

The Synod of Eastern Australia

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS

RAYMOND TERRACE CHURCH, PCEA HUNTER CONGREGATION

155 ADELAIDE STREET, RAYMOND TERRACE

7TH TO 10TH MAY, 2024

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TIMETABLE FOR SYNOD 2024

TIME	TUESDAY 7 th MAY	TIME	WEDNESDAY 8 th MAY	THURSDAY 9 th MAY	FRIDAY 10 th 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 & Advisory Training of Ministry	Inter-Church Relations Delegates from other Churches	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 Presbytery Rolls Welcome to new members, guests, associations etc. Election of Moderator for 2024/25	2:00pm	SESSION 4 Youth and Fellowship Superannuation Finance Trust Corporations	SESSION 7 Presbytery Reports Missions	SYNOD CLOSSES 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 Moderator's Address Administration	7:00pm	SESSION 5 Church and Nation & Publications Banner Information Technology Psalmody	SESSION 8 Mission Speakers	
8:30pm	Close	8:30pm	Close	Close	

NOTE Delegates from other churches will be introduced and invited to speak as they are available online or in person.

ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

Members: Clerk (Convener); Moderator; Moderator-Elect; Presbytery Clerks

Timetable: Synod is scheduled to commence at 4:30pm on Tuesday, 7th May and conclude by Friday, 10th May, 2024. A detailed timetable is appended above.

Ministerial Movements: Rev. George Ball retired on 31st December, 2023. Rev. Ian Hall's seat on Southern Presbytery came to an end on 31st December 2023 when he concluded a term of resident supply in Carrum Downs. He continues to be available for call. Rev Tut Yoa's seat on Southern Presbytery was discontinued by Presbytery on 1st July 2023. His secession in September 2023 means that he is no longer a PCEA minister.

Expressions of Sympathy: We express our deepest sympathy to the family of the late Rev. Kenneth MacLeod. A Memorial Minute is provided below, reproduced from the Northern Presbytery Memorial Minute. The Memorial also appeared in the *Banner*.

Standing Orders: Noted that an incorrect and incomplete version of Standing Orders was in the 2019 Handbook. A correct version has been circulated with the Synod Reports. It is proposed that section 2 be titled "LENGTH OF SPEECHES".

Consideration of Committee Structure: The Administration Committee proposes the following Committee Structure and other Synod Appointments:

Committee Structure:

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

Law and Advisory: J. Forbes (Convener), D. Kerridge, T Reeve, I. Miller.

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

Church and Nation and Publication: GD Ball (Convener), I Miller, JD Klazinga (Banner), TBC (Archive).

Information Technology: D Kerridge (Convener), R Tso, N. O'Dell.

Youth and Fellowship: S Carswell (Convener), AA Miranda, J Forbes, Matthew Schmidt, Mandy Kerridge

[The Committee proposes the amalgamation of the Finance and Superannuation and Insurance Committees under one Committee to be called "Finance Committee", with Superannuation and Insurance to be a sub-Committee]

Finance: AH Steel (Convener), DJ Ramsay, G. Hamilton.

Superannuation (and Insurance): R Tso (Convener), DJ Ramsay, AH Steel.

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

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

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

Other Appointments:

PCEA Trustees for Victoria: Donald Ramsay (Secretary), Robin Tso, Synod Clerk, Ian Hall

Treasurer: Alex Steel

Assistant Treasurer: Donald Ramsay

Moderator Elect 2025: D Muldoon

Southern Presbytery Assessors: Synod to appoint or reappoint men to be assessors.

Correspondence: For ease of reference, a copy of correspondence can be found at the back of this report. Correspondence is as follows:

1. Fraternal Greetings from the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ)

PROPOSED DELIVERANCES

1. That the above Timetable for Synod 2024 be confirmed.
2. That the proposed Committee Structure as listed in the report be considered in the final session of Synod.
3. That Synod Standing Orders (Act 1, class 2, 1978, as amended 1984, 1991 and 2008) section 2 be titled “LENGTH OF SPEECHES”.
4. That the following Examiners of Records be appointed:

Northern Presbytery	Rev. A. Miranda and Mt Druitt Elder
Central Presbytery	Rev. J Klazinga and Geelong Elder
Southern Presbytery	Rev. R Tso and Northern Rivers Elder

5. That Synod incorporate the following Memorial Minute for Rev. Kenneth MacLeod in the permanent record.

Memorial Minute

The Rev. Kenneth MacLeod 15th February, 1933 – 2nd May, 2023

Memorial Minute for Rev. Kenneth MacLeod

Kenneth MacLeod was born in Lemreway, on the Isle of Lewis, on 15th February, 1933. He began schooling there then later boarded at the Nicholson Institute in Stornoway, going home for school holidays. He finished school aged 15 and was apprenticed to a local carpenter. At age 17, Ken joined the Merchant Navy and sailed the world for many years. Unbeknownst to him at the time, his wide experience of people in all walks of life equipped Ken for an earnest witness to people in all spheres and situations. Whilst on shore leave in New Zealand, Ken attended an open-air Gospel meeting where he was converted and brought to saving faith in the Lord. He returned to Barvas and completed his high school education.

It was at this time Ken felt called to the ministry. He engaged in further study at Glasgow and then at University of Aberdeen with this end in mind, thence to the Free Church College where he began theological education, aged 31. He married Catherine McLennan on the 26th July, 1966. At the prompting of Professor Alan Harman, who was teaching at the Free Church College at the time, and nominated for assisted passage by the Synod Church Extension Committee (see *Our Banner*, May 1968), Ken came to Australia as a probationer at the end of 1968 with his wife and first child, Donald, and enthusiastically entered the work in his first charge at Lismore (Richmond-Brunswick). The charge included preaching stations as far north as Brisbane. Two of Ken and Catherine’s children were born there: Murdo and Mairi. Having served 5 years in the PCEA, Ken transferred to service in the Free Church at Tain, Ross-shire where he ministered for 15 years. Ken and Catherine’s fourth child, Ann, was born to them in Inverness.

In a conversation with Mr Ross Campbell, discovering that Rev. Angus Beaton had moved from Maclean leaving the charge vacant, Ken answered a request for someone to come and help and returned to Australia taking up a call to the charge in Maclean. Ken laboured in Maclean for the Lord for 15 years. Ken’s preaching was without notes, evangelistic and comforting. His pastoral care was exemplary and extended beyond the congregation into the community. He was called to return to the Free Church at Barvas, Lewis where he spent 5 years until his retirement. It was during this time that Ken was Moderator of the Free Church General Assembly. After his retirement in 2000 from the Free Church, Ken and Catherine returned to Australia and lived at the Bethesda units in Maclean which Ken had been instrumental in getting built, and formally opened. Ken died on 2nd May, 2023 aged 90.

We thank the Lord for the labour of a beloved and faithful servant in both the Free Church of Scotland and in the Northern Rivers charge of NSW. We extend our sympathy to Catherine, Donald, Murdo, Mairi and Ann.

[NOTE from *Our Banner*, May 1968:

“The third application came from Mr. Kenneth MacLeod, a final year student in the Free Church of Scotland College, Edinburgh. This was favourably received, and both the Victorian and Northern Presbyteries requested that he be invited to come to Australia under the terms of the Commonwealth's and Church's provisions, to labour in the vacant charges of our Church, it being understood that he could be called by and settled in any such charge. When notified of these invitations, Mr. MacLeod replied expressing a desire to labour in the Richmond-Brunswick Charge. He is seeking assisted passages for himself, his wife and child, and plans tentatively to come to Australia about September of this year. Your Committee [Church Extension] has nominated him for assisted passage to the Immigration Department, giving the required assurance of provision of accommodation, etc.”]

LAW & ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Members: J.C.A. Forbes (convener from May 2023), D.J. Kerridge, T.M. Reeve, I.J. Miller

The committee communicated at various points in the year by e-mail and video conference.

1. National Redress Scheme. The National Redress Scheme was established in 2018 to provide a means for victims of historic child abuse to receive an acknowledgement, compensation and an apology from the institution where the abuse occurred. The PCEA joined the Scheme in 2020 as part of a group of churches under ACS Mutual but the arrangement came to a premature end on 30th June 2023 when ACS Mutual advised their withdrawal due to financial unviability. Subsequently the PCEA was approached directly by the Redress Scheme and encouraged to rejoin in its own name. It became apparent that this invitation was due to the PCEA being incorrectly named in a redress application. Organisations named in an application can suffer penalties if they decline to join the Scheme. The Law & Advisory committee clarified the background and recommends against rejoining the Scheme at this time as it is not necessary and would involve a significant administrative burden.

2. Review of PCEA Safe Church standards. It is intended to have a significant review of our Safe Church processes every three years. This will be based on internal feedback received about the workability of our current processes as well as significant developments in State legislation. The committee encourages feedback at any time from sessions, church leaders and others. None has been received to date.

In Victoria new Child Safe Standards came into effect from 1st July 2022. The government's website explains their purpose being to “*more closely align Victoria’s Standards with the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, while retaining Victoria’s focus on Aboriginal cultural safety and empowering children and young people.*” It is evident that the intention is to go beyond child safety, for which national standards exist, by introducing ideological concepts of “cultural safety” and “empowerment”. Of particular note are Child Safe Standards 1 and 3.

Child Safe Standard 1 - Organisations establish a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued.

The committee does not think this necessitates a change to our current Safe Church standards since the clear and public teaching of this Church is that people from all nations and cultures, including those of Aboriginal descent, are precious to God and welcome at our services and events. God has made all people in His own image, from one blood (Acts 17:26), and all are to be respected, valued, and treated with appropriate cultural sensitivity for Christ's sake and the gospel (1 Cor 9:19-23).

Child Safe Standard 3 – Children and young people are empowered about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.

The committee believe that a due regard for the rights and value of children and young people is already embedded in our ethos and Safe Church Policy.

3. Panel on Divorce and Remarriage. A panel consisting of Tom Reeve, Ian Miller, Jim Klazinga and John Forbes was appointed by Synod 2022 to prepare a statement for the PCEA Handbook to provide clear scriptural guidance on Divorce, Separation and Remarriage, and to bring proposed legislation to Synod 2024. The committee is not yet in a position to report. It is requested that the remit be continued and progress to be reported in 2025.

4. Handbook Update. Over the years many unapproved changes crept in to successive editions of our *Handbook of Practice and Procedure*. Extensive work has been carried out to carefully compare the latest 2019 edition with the 1992 original. All differences have been noted and Synod minutes searched to identify which changes had Synod approval and which did not. In discussion with the Administration Committee most unauthorised changes have been deleted but some, deemed

appropriate and helpful, are now submitted to Synod for formal approval along with some proposed reorganisation. These changes are detailed in Appendix A.

The Handbook section in Chapter 4, entitled *Reception, Status & Oversight of Students and Home Missionaries*, consists of a series of acts that have never been synthesised into a logical or chronological order. It is proposed that a revision of this section be undertaken in conjunction with the Training of Ministry Committee.

The Handbook processes for *Church Discipline* in chapter 7 were thoroughly tested in 2022 and 2023 when the PCEA had a significant disciplinary case. It is evident that there are gaps and some lack of clarity. A revision of chapter 7 is proposed for future clarity.

5. Compiling Acts of Synod. The work of compiling Acts of Synod for availability on the PCEA website is an ongoing project which has been largely on hold in the past year.

6. Rescind Act 5, 2008 concerning *Optional Alternative Questions and Formula*. Since 2008 the PCEA has had two sets of questions and formula. The 1952 Questions and Formula were authorised using Barrier Act procedure, whereas the 2008 optional alternatives were not. The use of optional alternatives appears to be unconstitutional and has sown confusion. Prior to 1952 it was observed that there had also been confusion due to variations in the form of questions and formula in use within the Church. One of the purposes of the 1952 act was to ensure that there would be only one set of authorised questions and formula and that they would be used “*without addition, variation or omission*”. It is proposed that the 2008 optional alternative questions and formula now be rescinded for the sake of unity and clarity.

7. Rescind Act 4, 2008 concerning *Handbook of Practice and Procedure Barrier Act Compliance*. This act purported to reclassify multiple class 2 acts to the status of class 1 acts without using Barrier Act procedure. Not only is this entirely unconstitutional but has caused considerable confusion about the current status of acts. It is proposed to rescind this act.

8. Rescind Act 2, 2015 concerning *inserting footnote re Barrier Act: Constitutions: “that is laws”*. In 2014 a proposal was made to change the wording of the 1697 Barrier Act so that “*constitutions*” would be replaced with “*laws*”. This interpretation was disapproved by presbyteries. Subsequently, in 2015, without consulting presbyteries, Synod allowed “*that is laws*” to be inserted as an explanatory footnote, but it was actually inserted into the body of the Barrier Act text in the Handbook. It is a flawed interpretation that has caused confusion. Constitutions does actually mean constitutions. It is proposed to rescind Act 2, 2015.

9. Reclassify Act 1, 2011 concerning *Conflict of Interest*. In 2011, an overture from the Central Presbytery regarding conflict of interest was approved by Synod and passed directly into law without Barrier Act procedure. The minutes then state, “*It was further resolved, with none opposing, that Synod declare that, as there is general agreement that the Act Concerning Conflict of Interest is not innovative and as the subject has been before the church for two years, the Act Concerning Conflict of Interest is held to have met the requirements of the Barrier Act.*” This proposal appears to have been sudden and not carefully considered as it was raised without notice and was not moved or seconded. The only constitutional method for passing class 1 legislation is for the exact wording of an overture to be scrutinised and approved by a majority of Presbyteries before it can be enacted by Synod. It is insufficient to claim that the general subject has been before the Church for a couple of years. It is proposed that this act be reclassified as Act 8, Class 2, 2011.

10. Alteration to Handbook 4.55 – *Vacancy by Resignation*. Wording introduced in 2013 imposes a process that appears inquisitorial and unjust in that it requires an investigation of wrong where none is known. No clear reason was given by the L&A committee for the revision at the time and it was narrowly passed by Synod in the face of dissents. It is proposed to revert to the original Handbook

wording.

