further progressed.

Deed Box: The Locked Deed Box of the Trustees of the Synod of Eastern Australia is lodged with Paton Hooke, Lawyers, 25 Albert Street, Taree NSW, under the oversight of the Clerk of Synod and the Synod Treasurer (See Synod resolution 18.45.2).

The deed box was inspected by the Clerk and Rev Peter Smith on 1st March 2020 and all was found to be in order. A copy of the list of documents is available from the Clerk on request.

No Deeds lodged during 2020 No Deeds uplifted during 2020

Common Seal Applications:

8/9/20 – Deed of Mutual Release & Indemnity (St Georges Congregation)

Review of Results as at 31/12/20

Diversification

Actual as at 31/12/20		Asset Class	Investment Strategy	
Amount	Percentage		Benchmark	Range
152,869	45%	Cash (Banks)	5%	5% - 10%
0	0%	1 st Regd Mtges	30%	20% - 40%
0	0%	Debentures	15%	10% - 25%
189,175	55%	Shares/Units	50%	40% - 60%
342,044	100%		100%	

No change in the spread of investments was made during 2020.

Return:

Growth –

Total Trust Funds (Specified Capital Funds) decreased by \$2,622 (-0.76%) during 2020 against a Target of 0.90% (CPI). “Real value” (keeping up with inflation) was not therefore achieved. This resulted mainly from the effects of COVID-19 on equity investments.

When CPI is taken into account since 1998 total Capital Funds lag behind by \$140,252. (-29%) as at 31/12/20 (-27% 2019).

Income – Income of \$8,082 represented a return of 2.34% against a Target of 1.31% (2020 Average Official Cash Interest Rate of 0.31% Plus 1.00%). Income also suffered by the effects of COVID-19 by company dividends being greatly reduced or not paid.

Summary –

Diversification – To minimise risk and achieve a reasonable return in a climate of low inflation and low interest rates, investments are only held in Banks and Equities (mostly in the financial sector).

Investment Strategy Objectives –

Growth – **Not Achieved** for 2020 and **still behind** with CPI added since 1998.

Income - **Achieved** for 2020.

Proposed Deliverance:

Synod gives thanks to God for the generosity of the late Mrs Margaret Isabel Hockett and meets now to discuss the use of this bequest.

QUEENSLAND TRUST CORPORATION
'PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF EASTERN AUSTRALIA'

Members: Moderator, Clerk and Treasurer

Deed Box and Common Seal: The title deeds of the Church Property at Kalinga and a Declaration of Trust re Certificate of Title for the new Manse at 3 Padua Place are held in the Locked Deed Box of the Trustees of the Synod of Eastern Australia with the Paton Hooke, Lawyers, 25 Albert Street, Taree NSW. The Common Seal is held by the Clerk of Synod.

Deed Lodged 2020:

894080	Lot 358 Manse	3 Padua Place, Boondall Qld
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Proposed Deliverances: Nil.

THE TRUSTEES FOR VICTORIA OF THE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF EASTERN AUSTRALIA

Pursuant to Act 5691 Victoria 1953 as amended 2012

Trustees: R.S.Ward (Secretary 2013), Clerk (T.I.Leggott), Treasurer (A.H.Steel) D.J.Kerridge, S.A. Loudon

REPORT FOR SYNOD 2021 SUPPLEMENTARY TO THAT IN 2020

Financial Result: At 31/12/2020 there was a decline in share values of 5.8% but the income return for the year was 4.47% due to share investment, about 3 times what was available of term deposits during the year.

Common seal Applications: None; and no property changes in 2020.

Trustees

Dr Ward was last appointed for 5 years from 2018, but as he turned 75 in the later part of 2020 his membership ceases on 30 June 2021 unless extended by Synod. He has been a trustee from 1981-2001 and since 2013. Mr Kerridge was last appointed for 5 years in 2018 and does not expire until 30 June 2023. Mr Loudon was appointed 3 May 2017 and his initial 5 year appointment will expire on 30th June 2022. Given that the Treasurer and Secretary are changing in 2021 and there has not been opportunity to prepare a new man to replace Dr Ward, it is suggested he remain for a further 6 months and that Rev Wesley Ian Hall replace him on 1 January 2022.

Proposed Deliverance:

Synod extend the appointment of R. S. Ward by six months to 31/12/2021 and appoint Wesley Ian Hall as Trustee and Secretary for an initial period of 5 years commencing 1/1/2022 to be reviewed no later Synod 2027.