ORIGINAL WORDING

4.55 A minister who wishes to resign his charge from ill-health, old age or other circumstances not affecting his ministerial character, must tender his resignation to the presbytery under whose jurisdiction he is placed. Permission to resign a charge cannot be granted to a minister against whom a judicial process has commenced or against whom a *fama*, that is, bad or prejudicial reports or rumours, prevails.

Should a minister apply for leave to resign his charge, the presbytery may order the application to lie on the table, appoint a committee to confer with him and ascertain the reason that led to the application, and cite the session and congregation to appear for their interest at an appointed time and place. If, however, the session and congregation have been duly informed of the minister's purpose to seek leave to resign the charge, the presbytery may deal with the matter at once.

If the reason given is ascertained to be change of opinion relative to the doctrines or government of the PCEA, incapacitating him to continue in its ministry, his resignation is accepted by the presbytery, which then declares him no longer a minister of the church.

If the resignation is accepted for other than such reasons, the pastoral tie between the minister and the congregation is dissolved, and the congregation declared vacant; but he still remains a minister of the church. His name, however, is taken from the roll of presbytery but he is eligible for election as a ruling elder in the congregation to which he attaches himself as a communicant member. The presbytery must decide if the resigned man's name is to be placed on the Register or the Roll of Resigned Ministers which are kept by the Synod Clerk in accordance with Act 19, Synod 1986. A minister whose name is on the Roll of Resigned Ministers is not eligible for call, but if he is on the Register, he is eligible for call subject to time restrictions and other conditions per Acts 19 and 20, Synod 1986. In certain circumstances the Synod may grant him a seat on the Presbytery (see Act 18, Synod 1986).

11. Request from Rev. Dr. D Muldoon - "minimum stipend and benefits". Dr Muldoon wrote to the committee in 2023 to request that consideration be given to removing the word "minimum" from Handbook 3.16a. The committee notes that neither the Free Church of Scotland nor the PCEA have ever deemed it equitable to require that every minister's stipend and benefits be the same. The book *The Annals of the Disruption* pp. 291-308 helpfully elaborates the biblical principles that underpinned the original Free Church Sustentation Fund. Upon consideration the committee recommends that the word "minimum" be retained in Handbook 3.16a.

PROPOSED DELIVERANCES:

1. National Redress Scheme. Synod notes the advice of the Law and Advisory committee and agrees not to rejoin the National Redress Scheme at this time.

2. Panel on Divorce and Remarriage. The remit of the Panel on Divorce and Remarriage is continued, with a report to be brought to Synod 2025.

3. Handbook changes. Synod approve the Handbook changes listed in Appendix A and for a new edition to be produced incorporating all authorised changes up to and including Synod 2024.

4. Revision of Handbook Chapters 4 and 7. Synod instruct the Law and Advisory committee to undertake a revision of Handbook Chapter 7 on *Church Discipline* and, in conjunction with the Training of Ministry Committee, to revise Chapter 4 section entitled *Reception, Status & Oversight of Students and Home Missionaries*, and to report progress to the 2025 Synod.

5. Rescind Act 5, 2008. Synod rescind Act 5, Class 2, 2008 entitled *Act allowing optional alternative Questions and Formula while not reducing commitments in terms of Act of Synod 1952.*

6. Rescind Act 4, 2008. Synod rescind Act 4, Class 2, 2008 entitled *Handbook of Practice and Procedure Barrier Act Compliance.*

7. Rescind Act 2, 2015. Synod rescind Act 2, Class 2, 2015 entitled *Act inserting footnote re Barrier Act: Constitutions: "that is laws".*

8. Reclassify Act 1, 2011. Synod note that Act 1, Class 1, 2011 never passed Barrier Act or received approval of Presbyteries. It is hereby reclassified as Act 8, Class 2, 2011 entitled *Act concerning Conflict of Interest.*

9. Rescind Act 2, 2013. Synod rescind Act 2, Class 2, 2013 concerning *Revision of Section 4.55 in the Handbook* and revert to the original wording of Handbook 4.55.

**APPENDIX A
LAW & ADVISORY REPORT 2024**

Ref.	Proposed Handbook alteration
1.11	Delete " <i>regulate</i> " and replace with " <i>guide the conduct of</i> "
2.6	Add reference " <i>(Note also 4.55d)</i> "
2.9	Add additional wording (being a simplified version of the previously unauthorised wording in the 2019 Handbook), " <i>Disturbance in a church service. From time to time there may be serious incidents of disturbance in a church service. A caring Christian approach is usually able to resolve the issue without recourse to legal measures. The legal position is understood to be that there is an implied licence to enter a church for the purpose of public worship. If a person acts in a manner that is contrary to this purpose the licence can be revoked by words spoken to him, and he can be asked to leave or the police will be called. One must not use physical restraint to remove a person unless the physical safety of congregants is at risk. If needed one can seek a court order.</i> "
2.10	Add bold heading " <i>Relationship to minister</i> "
2.11	Add bold heading " <i>Jurisdiction</i> "
2.19	Add sample disjunction certificate (as found in 2019 Handbook but previously unauthorised)
2.38	Amend incorrect reference from " <i>chapter 7.26</i> " to " <i>chapter 7</i> "
3.15	ACNC has changed its classification of charity size. Update Handbook accordingly to Small, up to \$500k, Medium \$500k-\$3m, and Large over \$3m.
3.16a	Add " <i>Non-Cash Benefits are to be limited to 40% of minimum stipend (Synod 2017)</i> "
3.16b	Add "plus an extra week (which must be taken) or in lieu one week of LSL to age 70 (Synod 2003)."
3.16	Add " <i>Deacons Courts are to keep a close eye on the minister's leave entitlement to ensure he does not suffer burnout through failure to take it. Recording of entitlement in the minutes should occur once a year to avoid misunderstanding and facilitate Presbytery's role when examining records.</i> "
3.17a	Delete the words " <i>and Long Service Leave</i> ". Amend " <i>half-yearly</i> " to read " <i>quarterly</i> ".
3.21 title	Replace " <i>3.21b-c is Act of Synod 1991</i> " with " <i>See Act 16, 1991, and Act 3, 2016</i> "
3.21 a & b	Delete insurance renewal dates as this is unnecessary information and may change.

3.22	Insert actual wording of Act 10, 1988 to clarify the conditions upon which Presbytery can approve the sale of property, “ <i>where a) the Congregation has been informed of the reasons for the proposed sale, and the purpose for which the funds realized will be used, and has given its consent, certified to the Presbytery by extract minute; b) in the case of the sale of a manse the Presbytery has been satisfied that the provision of a suitable manse is assured upon the sale of the old; c) the sale and related purchases are handled in their legal aspects by a competent firm of solicitors; and d) in all respects the provisions of the applicable Act of Parliament, and legislation of Synod are adhered to.</i> ”
3.22	Add paragraph, “ <i>Should it be impracticable to wait until the annual Synod, a congregation desiring to mortgage property (other than church buildings) may submit a Presbytery-approved proposal to the Finance Committee in terms of the existing Capital Assistance Fund procedure and the Administration Committee is authorised to make a decision after receiving recommendation or otherwise from the Finance Committee. (Act 9, 2008)</i> ”
3.26a	Add “ <i>and amended by The Synod of Eastern Australia Property Amendment Act 2004 No. 6/2004.</i> ”
3.26b	Add “ <i>and amended by the Free Presbyterian Church Property Amendment Act 2012, No. 67/2012.</i> ”
4.3	Add Act 18, 1986, Seats of Presbyteries for Ministers not Inducted
4.26c	Add “ <i>including student training and allowances and licensing procedure 4.46-4.50</i> ” Previously <i>Licensing of students</i> was item d). Reletter subsequent headings accordingly.
4.26i	Add “ <i>i) Minister without charge and resigned/retired ministers 4.88</i> ”
4.41d	Add “ <i>d) Ensures a record of the minister’s outstanding leave entitlement is entered in the deacons’ court or session minutes at least annually</i> ”
4.41e	Add “ <i>e) sees to it that congregations under their care include a fair value of their assets in their annual financial statement as well as detail of any liabilities</i> ”
4.49g	Add wording of Act 6, 2018 (minutes 18.24.2) “ <i>In meeting not less than annually...</i> ”
4.49A	Add full wording of Act 16, 1983 as amended 1991 and 2013 - Student Training & Allowances.
4.50	Replace original wording “ <i>The current (1991) regulations as last amended in 1983 are as follows</i> ” REPLACED with “ <i>The current regulations are as follows</i> ”
4.51	Insert heading “ <i>4.51 ADMISSION OF MINISTERS FROM CHURCHES WITH WHOM THERE IS MUTUAL ELGIBILITY</i> ” followed by relevant wording of current Synod Acts for mutual eligibility.
4.52	Renumber so that original 4.51 & 4.52 are now all under 4.52
4.55a	Update reference to read <i>Handbook 4.3</i>
4.65	Delete “ORDAINED” so that heading reads “4.65 CALL TO MINISTER IN A CHARGE IN ANOTHER PRESBYTERY”
4.76-4.83	Heading - add reference “ <i>4.76-4.83 PRESBYTERY IN RELATION TO SYNOD, &c.</i> ”
4.76	Update reference to “(see 5.3)” due to changed numbering
4.79	Replace “ <i>See Act of Synod 1990</i> ” with “ <i>See Act 11, 1990 as amended 2008</i> ”. Necessary editorial addition per Synod minutes 2008.17.2, which is not listed as an Act.
4.88	Add “ <i>4.88 MINISTERS WITHOUT CHARGE AND RESIGNED/RETIRED MINISTERS [Act 4 Class 2, Synod 2012]</i> ” and full wording of Act.
5	Numbering updated throughout chapter 5. All references update to match new numbering.
5.19	Replace “ <i>Since Synod 2013 standing committees have been arranged as follows:</i> ” with “ <i>Standing committees are arranged as follows:</i> ” and update current committee names
5.24	Include reference to Act 5, class 2, 1984 at beginning of paragraph rather than end.

5.24	Add " <i>Synod 2008 (minute 17.1) requested any who frame proposals for Synod's consideration to take care to make provision for specifying previous enactments that are varied or rescinded by such proposals.</i> "
5.24	Add " <i>Synod 2008 (Act 2, Class 2): 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.</i> "
5.25	Add reference "5.25" to heading.
5.25	Delete sentence from original wording " <i>Synod committees are generally composed on a regional basis with up to 5 members who are to serve for at least three years.</i> " and add " <i>to reach the Finance Committee at least 60 days before the Synod.</i> "
5.32	After " <i>records of presbyteries,</i> " Delete " <i>and to compare the scroll minutes of Synod with the permanent record</i> " as out-of-date
5.37	Remove " <i>that is laws</i> " incorporated into text of the Barrier Act in 2015. Also in chapter on Principal Enactments.
5.38	Add historical detail " <i>Act 8, Assembly 1736</i> "
5.39 - 5.40	Wording was replaced with Act 5, 2016. This has proved to be unclear and confusing. Rescind the act, delete from Handbook, and revert to original.
5.42	Delete " <i>Copies of the Decision Book are made available at a suitable charge to members and other interested persons.</i> " Now out-of-date.
5.48	Replace " <i>(as amended 1979, 1984, 1991)</i> " with " <i>(amended from time to time)</i> "
7.26	After " <i>other like matters</i> " insert " <i>such as homosexual behaviour, child abuse and serious marriage breakdowns.</i> " This is a version of wording proposed in 2008 (see minutes 08.17.4) but some of that wording was inappropriate.
7.50	Insert " <i>7.50 INTERVIEWING WOMEN, CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE ADULTS [Act 1, Class 1, Synod 2012]</i> " followed by full wording of the act.
9	Designate this as Chapter 9 " <i>PRINCIPAL ENACTMENTS BEARING ON THE CONSTITUTION OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF EASTERN AUSTRALIA</i> "
	1697 - Add " <i>COMMONLY CALLED THE BARRIER ACT</i> "
9	1736 - Add to Principal Enactments - <i>1736 ACT CONCERNING RESCINDING ACTS PASSED UNDER THE BARRIER ACT (Act 8, Assembly 1736)</i>
9	1954 - Add additional note " <i>and remains in force for both Free Church and Free Church (Continuing). The PCEA Act was rescinded in 2004, and a new mutual relationship was formalised with the Free Church in 2005 and with the Free Church (Continuing) in 2019.]</i> "
Appendix	Add new Appendix - DEVELOPMENT OF THE HANDBOOK - wording below

DEVELOPMENT OF THE HANDBOOK

DEVELOPMENT

From the early days of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia there was a desire to have a book of church practice and procedure that specifically addressed the needs of the Australian church. This was evidenced in 1871 when Synod appointed the Revs. James McCulloch and W.S. Donald to 'draw up a digest of rules and procedure for the Church Courts.' McCulloch's ill-health and death in 1873 prevented this project being completed. In 1879 an overture from the Presbytery of Grafton asked Synod to draw up "a code of rules" but the work proved difficult due to the small number of ministers. In 1928 Synod adopted the Practice of the Free Church of Scotland "as authority for the procedure of the Church as far as possible". Differences between the relative circumstances of the church in Scotland and that in Australia meant that the Scottish Practice could not always be uniformly applied. In 1964 the Victorian Presbytery overtured Synod 'to take steps to produce over a period of years a Practice for our own Church.' Synod approved the overture and remitted it to the Law and Advisory committee but it was not until 1982 that work began in earnest when Synod urged the Committee to press on with the task.

The Clerk of Synod, the Rev W.P. Gadsby, convened the Law and Advisory Committee from 1982 to 1985. A complete draft Practice was submitted to Synod in 1983. This was an adaptation of the Scottish Practice carried out largely by Rev R.S. Ward. It was commended by Synod as 'a useful adjunct' pending careful revision by the Committee and Synod. The Rev. R. S. Ward was appointed Convener in 1985 serving to 1995. In 1985, the Rev. R.W. Murray made significant contribution to the

arrangement of the early chapters. The work subsequently profited from the scrutiny of all members of the Committee and of the Synod.

Chapters 1-3 were adopted by Synod on 30th March 1989. Chapters 4 – 5 were adopted on 4th April 1991. Chapters 6-7 were adopted on 29th April 1992, at which time Synod resolved to "affirm the completed practice Chapters 1 to 7 as its *Handbook of Practice and Procedure* in succession to the Free Church of Scotland *Practice* of 1964" and to "commend the study and careful use of the Handbook to office-bearers and others, reminding users of the provisions of Chapter 1.10 and 1.11."

The first edition, published in August 1992, included three sections in addition to the chapters approved by Synod. These were - "Principal enactments bearing on the constitution", "Timelines showing origin of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia", and "Some specimens of the way minutes may be written".

UPDATES

Successive editions of the *Handbook* incorporated amendments authorised by Synod from time to time. Chapter 8 relating to child protection was approved in 2022. Over the years it also became apparent that the *Handbook* had accumulated editorial changes that, however well intentioned, were not duly sanctioned. A careful review was carried out from 2022 - 2024 to produce an edition that would include only what had been approved by Synod and necessary editorial corrections such as updating of references. Henceforth all changes from the original 1992 Handbook to be recorded in the table below: *(Table to follow)*

TRAINING OF MINISTRY COMMITTEE

Members: D Kerridge (Convener), R Tso, A Miranda, G Hamilton, I Hamilton

The Committee corresponded over the year by email and met by video conference.

Our current candidate, Mr Zachary Dotson, completed the additional work set for him under section 4.49a of the Handbook. From October to December, 2023 he undertook placement through the Candidate Placement Scheme (CPS) to assess pastoral matters and to give him experience in the PCEA outside of Southern Presbytery. The Convener reported favourably on the outcome of this placement to Mr Dotson's Session, Southern Presbytery and to the *pro re nata* Synod.

Consequently, the Committee certified to the Synod, at the *pro re nata* meeting in January, that Mr Zachary Dotson had completed all academic requirements for additional study under our purview. Southern Presbytery has been informed and is able now to move towards licencing trials.

One matter that emerged last year was the effectiveness of the CPS scheme as a tool to evaluate a student, as well as the interaction of Session, Presbytery and Committee in this and, by extension, our respective roles in general student oversight. The Committee intends to re-evaluate the CPS scheme in 2024 and report its deliberations to next Synod.

As was intimated to Synod 2023, approaches were made to the Reformed Theological College (Melbourne) with a view to re-establish that institution in our list of Synod-approved colleges. RTC's status was rescinded in 1979 and has not been reviewed since that time. In August 2023, the Convener communicated with the Principal, Dr Phillip Scheepers, about the next steps to closer ties. Dr Scheepers welcomed the inquiry and referred the matter to the RTC Board for their consideration. We await their response.

During cross-committee work on revising the Handbook, the sections relating to the work of Training of Ministry (sections 4.46 through 4.52) came under discussion. While the sections mostly just iterate Acts, it was suggested that the section may benefit from reorganisation. For instance, this may be particularly beneficial to any prospective student wishing to understand the processes and requirements of candidacy. The Law and Advisory Committee has suggested a consultation with the Committee to further this discussion.

The same concern that was raised in our last report continues to prevail: the average age of Elders within our denomination continues to rise. We are concerned that there is a dearth of men coming through the ranks.

We pray that men would be provided for the work of ministry within the PCEA and other office-bearers raised up to support them.

PROPOSED DELIVERANCES

1. That Synod call on ministers and sessions to exhort men in our congregations to consider the high calling of Christian manhood and serving the Lord in office-bearer roles. That they would be equipped with the gifts necessary and recognised by their congregations.

YOUTH AND FELLOWSHIP COMMITTEE

Members: Stewart Carswell (Convenor), Andres Miranda, Mandy Kerridge, John Forbes and Matthew Schmidt

Youth Camp 2023

The youth camp was able to run over the Easter long weekend from 7-10 April. George Ball, Manning, spoke on the Second Coming of Christ. The camp was for 15- to 30-year-olds had 25 campers from Brisbane, Northern Rivers, Hastings and Hunter congregations who enjoyed the weekend of teaching and fellowship.

We are thankful for the willingness of John and Judy Greensill to prepare their property, and further thanks to the cooks and helpers, including Keith and Barbara Schmidt and Julie Schmidt (Brisbane), and for the Northern Rivers congregation for their hospitality.

For 2024 we are hoping to run the Youth camp over the weekend 4-7 October. Robin Tso has agreed to be speaker. It is proposed to change the ages of the camp to 14 to 25 year olds. For the past few years the camp has been for 15 to 30 year olds, mainly to capture a group of church members who have not had the opportunity to attend youth camps. The committee feels that this need has now been met, and lowered the age bracket, more in line with the definition or concept of “youth”. Prices should be approximately the same, at \$100 for 18+ years and \$60 for students and unemployed. We have not needed to consider family discounts.

Due to travel the Greensill’s are unable to hold the youth camp this year. It is likely that due to the work involved John and Judy will not be able to hold future camps. The committee is looking at various options including the Wauchope church, which offers nearby activities including tennis, swimming pool and river, and a short drive to the beach at Port Macquarie.

Family Camp

Once again, the Family Camp was not held in 2023. However, it is planned to hold a family camp in 2024 at Camp Elim, Forster approximately 45 minutes south of Taree and 2 hours north of Newcastle. The proposed dates are 1 – 4 July 2024, as other dates, especially during summer holidays are not available for the foreseeable future. We hope to have sole access to the site. As of writing this report the price has not been confirmed.

Camp Elim offers differing accommodation options including camping, caravans and cabins, which allows slightly cheaper options. Family discounts are also available. Self-catering is allowed but would be difficult as kitchen facilities would not be made available.

Previous camps have cost between \$220 to \$280 per person with Synod subsidising the family rate to \$1,100. The cost has been a criticism of previous camps as being out of reach for many people, especially families. It is proposed to cap the price for families to approx. \$600 to \$700. The speaker is to be advised.

The Family and Youth Camps are important events in the life of the church and provide opportunities for strengthening fellowship and deepening our love for God and His Word.

Essays (John Forbes)

The 2023 essay topic was – the Humility of Christ, with the seniors writing on Humiliation and Exaltation, the intermediates on the Suffering of Christ and the juniors on a baby in a manger. There was reasonable uptake of the essay question for 2023 despite the questions not being released until September. There were 18 submissions from 3 congregations in 2023 (compared to 20 submissions from 4 congregations in 2022). Book vouchers were awarded to all participants, \$30 for seniors, \$25 for intermediate, and \$20 juniors. The total cost of awards was \$470.

Those who participated and received a book voucher were:

Junior (age up to 9) - Mabel Lethbridge (Hastings), Elisha Gullick (Hastings), Josiah Gullick (Hastings), Katie Hornsey (Hastings)

Intermediate (age 10-13) - James Kerridge (Northern Rivers), Emily Kerridge (Northern Rivers), Scarlett Lethbridge (Hastings), Elsa Forbes (Hastings), Kenneth Forbes (Hastings), Micah Rohdich (Hastings)

Senior (age 14+) - Grieta Bosveld (Ulverstone), Anna Bosveld (Ulverstone), William Kerridge (Northern Rivers), Grace Kerridge (Northern Rivers), Amelia Hornsey (Hastings), Katherine Forbes (Hastings), James Forbes (Hastings), Donald Forbes (Hastings).

Prescribed Youth Work 2024

The prescribed work, memorisation and essay questions were published in the Banner and sent to interested congregation earlier this year.

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

Birthday Card Greeting

The 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. Currently there are 73 children on the roll. We would encourage each congregation to update the list of children under 12 years to yfc@pcea.org.au

Search Work

In 2023 there saw 4 children submit answers for the whole year, from Hastings & Ulverstone.

Senior: Katherine Forbes (Hastings) Anna Bosveld (Ulverstone), Grieta Bosveld (Ulverstone)

Junior: Scarlett Lethbridge (Hastings)

There were a few others who started the year but only did a month or so.

This continues the pattern of the last few years with only as 4 children completed the full year of search work in 2022. The committee would encourage Sunday schools and teachers and parents to utilise this ministry, or give feedback as to the low uptake of this ministry.

The Committee is thankful to Irene Steel for her continued commitment to the Search Work.

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 encourages the Youth and Fellowship committee to proceed with the organisation of a family camp and youth camp in 2024 and encourages the church to pray for the practical planning and organisation of all activities that must be monitored during these camps. Pray that these anticipated events will be an experience of deep spiritual growth under the ministry of the Word, with enrichment of Christian relationships, and a refreshing time of body and mind surrounded by God's creation.
2. Synod instructs the Youth and Fellowship committee to continue to produce Essay Questions and Prescribed Youth Work and encourages the church to pray that this will continue to be a source of theological discovery, personal strength, and spiritual direction in the lives of all children, and adolescents who participate in this activity.
3. The Synod prayerfully thanks God for the contributions of members and volunteers who have provided leadership during the camps. Synod also prays for the guest speakers who are thinking about the talks for the July and October camps. Pray for their messages to increase the joy of learning new things from Scripture.
4. Synod gives thanks and pray for those are involved in the work of teaching Sunday-school and youth classes.
5. Synod thank Irene Steel for her dedication to the scripture search work and Nic and Amelia O'Dell for birthday card greeting and uphold them in prayer.
6. Synod thank John and Judy Greensill for the preparation and use of their property, and the Northern Rivers congregation for their generosity for the youth camps over the last several years.

7. Synod continues to pray for the children and youth in the Church and the work of the committee in building relationships between congregations as members of Christ's body.

MISSIONS COMMITTEE

Members: D.K. Muldoon (convener), J. Greensill, J.D. Klazinga, I. Hamilton.

The MC met in six Zoom meetings during the year, at which members gave updates on the fields assigned to them. Members agreed to keep in touch with their assigned field, getting prayer points for the PCEA Missions prayer notes and an annual report - included in this report. It was agreed, among other things, to send a gift of \$2000 to the PFC-CI to help with the costs of their first synod. We did not agree to a request from PFC-CI to financially support a candidate for the ministry who plans to study in the USA. Diaconal help of \$2000 was sent to Manipur, India, in the wake of attacks upon their churches and homes by Hindu militants.

MISSION FIELD REPORTS

1. **Australian Indigenous Ministries**
2. **Dumisani Theological Institute**
3. **Dr Dickson, India**
4. **Central India**
5. **Annie Soper and San Andres School**
6. **International Mission to Jewish people**

1. Australian Indigenous Ministries

Peter Smith retired from AIM on 31 July 2023 after 11 years of service. Support allocated in the budget was sent to him in full. The MC expresses thanks to Peter for his work with the indigenous people of Australia through the office of AIM.

2. Dumisani Theological Institute and Bible School (Ian Hamilton)

Principal Wilbert Chipenyu writes:

From the survey I made in the Eastern Cape among different African Independent Churches (AIC) which has most students presently, syncretism is seemingly with most of these denominations. The student ministers who are studying at Dumisani also confirm my findings and they suggest that they had no clue that it's against God to keep worshiping ancestors while serving Him, up until they enrolled with us. These student pastors are already ordained and some of them are Archbishops and Bishops of their denominations. As a college we plan to reach out to as many AICs as possible with the reformed theology. Regrettably, these churches do not have funds to pay for the studies of their pastors. We are praying for brothers and sisters all over the world to give in to Dumisani towards students' bursaries. We are grateful to PCEA which advises that we can use the donation therefrom as we wish, thus allowing us to channel the donation towards student bursaries.

We commenced the year 2023 with the usual two programmes: Certificate in Christian Foundations (CCF) and Advanced Ministry Studies (AMS). One accredited programme was introduced in April during term two since there was no preparation for it in 2022 as it was only accredited in January 2023. The other accredited programme could not be taught because of limited faculty. The graduation and award ceremonies were held on 4 March 2023. The former principal, Jack Whytock, was the Guest speaker. There were 13 students graduating with CCF, 12 with AMS and 1 with Honors degree through SATS our partner.

Rev Magodla who has been acting principal because Dr Diniso was working in Port Elizabeth and could not avail himself at Dumisani most of the time, takes over as the vice principal. He is going to double this role as VP with that of Academic Dean to oversee the academic affairs of the institution.

Lecturing staff for 2023

Name Courses taught Status Highest level of Education

Wilbert Chipenyu 12 Fulltime Philosophy Doctorate
Ikho Magodla 10 Fulltime Bachelor of Theology
Tembani Zani 2 Part-time Bachelor of Theology Honors
Luan Goosen 2 Part-time Bachelor of Theology Honors
Stephen Choi 1 Part-time Master of Theology
David Galletta 2 Visiting Philosophy Doctorate
Johannes Aucamp 1 Visiting Master of Divinity
Thinus Herman 1 Visiting Bachelor of Science Honors
Kyle Barrow 1 Visiting Bachelor of Theology Honors
Andre Kruger 1 Visiting Bachelor of Theology Honors

The other members of staff cooperated well in seeing to it that the teaching and learning material is available on time for both students and lecturers, and the records were kept in a professional manner.

Student body

In 2023 we realised 60 students drawn from 16 different denominations, all being African Independent churches (AIC). The students are drawn from the Eastern Cape, mainly from the Transkei and surrounding areas. In addition to the four programmes offered at Dumisani, some of our students are furthering their studies with our partners such as Northwest University (NWU- 3 students), South African Theological Seminary (SATS- 4 students) and George Whitefield College (GWC- 3 students). Through our partnership with GWC, Dumisani graduates are on full bursary at GWC. Dumisani staff does facilitation of lectures for NWU students while SATS is all online.

Donations to Dumsiani included:

TDA through GWC gave us a total of 631 000 towards student bursaries.

Renovation fund- 159 000 from Scotland gala dinner–repair of small lecture hall roof

Presbyterian Eastern Australia- 56 196.32 000 to be used as we see it fit.

Kyser’s beach chapel- 20 000 renovations.

Free Church in Southern Africa- R19 762 to be used for projects

Total donations R895 958.32

The Principal gained insights from visits made to Johannesburg Bible College (JBC) and George Whitefield College. I chose to visit these colleges because they were part of NWU centres together with Dumisani, but they are way ahead of us in expansion and other forms of growth.

Insights gained from the visits:

- Having a clear budget for different operational aspects such as marketing, programmes, bills etc.
- Both colleges have western fundraising ambassadors which we do not have
- According to the sister colleges, the best technique in fundraising is building friendships
- Both colleges have functional sub-committees.
- Cooperation, dedication, and advocacy among the Board, faculty, and administrators and partners is key to success.

Renovations

The library’s outer wall was redone using the money which was sitting in the library fund after previous renovations. The smaller lecture hall and staff flat has a new roof, and the verandah was also tiled. The contractor gave to Dumisani by repainting the walls of the smaller lecture hall that were looking bad. The flat at the back of the office building is low-lying so that water could flow in the rooms after much rainfall. I personally saw this one day, and I had to dig a trench, but the water was directed towards the neighbour’s plot. The contractor recently installed a pipe that directs the water into the drainage system. I am sure this will serve the purpose well. In 2024 it is proposed to repair the office building walls.

Partnership endeavours

The Admin Bureau of the GKSA gave me leeway to visit any congregation in drumming support for Dumisani. Unfortunately, the two biggest congregations I was given could not give me a green light to visit them. I will keep trying to visit whenever I get space and opportunity. On the other hand, one new visiting lecturer from Reformed Evangelical, Anglican Church (REACH) invited me to share about Dumisani with his church. I was delighted that the response from the congregation was encouraging.

We are in the process of applying for the assessment centre as Dumisani Institute. QCTO requires that we get accreditation as an assessment centre also.

For questions and clarity contact Wilbert Chipenyu Call/WhatsApp +27787311228 Email wilbertchipenyu@yahoo.com/chipenyu@dumisani.org.z

3. Dr Dickson, India

As the New Year (2024) begins, we want to thank God for enabling us to serve those in need. We also express our thanks and deep gratitude for the support from our donors, prayer warriors, well wishes, and partners who journeyed with us throughout 2023. God's faithfulness in 2023- God enabled the Vetnet team to travel across our great land, visiting different states, villages, and serving thousands of the farmers by treating their livestock and training them on animal health. Thanks to the Vetnet team for their exceptional work reaching out to the underprivileged in 9 different states of India using their veterinary skills. The impact was enormous.

Annual Conference JOSH 2023 in Kolkata, 29 Sep to Oct 1 2023. It was a blessed time as we gathered in the place where Dr. William Carey ministered amidst many challenges. God unified our thoughts as we came together crossing vernacular and state boundaries. The value from each session, including the free veterinary camp at the village, was significant for everyone. Each person returned with clear convictions of reaching to Our Nation with one Mission. God reminded us again to be contextually conscious and come out of our comfort zone like Dr. William Carey did almost two hundred years ago.

God works in mysterious ways- "Hey yesappa nandri" (Thank you Lord Jesus), was the statement uttered by a widow in a village near Pallapatti, Madurai, Tamil Nadu. The name of the widow was Naomi who lived with her two sons. She kept dairy animals and a few of them were suffering from unknown diseases. She was perplexed and didn't know what to do except pray. It was a rainy day when the Vetnet team came to her rescue as the answer to her plea. Her testimony was a great encouragement to the team of 11 veterinarians who voluntarily worked for a week to treat thousands of animals in these 6 villages.

A young vet student writes- I first want to thank Jesus for providing me with this opportunity, and then I thank Dr. Dickson. He gave his knowledge and a powerful message, and I was really moved by his zeal and resolve to serve God. It motivated me to work for God. Rajapandian Sir, who taught me about pregnancy diagnosis and treatment. Additionally, Dr. Annie Ma'am taught me how to castrate properly. I am given so much happiness in the camps in the villages of Robertsganj and Kachhwa. Those people are lacking of veterinary facility. In this programme I had the impression that those who lack it are the only ones who can experience this level of joy - Sabastin.

God's love in action- I am writing to express my sincerest appreciation for your initiative for conducting a 5 day, free Animal Health Care-giver Training at Tamenglong, Manipur. During this time, you have extended free treatment for more than 200 animals, provided lessons on deworming, vaccination, routine management, and more for the marginalized farmers. This gesture, and your wholistic approach to animal care has truly made a significant impact on the lives of the farmers who are often overlooked and undeserved -Rev. Adui

Visit our website: www.vetnetfoundation.org VETNET Annual Newsletter, 2023

4. Presbyterian Free Church of Central India (Elizabeth Muldoon with update by J Greensill from Pradeep)

The historic first Synod of the PFC-CI at Jabalpur ended on Thursday evening. It was a time of great encouragement and fellowship. After the evening meal, with rain pouring down and a cold wind blowing, a small contingent left Jabalpur to drive to Chhapara: my husband, Dennis Muldoon, and I, as well as two visitors from Scotland, David Meredith and Alistair Wilson. We arrived in Chhapara at about 11.00 pm and were warmly welcomed by Pradeep's brother, Michael, and his wife. We sat in their pretty little lounge room and drank hot chocolate and talked for a while. Pradeep then took us next door to his home where we stayed for our time there. Pradeep and his wife looked after us all with kindness and graciousness. It was a joy and a blessing to be in their home. Dennis remembered the Mission Awareness tour in 2016 and how all the members of that tour were also lovingly cared for by this family.

The next morning Pradeep took us all to visit the school where he has been faithfully teaching for many years. It was an amazing and delightful experience. We were greeted as honoured guests. The school band played for us as we walked into the gate and flower petals were thrown over us, as well as beautiful garlands being given to each of us. There was a wonderful programme prepared for us:

many different traditional Indian dances and songs were beautifully performed. One little boy was incredible. He must have only been about 6 years old, all dressed up in traditional Indian clothing for that region, and he danced with such talent and skill that everyone was delighted. The children had also made projects to display the work they had been doing in class - models of the water cycle, how renewable energy can be used in farming, how the human heart works and many other things. The standard of these displays was very impressive. We walked around the playground genuinely admiring the work they had done and recognizing how much time and effort and skill goes into putting together functioning models.



The local press was present and our visit was favourably reported in the press the next day. One of the senior girls was the MC of the procedures; she led the programme very capably and with excellent English. Later Pradeep told us that this girl was one of the top students of the school and that she had won a government scholarship to study at a prestigious university. The school is growing and the results it is achieving are very pleasing.



ऑस्ट्रेलिया से पधारे अतिथियों के बीच में हुआ कार्यक्रम संपन्न

हरिश्रीमि ब्यूजल (Chhapara) और डुइंग किए (Lakhnadon) सभी अभिभावकगण जिन्होंने परिश्रम करके अपने बच्चों को कार्यक्रम की तैयारी कराये, और वी सभी विद्यार्थी जो उपस्थित हुए, सभी को इस अविस्मरणीय कार्यक्रम की सफलता के लिए मिशन स्कूल शाला परिवार हार्दिक बधाई और धन्यवाद देता है।



In the afternoon we drove out to Lakhnadon. Now I had heard of Lakhnadon and the work that has been going on there for many years, and briefly visited about thirty years ago (!), but it was very interesting to actually be there again and see it afresh. Lakhnadon and Chhapara are both typical Indian towns, narrow streets, little shops lining the roads selling fruit and vegetables and ready-made food, stray dogs and cows wandering around, chaotic traffic, rubbish and dirt, brightly dressed women, lots of energy and friendliness and curiosity.

The school in Lakhnadon is a Hindi medium school but since COVID they have been struggling to build up their numbers. More and more Indian families prefer to send their children to English medium schools as they feel their children will have better opportunities in the future. The school board was re-evaluating future pathways for this school. The Lakhnadon congregation is having a new building constructed on the same site as the old one, so we saw that work in progress.

We went to the hospital, once a thriving and important building in the centre of the town, but now quite rundown and in need of new equipment and many repairs. EHA (The Emmanuel Hospital Association) manages the hospital and is hoping to build it up so that it can be a place of help and healing once again. We were able to visit the Director of EHA in Delhi, Dr Sarah Matthews, and hear about the plans to reconstruct the hospital. Two young doctors worked there - practically on call all the time! One night one would be on duty, and the next night the other. It was quite moving to see their commitment to their work in very difficult circumstances.

At the end of our visit to these places we came back and had afternoon tea with Samit and his lovely family. They shared some of their struggles and challenges and joys with us. We went home to Pradeep's house where we had family prayers with his family and his brother's family, sitting on chairs in the lounge room and enjoying a time of fellowship together. Pradeep's family do this every day - what a lovely custom it is.

The next day my husband and I left Chhapara and continued our travels in India. Brothers Vishal and Santosh kindly accompanied us to Nagpur airport. On the way we visited a new building that has just been constructed on the outskirts of the city where Rev Anand Sayyam teaches and pastors a small group of people who have joined the PFC-CI. Our trip to Chhapara and Lakhnadon and Nagpur was certainly one of the highlights of our time in India.

From Pradeep-

A team from DVN in the Netherlands, along with two Indian members, visited the Mission School Chhapara and Lakhnadon in November, 2023. They were impressed by the infrastructure development, enhanced quality of education, and improved administrative skills and systems in both of the schools. However, they were bit concerned about Lakhnadon school's future. One of the team members, connected the school authority with the Evangelical Teachers' Fellowship (ETF), and the General Secretary of ETF visited the schools and conducted a one-day workshop on the theme "The joy of teaching and learning." The teachers enjoyed the workshop and requested the same to continue for the next few years. Consequently, a teachers' training workshop is scheduled for 20-21 June, 2024.

Delegates from PCEA and FCoS visited Chhapara and Lakhnadon in the first few days of December 2023- after our Synod. Delegates from the FCoS had the opportunity to spend more time in Chhapara which allowed them to have more exposure to gospel and educational work in central India. Their longer stay paved the way for us to revive our relationship with FCoS.

5. Annie Soper School, Peru

No report received

San Andres (Lima, Peru)

Dr César Morales Campos, the Principal, wrote:

"As you may know, Peru is in the middle of a great political crisis.

Several demonstrations along the whole country are looking for the resignation of our president as well as the whole congress. This situation promotes not only uncertainty about the future but also fear, economic troubles and lack of some resources in some areas of the country. As a Christian school we are called to promote peace and trust in God in the middle of these times of distress.

There are some prayer points that I would like to be considered:

- New teachers. We need English native speaker teachers who can teach topics according to our international curriculum. Mainly we need secondary (lower and upper) school teachers but we may accept primary teachers as well. We pray God may call some Christian teachers that can see our school as a short term mission field.

- Technology. We need to buy new computers for our laboratories. We need around US\$ 40,000 in order to buy 30 new computers. Several of them are more than 8 years old. Please help us, praying God may provide for this project."

Please continue to keep the school and the political situation in Peru in prayer, that the Lord will bestow His mercy.

6. International Mission to Jewish People (Ian from Rahel Landrum)

7 October 2023 marks a horrific day when 1,200 Israelis were massacred and 240 women, children and elderly were taken hostages into Gaza, some of them still not released and some feared dead. It not only a tragedy in Israel, still ongoing, but had rippled effects on the Jewish community worldwide. As a result two major new realities changed the way we share the Gospel with Jewish people.

A JEWISH COMMUNITY IN MOURNING AND UNCERTAINTY- Many Jewish people in Australia have family and friends who either were killed or kidnapped and they are mourning loved ones. Five days after 7 October, we did an Outreach at the 'Mind Body Spirit' festival with a booth called 'Sar Shalom Pathway' (The Prince of Peace pathway), talking with people about the Peace Maker and offering prayers. Almost all the Jewish people we talked with said they had family in Israel and they were concerned about them. One young woman, said she is in constant communication with her family, she sends money but she feels helpless in the current situation, she doesn't know what else she can do. Rahel told her, that prayer is powerful and she prayed for her. She instantly felt better. Another Jewish lady we met the year before, wasn't interested in our message earlier but this time, after she told us she has family in Israel, she said: 'Tell me again what the Peace Maker is all about?'. Another Israeli who had friends who got killed at the music festival in Israel, when he heard about our message, said: 'We certainly need a Peace Maker!'

DEALING WITH ANTI-SEMITISM- In the aftermath of 7 October, came solidarity with Israel. It lasted a day. What came afterwards was intensifying waves of anti-Semitism into the heart of the Jewish community. A Jewish woman told us she heard about the anti-Semitism her grandmother experienced in the Holocaust, she didn't know she would live through the same in current times. An unsaved Jewish couple who live on the North shore and whom we invited to our home for a Hanukkah event, said they didn't want to come because of anti-Semitism in our area, the Eastern suburbs of Sydney. A Jewish couple told us they usually had their Hanukkah menorah in the window every year. This year they didn't feel safe doing so and had it hidden inside the home. So we do a lot of prayers these days with unsaved Jewish people (some of them more open and initiating/asking for prayers), listen to their stories, show compassion and connect with the Jewish community and especially Israelis through different venues.

2024 OUTREACH- We are planning to have a street outreach in August this year. Some of our colleagues from Israel and other places are scheduled to come participate with us in this outreach. As a result of pervading anti-Semitism, Jewish people are not wanting to identify themselves as such in public places. Please pray with us for wisdom to know how to reach out to them with the message of salvation and hope in Jesus at this event and throughout this coming year.

Mission awareness tour to India.

A tour planned for the end of 2023- from 16 to 30 December 2023- was cancelled due to various factors.

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 notes with appreciation the visit of Dennis and Elizabeth Muldoon to a number of centres of the PFC-CI following the first synod of the PFC-CI
3. Synod approve the gift of \$2000 towards the costs of the first synod of the PFC-CI
4. Synod approve the diaconal aid of \$2000 to the church in Manipur, India
5. Synod approve a gift of \$1500 towards the diaconal ministry of Women for Mission within the PFC-CI
6. Synod agree to Mark Hamilton joining the Missions Committee.

7. Synod thanks the congregations that held mission events during the year and urges all congregations to consider inviting mission workers in person, or online, to give an update of their ministry, and field questions from church folk. Presbyteries could assist or coordinate.

8. Synod adopt the Missions Committee Budget 2024/25 and expresses its general agreement with the estimates for this period.

Missions Relief Fund										
2024										
MRF Working Account	Budget 2023		Actual 2023		Budget 2024		Estimate 2025			
Balance 1 Jan		8749		8749		5577			3177	
Income Investments	5000			5049		5000			5000	
Other (Donation congs)				1259						
Transfer from Equities Ac	5000			0						
Income	10000	18749		6308	15057	5000	10577		5000	8177
Expenditure										
Lakhnadon Christian Hospital		2000		2000		2000			2000	
Lakhnadon Mission School		800		800		800			800	
Chhapara Mission School		1000		1000		1000			1000	
Annie Soper Scholarships		1200		1200		1200			1200	
Dr Dickson Delhi		1300		1300		1300			1300	
Mukti child sponsorships*3		1000		1000		1000			1000	
Manipur relief				2000						
Fees and Charges		100		180		100			100	
Total Expenditure		7400	7400	9480	9480	7400	7400		7400	7400
Closing Balance			11349		5577		3177			777

Equities Account	Budget 2023		Actual 2023		Budget 2024		Estimate 2025			
Balance 1 Jan		127240		127240		130087			135087	
Income Revaluation of shares & Managed Funds	0	0		1673		5000	5000		5000	5000
Income (Gain on sale M/Fund)	0			1174		0	0		0	0
Total	0	127240		2847	130087	5000	135087		5000	140087
		254480					270174			
Expenditure										
Transfer to McSwan Working Account	0			0		0			0	
Revaluation	0			0		0			0	
Total	0	0		0	0	0	0		0	0
Closing Balance 31 Dec		127240			130087		135087			140087
Total Funds Held McSwan Missions Relief Fund										
		138589			135664		135087			140864
Net Movement from previous year		0			-2985					

INTER-CHURCH RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Members: R. Tso (Convener 2017), G.D. Ball, J.Forbes, A. Miranda, J.Klazinga

In this past year, the committee has communicated by emails and met 2 times through Google Meet.

1. The International Conference of Reformed Churches

The 11th General Meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches will be held, the Lord willing, in Korea, in October 2026. We hope to bring forth a proposed deliverance for the next Synod.

The Convener sought to ascertain the current progress of the regional conference which is scheduled to be held in Bali, Indonesia. Sadly, there has been no reply to the enquiries regarding this matter.

2. CHURCHES WITH WHOM WE HAVE FRATERNAL RELATIONS.

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

Regrettably, due to budgetary constraints and the availability of personnel in the build-up to their own General Assembly, they are unable to send a fraternal delegate to our Synod. However, they hope to have a short video recorded from the moderator to address our Synod.

We received an invitation to their 2024 General Assembly, from the 20th to 23rd May in Edinburgh. Rev. Robin Tso has been appointed by the committee to represent our Synod to attend their General Assembly and to bring greetings on our behalf.

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

We are delighted to welcome Rev Kenneth MacDonald (retired) to our Synod.

We received an invitation to their 2024 General Assembly, from the 20th to 23rd May in Partick, Glasgow. Rev. Robin Tso has been appointed by the committee to represent our Synod to attend their General Assembly and to bring greetings on our behalf.

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

Regrettably, they are unable to send a delegate to our Synod but have sent us a letter with greetings to our Synod (attached to the standing reports.)

We have received an invitation to their 2024 Synod, from 7th and 13th September at the Reformed Church of Christchurch. This matter was discussed within the committee, and we would recommend the Rev John Forbes to attend their Synod and to bring greetings on our behalf.

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

We have received an invitation to their General Assembly, from 19th and 25th September 2024, to be held on the campus of Seattle Pacific University. This matter was discussed within the committee, and we would recommend the Rev Jim Klazinga to attend their Synod and to bring greetings on our behalf.

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

We are delighted to welcome Rev. Graeme Hart of the McKinnon RPCA, to our Synod through electronic means.

a proposal was received from the RPCA to “convene a gathering of representatives from Psalm-Singing Reformed Churches in Australia to consider how we might better express our unity and common convictions.” Appreciation was expressed for Mr Stewart taking the initiative in this matter and for the eagerness to foster closer relationships. It was agreed to propose a meeting with only RPCA and PCEA representatives initially to discuss the proposal further.

An invitation was sent to us, concerning their upcoming Annual Presbytery meeting on the 11th of May, at the McKinnon RPCA church. The Lord willing, Rev Andres Miranda hopes to represent us at their meeting.

2:6 The Australian Free Church

Since last Synod, the committee has been in dialogue with the Australian Free Church. Rev. Robin Tso was invited to conduct a communion season in the Chadstone congregation in October last year. During that period, he was able to have an extended discussion with the representatives of the AFC. Following some discussion within the committee, some written questions were prepared for the AFC to answer, to clarify their positions. The committee hopes to organise another online meeting with the AFC representatives to further our discussion, arising from the written communication.

It is worth noting that since our last Synod, there has been an increase of pulpit supply and communication between our churches. We are grateful to Almighty God for the mutual support and fellowship at the more local level.

2:7 The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland (RPCI). 2006.

2:8 The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA). 2008.

2:9 The Presbyterian Free Church of India (PFCI). 2010.

We are grateful that Rev Dennis Muldoon was able to represent us at their first Synod meeting last year. The report is found in addendum 1.

2:10 The Southern Presbyterian Church of Australia (SPCA). 2014.

We are delighted to welcome Rev Tom Budgen, of the Launceston SPC, to our Synod.

2:11 The Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA). 2014.

We have received an invitation to their General Assembly, from 20th and 25th May 2024 at the Oasis Church in Brisbane, Queensland. This matter was discussed within the committee, and we would recommend the Rev Jim Klazinga to attend their Synod and to bring greetings on our behalf.

2:12 The United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA). 2015.

3. CHURCHES WITH WHOM WE HAVE CONTACT.

3:1 The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia (EPCA).

3.2 Presbyterian Church of Australia

Rev. Robin Tso represented us at their last General Assembly in September 2023, in Hurstville, and was warmly welcomed by the Moderator. Though there was no provision for addressing the General Assembly, delegates were able to contribute to their discussion. There was some discussion on the definition of eldership and deacons, along with the associated ordination vows. The General Assembly itself was a good avenue to communicate with other denominations also.

Following the attendance and some participation at the General Assembly, the Committee received a request from the PCA, regarding having closer interchurch relations through a memorandum of understanding. It is currently being reviewed and considered by the committee, and we hope to be able to meet with PCA Relations With Other Churches in due time. We hope to report back to Synod 2025 regarding this matter.

3.3 Associated Presbyterian Churches of Scotland. 2018

Rev. Robin Tso hopes to meet with the representatives of the APC during his deputation in Scotland.

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 approves Rev John Forbes, be sent to attend the RCNZ 2024 Synod at the Reformed Church of Christchurch, and agrees to contribute appropriately to the economy airfare and other associated travel expenses.
3. Synod approves Rev Jim Klazinga, be sent to attend the OPC 2024 General Assembly, and agrees to contribute appropriately to the economy airfare and other associated travel expenses.
4. Synod approves Rev Andres Miranda, be sent to attend the RPCA 2024 Presbytery meeting.
5. Synod approves Rev Jim Klazinga, be sent to attend the CRCA 2024 Synod.
6. Synod commits to the Lord, the Committee's ongoing discussions with the Australian Free Church in seeking a closer relationship between our denominations.

Addendum

Report on first Synod of the Presbyterian Free Church-Central India

Dennis K. Muldoon

I was privileged and blessed to be part of the first synod of the Presbyterian Free Church of Central India (PFC-CI) held in Jabalpur 29-30 November 2023. I attended as a delegate of the PCEA, and my wife, Elizabeth, was also welcomed by the synod. We first heard of this synod when brothers Samit and Pradeep were at our PCEA synod in May 2023. They spoke of the opening of a new centre in village Kahani, and of four Reformed Presbyterian centres in Maharashtra wanting to join the PFC-CI. Moreover, men who gained a Hindi Diploma in Theology some years ago were sent out to make disciples; PCEA awareness tour participants met these men in 2016.

So it was that, in answer to the prayers of many, God in his grace gathered some thirty pastors and elders for this inaugural synod of the PFC-CI. The venue was the XIDAS, a Roman Catholic college in Jabalpur. Elizabeth and I were comfortably accommodated, after working out the hot-water system! The food was tasty Indian food: rice, chapatti, dahl, and curry. At the close of the synod we continued on the road to visit Chhapara, Lakhnadon, and Nagpur.



I was asked to preach the opening message of the synod, a message from 1Thessalonians 5:12-15, in which I highlighted, 'Leaders and their duties', 'Members and their duties' and, 'A functioning

fellowship'. Brother Pradeep Kumar led in the singing of Psalms 100 and 133 in Hindi. Pradeep has been busy translating the Psalms into Hindi, and adopting new tunes such that, 'the Psalms become more meaningful to modern worshippers'.

Pradeep spoke of the history of the PFC-CI, extending back to 1846 when Rev Stephen Hislop came from the Church of Scotland. The mission school in Chhapara began in 1895, and medical work in 1925. The hospital in Lakhnadon began in 1936. Dr Helen Ramsay went from Australia in 1955, and Nurse Heather Beaton soon after. 'Adopted Aussies', Flora Neil and Barbara Schmidt also served in these centres. Rev Ian McKenzie established work in the city of Jabalpur, where two congregations are now flourishing. Rev Prakash Kumar was the first Indian pastor; he laboured with great love for the Lord and for the people from 1959 to 2003.



Pradeep unveiled a new logo for the PFCI-CI (pictured) featuring a shield, a burning bush, and olive leaves, symbols of God's protection, presence, peace, and promises. He also welcomed two delegates from the Free Church of Scotland, three from the Reformed Churches in South Africa, and myself from the PCEA. Two ethnic Indian brothers, Samuel Christian and Rajesh Kumar, were welcomed as ministers sent to India by the PCA in Melbourne and the Reformed Churches in South Africa respectively.

I was asked to be presiding officer, and called the role of the synod. Members came from the three presbyteries that had been established: Central Presbytery including Jabalpur, Lakhnadon and

Chhapara, Eastern Presbytery including Kahani, Khurpar, and Mungatola, and Southern Presbytery, taking in Nagpur and Deori from the state of Maharashtra. Of the 31 members, two were not present.

As presiding officer I called for nominations for moderator. Rev Samit Mishra was nominated and elected as the first moderator. Rev Vishal Praveen was elected secretary, and Rev Arpan Bali treasurer. Rev Bali was a member from the Presbyterian Reformed Church of India, which is led by Rev Hiralal Solanki. Discussion continues with regard to the relationship between these two bodies, but it was wonderful to see brothers from this organisation welcomed and included in this synod. It is hoped that they will soon make up a fourth presbytery of the PFC-CI.

The synod agreed to have the Westminster documents as their subordinate standard, and to draw up a handbook of orders and procedures. All members took a pledge to abide by these standards. The moderator of each presbytery presented a report to the synod. Central Presbytery is the largest, but the others are growing with their help and guidance. The Eastern Presbytery recently opened a new centre in Kahani, and hopes to construct a prayer hall on land purchased at Mungatola. Being in the adjoining state of Maharashtra, the Southern Presbytery asked for help to register the PFC-CI in this state; Rev Anand Sanyam from Nagpur is their moderator. Rev Solanki gave a report on the PRCI, telling of centres established in Bilha, Pune, Vasai, Jaipur and Nagpur. He is active in training and sending out workers to the harvest. I went to visit one such worker in Goa.

Samit gave a paper on Psalm singing and led in a discussion. Members who recently joined the PFC-CI were not very familiar with Psalm singing. Vishal presented a paper on LGBTQA+ and led in discussion. The treasurer presented his report, and there was also a report from the property committee. A highlight of the synod was the diaconal ministry report, presented by the leaders of the Women for Mission group. Five women from this group spoke of identifying 70 disabled people in Chappara and Lakhnadon, visiting these people and helping them avail of government benefits- five were able to get a wheel chair. Disabled people are usually hidden away in India, so the friendship and help of these women comes as a great blessing- and a spiritual blessing it is hoped. Local government leaders and the press have seen and reported on this work.

Women for Mission hope to extend their ministry into income generation activities, for women in particular. So far, training has been given in soap making. Training in other income generation activities is planned, with help from the synod. Elizabeth had good fellowship with these women during the synod, and was asked to pray for them. Diaconal ministry like that of this women's group is encouraging to the women themselves, and to the whole church. It is a wonderful way to reach out to the community in the name of Jesus.

Knowing the history of this church in India and the involvement of PCEA over many years, we rejoice with our brothers and sisters in the PFC-CI on the occasion of their first synod, and pray the Lord to bless them with strength in the face of opposition, with knowledge and unity in the Lord Jesus Christ, and with the necessary resources, to establish more and more centres across the great land of India. As was said at the close of the synod, we pray that the PFC-CI will soon become the PFC of all India!



PRESBYTERY REPORTS

NORTHERN PRESBYTERY REPORT

Moderator: Rev. Jim Klazinga **Clerk:** Rev. John Forbes

	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 housebound but not including visitors passing through.									Baptisms	Sunday School classes/pupils	Youth midweek participants
		2022	+	-	2023	2022	2023	>4	4-11	12-18	19-30	31-45	46-64	65+	Total				
Brisbane	2/3	49	3	5	47	30-50										1	0	Varies	
Northern Rivers	3/2	33	2	2	33	40	45	1	8	7	4	6	2	22	50	4	1/10	N/A	
Hastings	2/1	35	9	4	40	70	75	5	16	11	7	11	13	25	88	9	2/28	N/A	

Brisbane

We give thanks to God for His continuing purposes being worked out in and through our congregation during 2023.

Services: Services were held most Sundays at our Emma Street building at 10 am and 5 pm. The Lord's Supper was celebrated six times. The congregation has been blessed by the consistent presence of visitors at our worship services, some of whom have been attending regularly. The livestreaming of services continues, for use by those unable to attend the services in person. We continue to accommodate senior members needing to join in worship via their phones.

Membership: We rejoiced with Hainian and Naomi Yu, who were married on 1 April; and with Weylin and Irene Morrison, who were married on 20 May.

In March, we bid farewell to Chris and Joanne Freebairn, with their three children, as they moved to Canada.

In April, we welcomed back as members Joel and Anca Scot, who came to us with their three children: David, Benjamin, and James. James was baptized on 30 April. The Scot family left for Europe at the end of June and are likely to have an extended stay there. However, they are keeping their membership with our church, as it is their plan to eventually return to the Brisbane area as their permanent home.

The session met with Jedidiah Hitchens on 30 May, and upon hearing his profession of faith, admitted him to communicant membership in our congregation.

In December, we bid farewell to Ben and Zara Saljooghi, who had become members earlier in the year, and who moved to Maclean and became members of the Northern Rivers congregation.

Also in December, we bid farewell to Stephen and Jessie Smith, who moved to Sydney, but who continue to be members in our congregation.

We rejoiced with Ben and Claire Klazinga for the birth of their son Nathan Oliver, born on 3 November. He was baptized on 21 January.

Mrs. Eleanor Hanna was called home to be with the Lord on Friday, 10 November. A graveside ceremony was held for her on the 16th of November. We continue to pray for her husband Wes, retired minister of the congregation and current elder.

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 again stands ready to serve as an assessor elder, but we did not need to call on him in 2023.

Deacons' Court: The Deacons' Court is made up of the pastor, the two other elders, and the three deacons. Keith Schmidt serves as clerk, while Stewart Carswell serves as treasurer, with Micah Klazinga being the assistant treasurer. Thanks to the generous giving of our members, our contributions continue to be more than our expenses. In mid-2023, we received with thankfulness an anonymous donation which was given for the purpose of allowing us to purchase padded chairs. The old wooden pews are being stored under the church.

We continue to maintain a Diaconate Fund, which is available to help members and others who find themselves confronted with a financial emergency. In the latter half of 2023, we began collecting monthly offerings for the Maintenance Fund, in anticipation of eventually needing to have the outside of the church painted.

Education and Fellowship: Our Sunday morning pre-service psalm singing class met during the school year. The Sunday School no longer has regular students, but the teachers remain ready to teach any visiting children that may wish to attend a Sunday School class.

One fortnightly mid-week Bible Study met on zoom, making use of online study courses offered by Ligonier Ministries. On the alternate weeks, a group met together to discuss marriage, making use of the book "Marriage," by Paul David Tripp.

A number of young adults meet regularly and conduct their own studies.

The minister led the 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.

Church Camp: The Annual Family Camp was held in December at Lennox Head in NSW. A blessed time was experienced by the members and visitors attending. Rev Andrew Stewart of the Geelong Reformed Presbyterian Church spoke on the theme, "The Healthy Conscience."

Northern Rivers

Services continued in Maclean throughout 2023, both morning and evening. The services are livestreamed via YouTube and on the phone for those unable to attend. These facilities remain a vital link with those who are housebound and in nursing homes, of whom there is an increasing number. Wednesday morning Bible studies continue with a time of fellowship prior to the study. We concluded our 2022 study of Isaiah in 2023 and took up 1 Thessalonians. At the conclusion of each course of study we utilised online material from Ligonier. We viewed and discussed lectures from Joel Beeke on Assurance, and then Robert Godfrey on The Lord's Day. These were very well received and provided a respite from our usual format. Westminster Confession classes continue on Thursday night in the church library, the participants eager to learn theology.

We continue to rejoice in the steady growth of the congregation through new members and adherents. We received two new members in 2023, Mr Carl and Mrs Tenielle Weedon by profession of faith. Carl was baptised, and their three children, Eli, Mason and Olivia at the commencement of a Lord's Supper season.

The Annual PCEA Youth Camp took place over the Easter long weekend in April. The speaker was the Rev. George Ball who spoke on the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Again, the camp was well attended and well received, especially as a feature is to integrate the camp with congregational worship, thus giving the congregation the blessing of meeting with young people from around the denomination. The "mini camp", a success from the previous year for those under 15, was held later in the year in July. We are thankful to the Lord for John and Judy Greensill's hospitality in using the facilities at their farm again this year for the camps.

Rev. Ken MacLeod, a retired minister of the PCEA and Free Church of Scotland, died in Maclean on 2nd May, 2023. Mr Macleod was a gracious, warm, friendly and active member of the congregation in his retirement at the Bethesda units. A memorial Minute for him is recorded in Synod records detailing his long service in the PCEA and Free Church. Mr James Ross, a member of the congregation, died in June.

Mr Zach Dotson, PCEA candidate for the ministry, was with us from October to the beginning of December on CPS placement. He preached a number of times, conducted some of the mid-week meetings and visited with various members of the congregation. It was a great pleasure to have Zach, Wilma and the family with us for these 8 weeks and a positive encouragement to the congregation to observe men taking up the call to work with us.

We continue to rejoice that the Maclean Manse Op-Shop raises substantial funds to support the work of the Lower Clarence Christian Education Association (LCCEA). In turn, the LCCEA makes a donation to the Northern Rivers Congregation.

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.

Hastings River

Services and activities - The congregation meets for public worship at 10am and 4pm every Lord's Day. The morning services continue to be better attended but it has been a delight to see an increased commitment to the afternoon services. The third Sunday of every month there is a 7pm worship service in Kindee. Two midweek meetings for prayer and study are held on Wednesdays at 10am and 7pm. Other regular congregational activities are the congregational lunch (fifth Sunday of the month), the Sunday School outing in December, and our elder Glen Hamilton and Sonja usually host a bonfire at their place during the year.

Sunday School and Youth - The Sunday School is well attended. A junior and senior class are led by David Gullick and John Forbes respectively, with assistance from others from time to time. A number of the young people received certificates for memorisation of Scripture, Psalms and Catechisms following the set work recommended by the PCEA Youth and Fellowship committee.

People – It was a particular delight to have nine baptisms during the year, with three families presenting their children for baptism (eight boys and one girl). There were also nine new adult communicant members during the year though, sadly, four (two couples with children) have withdrawn from membership again having chosen to worship elsewhere.

Finance and Property – We are thankful to the Lord that regular givings have increased so that ordinary expenses were covered without using reserves, as had been necessary in previous years. A few small upgrades were completed during the year. The congregation also has funds available from sale of land in 2022 that is earmarked for additional projects which it is hoped to progress in the year ahead.

We thank the Lord for continuing to sustain the life and fellowship of the Hastings River congregation and pray that, with these gracious benefits, He may also give growth in grace and spiritual fruit for His glory and honour.

CENTRAL PRESBYTERY REPORT

Moderator: Rev. Robin Tso **Clerk:** Mr Ian J Miller

The Central Presbytery held two regular meetings during the year. At the second meeting a visitation of Hawkesbury-Nepean congregation was conducted. A presbyterial visitation to the Manning congregation was conducted after having considered correspondence from the Manning Session. Following are the congregational reports submitted on 5 March 2024 when, *inter alia*, congregational reports were presented.

Manning Report.

Rev George Ball concluded his ministry on 31st December 2023 with a small farewell over morning tea on that day. George was thanked for his preaching ministry, and he and Rhoda were thanked for their fellowship amongst us. A token of thanks was given with the church car being transferred to George as a gift. There are three elders on Session: Clive Alley, Peter Smith and Trevor Leggott. We continue with services by telephone, as well as on-line live services. We have held our regular communion services four times during the year on the months with a 5th Sunday.

Wednesday morning fortnightly, and Thursday evening weekly Bible studies continued through the year. With the vacancy we expect to continue with the Wednesday meeting only, but have it each

week. Our weekly prayer meetings, half an hour before our morning service, are led by Peter Smith. We plan to continue a prayer morning on the Saturday before our regular Communion Services. Our weekly average attendance continues at about 48 persons for both services on the Lord's Day, with a number of elderly, and others who might listen in as well, using our telephone and live-stream services. In November we met with the Central Presbytery to express our grief and concern over matters relating to things that have taken place in Southern Presbytery with the Knox and All Nations congregations.

Overall, there is a good spirit of fellowship amongst the congregation, exemplified by a really good get together again on Australia Day. Other similar events are being planned. We recognize the need to bring others into our fellowship and seek the Lord in how best to address this, and lay a foundation for the future. The elders generally meet monthly and look to maintain contact and visit members as regularly as mutually convenient. This coming year we plan to visit each member in their homes, with all elders attending wherever possible.

The Deacons, with the Session, are Paul Dyson, Marshall Reed, Alistair Weber, and David Wilson. The Deacons meet every second month, usually on the last Tuesday of the month at 7.30pm. Deacons seek to keep a close eye to maintain church property and help with any needs that arise amongst those in our fellowship. There are a number of minor works that need attending to, and these are kept on our agenda to be done as time permits. The Tinonee church has been reroofed and we plan to do some repair work on the brickwork pointing. The shed at Cedar Party Road has proved a great asset for our garage sales to raise funds for mission. The congregation continues to give good financial support for the ministry.

For over 100 years there has been a strong interest in mission through what is now called the Manning Mission Society. This year over \$8000 was raised for distribution to a number of different agencies.

Primary School Special Religious Education is supported with Young Lee teaching at three Taree primary schools. Young has now been teaching for seven years and persevered in what is often a challenging environment.

Communicant members	34		
Adherents	10	Children	1
Typical Lord's Day attendance:	Last Year	48	this year 48

Hunter Report.

The congregation was challenged, comforted and encouraged by the preaching ministry of Rev Tso, supplemented by Rev Ball and two local office bearers, Mr Miller and Mr Barnes. Rev Tso's Lord's Day morning sermon series were based on Psalm 27, the Book of Daniel and the High Priestly Prayer of Christ as found in John 17. The evening sermon series was mainly devoted to an exegesis of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. During 2023 some 5000 views of sermons on YouTube were noted.

Other significant ministries of the Scriptures included the mid-week Bible study/Prayer meeting, the Cardiff All Ages Sunday School and counselling of individuals and couples.

The mid-week Bible study used Matthias study booklets as an aid. A study of Romans 11-18 was completed, and a study of Deuteronomy is ongoing. Fervent prayers were directed to the Throne of grace for many people and matters such as our persecuted brethren worldwide, the furtherance of the glorious gospel through our sister congregations and various missions.

The Cardiff All Ages Sunday School comprised of three classes: infants and primary and one adult class. Psalm singing practice was conducted prior to class lessons. We are grateful for the Lord's provision of willing and capable teachers of the classes. Rev Tso led a very helpful series of studies regarding 'Scotland's Forgotten Foundations' using a packaged study series of videos and question sheets. A few of the local office bearers led studies during Rev Tso's absences on other duties or leave.

Informative and helpful mission presentations were made by representatives of the Hinglish Church, India; Middle Eastern Reformed Fellowship and the Mitamisiyi Orphanage, Kenya.

Whilst the overall communicant membership diminished slightly, we were pleased to admit a young adult to membership and the Rev Tso conducted three infant baptisms: Zara Oringo, Esther Tamata and Miriam O'Dell.

We are thankful for our gracious God's bountiful blessings throughout 2023 and can rely upon "Jehovah Jireh" to provide for our needs as we continue with the commission from Christ to make disciples to the glory of His name.

Statistics. Members: 51(2022) 48 (2023) **Adherents:** 17(2022) 20 (2023) **children:** 18 (2022) 20 (2023) **young people:** 2 (2022) 2 (2023)

Average attendance at Morning worship: 55 Evening worship: 50

Minister's Leave entitlement used in 2023: 5 weeks.

St George's Report.

In 2023 St Georges congregation was able to provide three worship services each week. After Rev John McCallum announced his resignation in December 2022, he continued to preach until the last Lords' Day on 30th January 2023.

We are grateful to Rev Robin Tso as Interim Moderator at St Georges for arranging pulpit supply during the year and to the ministers from various churches supplying the pulpit. The office bearers took the services when there were no ministers available. Online services continued.

At all services we had our regular worshippers, many of whom travelled long distances. We also had overseas, interstate and intrastate visitors attending the worship services. We celebrated the Lord's Supper twice in 2023. These were conducted by the Rev. Robin Tso.

Our website has still played a major part in attracting visitors as well as the promotion of our standards, form of worship and our location in the city. Many visitors, if they returned to Sydney came back to worship with us because of St Georges' ideal location in Sydney CBD.

The visitors from overseas comprised mainly businesspeople, students, tourists, and those attending various conferences in the city.

Repairs and restoration work preparations for the steeple have been progressing slowly. Roof replacement and fence repair are also included, and we hope to begin stage 2 of repairs and restoration work in early 2024. In 2023 plans were started for renovation of the Manse at Bay Road , Waverton and some are now under way.

The congregation continues in good spirits generally and we are thankful to God for His graciousness to us in providing the means whereby we can gather for public worship.

Statistics:

- 1. Communicant membership - 29**
Adults. 65 Adherents- 11
Children- 4 Young people- 1
- 2. Typical Lord's Day attendance - 70**

Hawkesbury-Nepean Report.

The past year had its encouragements and its sorrows. The Word was faithfully proclaimed at two services each Lord's Day with our minister preaching on portions of the Psalms, the book of 2 Samuel, early chapters of Mark and 1 Thessalonians. Sunday School and Bible Classes are held prior

to the morning service in the hall, whilst a Tongan language fellowship meeting is conducted in the church building.

Of special encouragement was an outreach meeting organised with Creation Ministries International (Dr Tas Walker) in July. The congregation provided a dinner beforehand and supper later. The hall was full and the speaker engaged well with the many young people who attended. New adherents commenced with us during the year, with one young couple joining in membership. We do ask the Lord of the harvest to raise up more spiritual leaders to labour at Mount Druitt for the ingathering and building up of precious souls in this needy part of Western Sydney where there is much nominal Christianity.

Two of the saints were called to their eternal Home, one being former elder Mr Sekona Latu. Sekona, and Lupe in the Walter family, died full of faith and ready to be with Christ. During the year two of our faithful members were diagnosed with serious cancer and treatment is ongoing. A special evening of prayer was held to intercede for them and this was a blessed time. Regular visitation was carried out by the elders and others to the sick and elderly, and to nursing homes.

Statistics: Membership: 36 Adherents: 15 Children and young people: 26
Average attendance at Morning worship: 40 Evening worship: 8

SOUTHERN PRESBYTERY REPORT

Moderator: Rev. Dr Dennis Muldoon **Clerk:** Dr Donald Ramsay

Congregation	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 housebound but not including visitors passing through.								Baptisms	Sunday School classes/pupils		Youth midweek partn.	
			2022	+	-	2023	Deaths	2022	2023	<4	4-11	12-18	19-30	31-45	45-64	65+	Total					
All Nations	0	0	68	0	68	0	0	137	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Carrum Downs	2	0	15	0	0	15	0	25	20	1	3	4	7	3	7	7	32	0	0	0	0	
Geelong	1	0	9	2	0	11	0	10	10	0	0	0	0	0	3	11	14	0	0	0	0	
Knox	0	0	19	0	11	8	0	27	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Narre Warren	2	0	18	0	4	14	0	32	25	1	0	0	2	3	9	11	26	1	0	0	0	
Ulverstone	1	1	23	3	0	26	0	37	35	3	2	3	9	5	7	8	37	1	2	6	15	
Southern Pres	6	1	152	5	83	74	0	268	90	5	5	7	18	11	26	37	109	2	2	6	15	

The Southern Presbytery is pleased to advise that licencing trials for ministry candidate Mr Zachary Dotson have been scheduled for Tuesday 7 May 2024, prior to the commencement of the annual Synod meeting.

ALL NATIONS

Public Statement

On 5th June 2023 the All Nations session issued a public statement which purported to overturn Synod's deposition of Rowland Ward and to reinstate him as a PCEA minister. It also claimed authority to install a new session for the Knox congregation with Rowland Ward as interim moderator and Tut Yoa as an assessor. The public statement was written and co-signed by Rowland Ward. It caused untold damage in the Knox congregation where Rowland Ward proceeded to take control of the pulpit, ousting the lawful interim-moderator and session. Southern Presbytery declared the public statement to be an open act of rebellion against the courts of the PCEA and required the All Nations session to withdraw it, which they refused to do.

Departure of members

Unknown to Presbytery the All Nations session called a congregational meeting for 24th September 2023 at which the consent of communicant members was sought for the creation of a new church with a new constitution. The congregation voted unanimously for the proposal. The session then met to appoint Rowland Ward as Secretary of the new church, instructing him to register it on their behalf as a legal business entity. Thus, on 24th September 2023, the entire membership of All Nations withdrew as members and office-bearers of the PCEA and became members of a new church. The new church was registered with the ABR on 26th September 2023 as *All Nations Presbyterian Church of Melbourne Inc.*

It is deeply troubling that the minutes of the congregational meeting reveal that members were publicly told by the session that this schism was necessary because of unjust treatment against their congregation by Presbytery and Synod. This was untrue and slanderous. Neither Synod nor Presbytery had done anything against the All Nations congregation that could possibly be deemed unjust treatment. Similar false accusations of “demeaning and discriminatory” actions by Presbytery and Synod were recorded in the session minutes of 6th September 2023. It is extremely disappointing that the elders, with Rowland Ward present, would propagate such slander. God hates “a *false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren*” (Prov 6:19).

Appointment of new Session and Deacons' Court

The All Nations elders did not immediately inform Southern Presbytery of their action in forming a new church. There is reason to suspect that they determined to keep this secret so that Presbytery would look like the aggressor when it took action to resolve the rebellious stand-off that had been going on since June 2023. When Presbytery would act, as they knew it must, they would be ready to disseminate further public statements complaining about the terrible unfairness against them. This was, ultimately, what they did. All the time they hid the fact that they, themselves, had already formed a new church and left the PCEA. This secrecy was an inevitable source of confusion and discord in the wider church. It was not until 12th December 2023 that Southern Presbytery was finally informed that a voluntarily separation from the PCEA had been affected on 24th September 2023. This kind of secrecy and unilateralism had begun to be apparent in recent years and has been so detrimental to genuine Christian fellowship and oversight.

Unaware that a separation had already occurred, the Southern Presbytery met on 10th October 2023 with heavy hearts to take action over the rebellious public statement of 5th June 2023. Much patience had been exercised for more than four months. Presbytery's repeated requests for the statement to be withdrawn had met only stubborn refusal and slanderous counter accusations. Therefore, on 10th October 2023, Presbytery formally declared that the All Nations elders had, by their statement, wilfully and publicly rejected the oversight of the courts of the PCEA and removed themselves, and the members they represented, from membership. Desiring to be fair, and not wishing any further discord, Presbytery advised that, upon forming themselves as a new church entity, the seceders could transfer all remaining congregational funds to it. Special arrangements were made for Rev Tut Yoa, whose employment and benefits continued until the end of the year. From 10th October 2023 Presbytery appointed Rev George Ball as interim moderator, with Dr Donald Ramsay and Rev John Forbes, as assessors to act as a session and deacons' court to oversee all outstanding administrative affairs. Presbytery set a generous timeframe, to the end of the year, for books, records, accounts and registrations to be handed back to the PCEA.

Discovery of financial irregularities

Despite the reasonable time frame, the PCEA records were not handed back until well into January 2024. Having received these it soon became evident that there were a number of irregularities in the way that the financial affairs of the congregation had been administered.

Unlawful operation of accounts by Rowland Ward - On 1st February 2023 Synod deposed Rowland Ward from the ministry and declared that he was also to be removed as a bank signatory for the Carrum Downs, Knox, and All Nations accounts. In defiance of this ruling, Rowland Ward continued to act as the bank signatory for All Nations for the entirety of 2023.

Deposit of funds in private account - On 12th July 2023 Rowland Ward, with Tut Yoa as co-signatory, transferred \$39,000 out of the All Nations congregational account into a private bank account operated by himself and Anna Ward. This was done without the knowledge or consent of the deacons' court. He subsequently reported to the deacons' court that the action was taken to prevent the PCEA Trustees for Victoria from seizing control of the funds. The very suggestion was an unwarranted and slanderous insinuation against Presbytery and Synod. No such instruction to the Trustees was ever so much as contemplated. The action of Rowland Ward and Tut Yoa was unethical, irresponsible, and subversive of proper church order. Regular transfers between the private account and congregational account ensued but, by the year end, \$19k of congregational funds had not been repaid to the All Nations PCEA bank account.

Harmony Grant – In 2019 All Nations obtained a \$40k grant from Victorian Multicultural Affairs to run programs to promote inter-tribal harmony among South Sudanese immigrants. It is evident that, over the years, Tut Yoa, Isaac John and Jonah Kot all received personal payments from these funds to run events. Appropriate accounting records were not kept and there is no declaration of conflict of interest in the minute books when these office-bearers employed themselves to be recipients of the government funds that they were entrusted to administer. A balance of well over \$11k was disbursed in 2023 with almost no credible records to substantiate how the money was actually spent. For example:

13 th March 2023	\$3,000 to Tut Yoa – recorded as “TWY Youth Activities”.
27 th April 2023	\$800 to Isaac John - recorded as “I John – advance”.
26 th September 2023	\$6,000 to Tut Yoa – recorded as “Advance as requested by TWY”.

Furthermore, on 1st October 2023 amounts of \$925 and \$575 were retrospectively claimed to have been spent on food for the opening of the new building on 22/10/22 and the visit of the Premier on 21/4/23. The financial records clearly show that no such amounts were actually spent by the congregation on food. These public funds were administered in the name of the PCEA. Therefore, in winding up the outstanding legal and financial affairs of All Nations PCEA, the deacons' court may need to ensure that due attention is given to clarifying such matters with the relevant public bodies.

Non-cash-benefits – Synod ruled in 2017 (see minutes 17.36) that the maximum level of non-cash-benefits allowed for ministers was 40% of the minimum stipend. In defiance of this ruling, Mr Yoa received over 50% of his stipend as non-cash-benefits in 2023.

Building – As recently as 2022, an amount of \$96,459.11 was being held by Knox for All Nations, designated “All Nations Church Funds (ex Hamilton)”. An examination of historic records shows that funds of \$448,946.62 from the dissolution of the former Hamilton congregation were channelled to Knox for All Nations in 2008/09 primarily to purchase and extend the church at 91 Tiverton Drive. It appears from Synod minutes that the funds belonged to Synod and were never allocated to Knox or All Nations. A request from Rowland Ward for the Hamilton funds to be used for projects in the Southern Presbytery was denied. Synod minutes (07.31) reveal that Synod resolved instead “*to hold the total funds for the time being, purpose unspecified, accounting for them separately in Synod’s books of account*”. Somehow, upon sale of the Hamilton property, the funds were channelled to the Knox congregation rather than being delivered to the Synod treasurer. This is a very large amount of money to have never appeared in Synod's books. The PCEA may need to review its procedure for how the Trustees execute the sale of property in order to understand how this happened and to ensure that the same may not happen again.

Current state of the charge

All Nations PCEA is now a congregation with no members or local office-bearers as all former members left to form a new church. It is evident from correspondence received by the PCEA that there is no desire from the former members or their office-bearers to rebuild relations with the PCEA. All Nations PCEA therefore remains a legal entity. The assessors are working towards dissolving the entity but there are a number of administrative matters to be addressed as part of that process.

GEELONG

This year has seen the congregation encouraged and bolstered by the addition of two new members to the congregation. Nigel Cunningham has provided pulpit supply to the congregation for many years but this year he decided to attend services regularly and become a member of the congregation. Greg Cahill, a member and elder of the congregation in the 1980's, returned to the PCEA and also became a member this year. Both are valued members with a strong commitment to the reformed theology and practices of our denomination.

We have continued to receive sound preaching throughout the year from Rev. Alastair McEwen, Dr Martin Williams, Rev. Nigel Cunningham, and Mr Bert Stasse. Due to age (93) and health, Bert is unable to continue preaching regularly, but he is happy to fill in as needed. Health issues have affected many of our members and supply preachers, requiring Dr Donald Ramsay to preach more frequently. It is particularly encouraging to see our small congregation supporting each other through difficult times.

Our fellowship after the morning service continues to be a source of encouragement and edification. It is a time to discuss issues arising from the sermon and how they affect our lives. Spiritual matters of concern to individuals are also addressed in terms of biblical principles and practical applications. During these times of fellowship, we strive to encourage one another in godliness.

The financial needs of the church are small at this time of vacancy but the generosity of the congregation to God's work continues and grows. This allows us to support various mission work and the needs of other congregations. We continue to enjoy the blessing of a Christian family renting the manse and caring for the church grounds.

Our Interim Moderator, Rev. Andres Miranda, conducts the worship services when we celebrate the Lord's Supper each quarter. The needs of our members and the wider church are remembered in our corporate and personal prayers. The congregation is aware of the particular needs of Southern Presbytery and Synod as they deal with extremely difficult and challenging problems resulting from the disobedient and rebellious attitudes of the past leadership of the Knox and All Nations congregations.

We give thanks to our Lord and Saviour for His blessings and provision throughout the past year, and we pray that He will continue to direct our paths in the year ahead as we commit ourselves to His service in our daily lives.

KNOX

General

It is not possible to overstate the impact that has resulted from the actions of Dr Ward on the Knox congregation during 2023. The personal and spiritual lives of all members have been adversely affected, with many leaving the PCEA as a result.

Deposition of Dr Ward

On 1 February 2023, Dr Ward was found guilty of unruly and contumacious behaviour, and of actions that prejudice and subvert the good order of the Church. Dr Ward was deposed as a minister of the Gospel by Synod and barred from holding any office in the PCEA. He was also required to be removed as a signatory on all PCEA bank accounts. With no sign of repentance, Dr Ward protested Synod's decisions, and accused Synod and Southern Presbytery of procedural unfairness and violating the Word of God in deposing him. Following the public announcement listing the charges and judgement of the Synod regarding the libel, Dr Ward threatened to take legal action for defamation. In defiance of Synod's decision, Dr Ward continued as both the Knox and All Nations treasurer and remained a signatory of their bank accounts, refusing to relinquish control of the finances.

The Knox Session and congregation were completely unaware of Dr Ward's contumacious defiance of the church laws and courts that was the basis of the libel. His deposition resulted in considerable distress, especially among those with a strong personal loyalty to Dr Ward within Knox and in the All Nations congregation, where he alone is perceived as the congregation's benefactor. This distress was

compounded when Dr Ward began a propaganda campaign declaring his innocence and accusing Southern Presbytery and Synod of unfair treatment. This propaganda was sent to other congregations and denominations, locally, interstate, and overseas.

Special Visitation by Southern Presbytery

Southern Presbytery conducted a special visitation to the Knox congregation on 4 March 2023 to address the concerns of the congregation. Southern Presbytery assured the Session and congregation of its full support of the ongoing work at Knox. The congregation was invited to ask questions or raise concerns they may have over the reasons for Synod's decision concerning Dr Ward and its implications for the future of the congregation. However, those attending came with prepared written statements accusing Presbytery and Synod of unfair and improper processes with respect to the treatment of Dr Ward, echoing the protest of Dr Ward at Synod. The meeting was marred by frequent outbursts and interruptions and a refusal to listen to Presbytery's responses. The Moderator assured the congregation of Presbytery's and Synod's concern for the congregation, offering pastoral and practical support.

Challenging Synod's Decision

Unhappy with Synod's judgement, 17 members and adherents at Knox signed a memorial to Synod, challenging the lawfulness of its decision and the severity of the judgement in deposing Dr Ward. This galvanised their opposition to Synod, the highest court of the church, and all lower courts, perpetuating the matter while seeking support from other congregations. On 5 May 2023, Synod heard the memorial, presented by Mrs Ward, and after due consideration decided to uphold its judgement concerning Dr Ward's deposition, denied the prayers of the petition, and appointed two additional Assessors to strengthen Southern Presbytery and to write a pastoral letter to the memorialists.

Departure of Dr John Lee

Dr John Lee had ministered faithfully for more than a year at Knox and the congregation was anticipating that he would be accepted as a candidate for the ministry at Synod in May 2023, having been recommended by Southern Presbytery in March 2023. However, the tension and hostility that persisted within the congregation led Dr Lee to withdraw his application for candidacy, take extended leave, and then resign from the PCEA at the end of May 2023. With Dr Ward deposed and Dr Lee leaving the PCEA, Rev. Ian Hall was appointed Interim Moderator of Knox, and Dr Donald Ramsay and Jonah Kot were appointed Assessor Elders. As Interim Moderator, Mr Hall arranged pulpit supply for the morning services and led the afternoon services himself.

Attempted Coup

A statement from the All Nations Session on 5 June 2023, adhered to by Dr Ward and Mr Loudon, declared that the deposition of Dr Ward was contrary to the Word of God, attempted to reinstate Dr Ward as a minister and the Interim Moderator for Knox, and proposed to establish an alternative Knox Session which included Mr Yoa and at least one of the All Nations elders. On 11 June 2023, Dr Ward led the worship service at Knox, in direct defiance of Synod's decision. At the morning service, Dr Ward attempted to deny Mr and Mrs Hall and Mr and Mrs Buck entry to the church building by physically blocking them. Dr Ward, with the support of Rev. Tut Yoa, prevented Rev. Ian Hall from taking the pulpit to conduct worship, as had been announced two weeks prior. As a consequence, PCEA-authorized worship services effectively ceased at Knox. However, Dr Ward, with the consent of the Knox members, conducted worship services in his own name that day and for the next 5 weeks. Some members who witnessed these events left the PCEA immediately, but many continued to support Dr Ward and his rebellion against Synod, Southern Presbytery, and the lawful Knox Session.

Recovery of Knox Finances

On 12 July 2023, at the direction of the Synod Clerk, the Trustees for Victoria, and the Knox Deacons' Court, the Bendigo and Westpac banks removed Dr Ward and Rev. Tut Yoa as signatories on the Knox bank accounts and gave the lawful Knox Deacons' Court rightful control. Having lost access to the Knox finances, Dr Ward and Rev. Tut Yoa immediately transferred all the All Nations finances into a personal bank account operated by Dr Ward.

Excommunication of Dr Ward

Presbytery cited Dr Ward to explain his unlawful actions in conducting worship services without the authority of the PCEA. When Dr Ward refused to appear before Presbytery on 15 July 2023, Dr Ward was found guilty of actions that are unlawful, rebellious, disruptive to the peace and harmony of Christ's church, and spiritually dangerous. Consequently, Dr Ward was excommunicated from the PCEA, and he was declared no longer a member of the church. Despite having been excommunicated, Dr Ward continued to represent himself as an authorised representative of the PCEA in negotiations with the Victorian government seeking a \$150,000 grant for extending the All Nations PCEA carpark.

Suspension of Worship Services

On 15 July 2023, in order for there to be complete clarity among members, Presbytery formally declared that all activities at Knox, including worship services, were suspended. Despite being excommunicated from the PCEA, Dr Ward again conducted worship services, with the support of the members. After the 23 July 2023, Dr Ward stopped conducting his unauthorised services at Knox. The anger and opposition of the Knox congregation in support of Dr Ward continued. The congregation was encouraged by Presbytery to worship with other PCEA congregations or at reformed churches nearby. Some did so but others gathered at Dr Ward's house on Sunday afternoons. Despite attempts to address questions and accusations brought against Presbytery, there was no sign of acceptance or repentance from the congregation, as evidenced by letters from Knox members and adherents on 17 July and 24 September 2023.

Departure of Members

In an attempt to clarify individual attitudes, a personal letter was sent to each member of Knox asking them whether they supported the illegitimate Knox session, or if they would disown the All Nations Statement and remain members of Knox. In response, 7 members expressed their desire to resign their membership in the PCEA and requested disjunction certificates. Some members and adherents had left the PCEA some months earlier while some did not reply to the letter, despite a follow-up email. Over a period of just two years, three elders, and their families, have left Knox and the PCEA. Sadly, there seems little likelihood of resuming worship services at Knox in the foreseeable future.

Carrum Downs

Carrum Downs continued to meet as usual for morning worship throughout the year with small but consistent numbers in attendance. From October, the pulpit was supplied by local ministers from other denominations while Rev. Ian Hall was on extended leave prior to his departure at the end 2023. The service time was then changed to the afternoon to facilitate regular supply, and Carrum Downs, a preaching station, was brought back under the oversight of the Knox Session. We are particularly thankful that recently retired minister Rev. George Ball, and wife Rhoda, have temporarily relocated to Carrum Downs to ensure the continuity of regular worship and to pastor the congregation.

NARRE WARREN

During the month of December 2023 and the first weeks of January 2024, the local church had the sad experience of saying goodbye to two families who have embarked on a new direction for their lives. The Marsh family is now relocated to Geelong (approximately 114km away from Narre Warren). The Louden family, after a long process of prayer and family reflection, decided to continue growing their faith in a church closer to their home. We are very aware that decisions of this type are never easy since they imply a new beginning in a new place. However, we know that there is nothing outside the reach of divine providence and therefore we are certain that this change is a preparation for a future full of blessings. During 2023, Narre Warren's leadership faced a number of challenges that with God's help did not greatly affect the ability to maintain a balance between personal life and focus on leadership tasks. Many of you will remember that from time to time, we asked for prayers for successful negotiations with the Optus telecommunications company. Unfortunately, halfway through last year we were informed that the Council rejected the planning application. We had high expectations for this project since the contract would have meant a significant increase in the church's finances. The Council's rejection, and the reduction of families in the church is obviously a major disappointment for our hopes of reaching financial self-support. Despite all this, we have not lost hope. In fact, we thank God that a new panorama is already unfolding in 2024. This year we have

witness a small but encouraging increase in visits to our public worship. A family from New Zealand, and a newly married couple from China have shown spiritual interest in staying in touch with the church. The most encouraging thing about this new situation is that until now (the end of February) their participation in worship has been constant.

Equally encouraging for us is to see the degree of physical, and spiritual proactivity of our adult members (two of them are over ninety years old). Although most of them face some physical limitations (intravitreal injections, arrhythmia, and chemotherapy treatments) the illness has not weakened them to the point of preventing their participation in the life of the Church. As a congregation, we benefit greatly from their example of love, patience, and perseverance in Christian discipleship. On February 25/2024 we had the joy of witnessing the baptism of little Justin, and we welcomed brother Peter Beissmann into the church membership. This was an event of encouragement for everyone present. Another situation that has been of immense assistance to Narre Warren's management leadership has been the addition of Rahul Raniga as Stewart Louden's successor to the treasury role, which was officially taken on the 6th March 2024. Rahul is currently Telstra's financial manager. The financial expertise along with his spiritual integrity are going to be valuable contributions to regaining financial stability in our local church. We thank God for his sustaining goodness, and for the wonderful ways He continues to bless our faith community.

ULVERSTONE

It was an eventful year in the life of the Ulverstone congregation, and we are thankful to the Lord for His gracious care and the many tokens of His presence. The regular preaching ministry of Mr Zach Dotson has been appreciated and has provided much stability. It has meant that it has been possible to continue to hold two worship services on the Lord's Day as well as a midweek meeting for prayer and Bible study. Zach was officially recognised as a candidate for the ministry by Synod in May and undertook a candidate placement to the Northern Rivers congregation from October to early December. Much help was given by men of other congregations and denominations as they assisted with leading services during the time of Zach's absence. It was an evidence of the goodwill and genuine fellowship that exists between many of the denominations in Tasmania and beyond.

In March, the Rev Andres Miranda visited to conduct communion and the congregation was delighted to welcome Phil and Suzanne Thompson and Danielle Ezard as communicant members at that time. All joined by certificate of transfer.

June was an eventful month as Esther Hamilton married Peter Cumming on 17th June, and the same day the Dotson family were blessed with the safe birth of their third child, Caspar Othniel. Caspar was baptised on 25th June. Esther and Peter have taken up residence in Western Australia where Peter works his family farm. The congregation also bade farewell to Andrew and Matilda Hamilton and family who relocated to NSW for work. Other activities in June was the Annual Congregational meeting, which took place on 22nd June, and a Safe Church training on Saturday 24th June in conjunction with a ten-day visit of the interim-moderator, who also conducted the wedding and the baptism.

Other congregational activities throughout the year included a monthly luncheon after the morning service. Upon request from members of the congregation, the session trialled having a 2pm afternoon service on the luncheon day. There were also occasional Friday night informal fellowships, meetings of the ladies' craft group, and Women's Missionary Union. The congregation hosted Rev Samit Mishra and elder Pradeep Kumar from the PFFCI in May and the spoke at a special missionary meeting about the work in central India.

CHURCH AND NATION AND PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE

Members: G.D. Ball (Convener), J. Klazinga (Banner), I. Miller.

1. The Threat to Christian Schools and Christian Freedom.

Last year's report began by stating the threat facing Christian schools and organizations being compelled to hire staff who don't share the same beliefs and convictions as the school, resulting in the school not being able to teach what they believe. The threat remains. The Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) finally launched its report on 21st March. A spokesperson for Australian Association of Christian Schools (AACS) labelled the report 'a direct attack on faith and freedom of belief in Australia.' AACS Executive Officer Vanessa Cheng called it 'a line in the sand moment not just for Christian schools, but for all people of faith and for the principle of religious freedom across Australia. If these ALRC recommendations are adopted, it means the government can tell Christian schools who we can employ, what we can believe and teach. It sets a scary precedent, and the question Australians need to ask is 'who's next'? Will they dictate to any other religious group or organisation what they can believe?'

At the State and territory level, the push continues to replace traditional moral values, with State-imposed relative values. At time of writing the NSW government has passed a 'Conversion Practices Ban Bill 2024'. Similar legislation has already been introduced in other jurisdictions around Australia and elsewhere. The Anglican Bishop of Sydney writes, 'legislation, such as this, illegitimately seeks to regulate what people can say and do in the ordinary course of living out their faith, and what faith groups may teach and promote in their communities, and to the wider society. These are very grave intrusions into the lives of families, individuals, and religious communities which seeks to impose upon them frameworks designed to undermine and diminish them'. Lawyer and lecturer Neil Foster writes, 'These laws are also often premised on the assumption that "gender transition" is a good thing which should be freely available to children, whether or not with parental permission. They raise important issues of concern to all those interested in the welfare of children, whether or not from a religious perspective'.

2. Welcome to Country.

2023 saw the defeat of the Government's referendum proposals for 'The Indigenous Voice'. While we share the desire for reconciliation and mutual respect between cultures and races, nevertheless we are thankful that 'The Voice' referendum was defeated. If it had been approved, one consequence among others would be that this nation would declare itself officially a pagan nation – as Aboriginal spirituality and religion would be enshrined in the constitution. That would have been a massive retrograde step, cancelling the benefits of colonisation.

We live in the age of 'post-colonialism' in which it is assumed that colonisation is always bad and destructive. Yes, there were bad things that happened in Australian history - just as the history of every nation is a mixture of good and bad. But not everything was bad. Colonisation brought agriculture that made the land more productive. It brought permanent buildings. It brought engineering, medicine, education, and a written language. It brought the rule of law, trial by jury, the presumption of innocence, and (eventually) a free democracy. But above all it brought the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is that which is the target of hate and resentment today.

One menacing feature in modern civic life is the seemingly mandatory and monotonous repetition of the 'Welcome to Country' and 'Acknowledgement of Country' ceremonies. It may seem merely innocuous and irritating. But it is more. It embraces Aboriginal indigenous spirituality which is contrary to our Christian beliefs. As Christians, we should have nothing to do with idolatry or the works of darkness. We also affirm that the ultimate ownership of land is not in the hands of any man or race but belongs to the Lord. Abraham Kuyper famously said: 'There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'

Since, we also understand, there is no universally recognised official wording for ‘Acknowledgement of Country’ (or consensus even among the Aboriginal peoples), we commend the wording endorsed by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in 2023: -

‘We acknowledge the triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), the Creator of heaven and earth and His ownership of all things (Psalm 24:1).

We recognise that He gave stewardship of these lands upon which we meet to the indigenous occupants of the land (Acts 17:26).

We recognise that in His sovereignty, He has allowed other people groups to migrate to these shores. We pray for civil peace for all people groups in order that the gospel of peace would be freely proclaimed (1 Tim. 2:1-2)’.

3. ‘I Believe in the Resurrection of the Body’

It used to be standard practice for Christians to bury their dead. Cremation was something foreign, practiced by the ancient Greeks, Romans, and Hindu’s. But things have changed especially in the West. Cremation is now more common than burial, and often Christians opt for cremation seemingly without a second thought. There may be a number of reasons for this. It seems more hygienic. It’s a more efficient use of the limited land space. It’s cheaper. And some don’t like the thought of their body slowly rotting in the earth.

Does it really matter? Should we care? Is it not a matter of indifference? Surely, God can just as easily resurrect cremated remains as buried remains. Thankfully He can. Many of the martyrs were burned. But that’s not the point. We believe that burial better reflects the biblical examples, biblical principles, biblical imagery, and the Biblical hope we have for the human body.

There are many examples of believers burying their dead in Scripture. Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Joseph, Miriam, Moses, David, Elisha, John the Baptist, Stephen, and most famously Christ Himself was buried (Gen. 25:10, 35:19, 29. 49:31, 50:14. Num. 20:1, Deut. 34:6, Josh. 24:32, 1 Kings 2:10, 2 Kings 13:20, Mark 6:29, Acts 8:2, 1 Cor. 15:4).

The biblical examples of cremation are a warning. Nadab and Abihu were consumed by fire because of their disobedience (Lev. 10: 1-2). If a man married a woman and her mother, they should be burned (Lev. 20: 14). If a priest’s daughter defiled herself by becoming a prostitute she must be burned (Lev. 21: 9). The grumblers at Taberah were burned (Num. 11: 1-3). Achan and his family were stoned, and their bodies burned (Jos. 7: 25-26). In the days of Israel’s apostasy children were sacrificed and burned (2 Kings 21: 6, 23: 10). In the days of Amos cremation was considered a form of desecration (Amos 2: 1). Saul and the remains of his sons were burned, but this was in exceptional circumstances (1 Sam. 31: 11-13).

Jesus’ burial was significant. It was prophesied (Psalm 16: 10, Isaiah 53: 9). It’s an essential part of the Gospel (1 Cor. 15: 3-4). Because Jesus’ body was raised from the dead, we believe not only in the immortality of the soul, but also in the resurrection of the body (John 6: 39-40, 44, 54, 1 Cor. 15: 42-44, 51-57). The Shorter Catechism summarises the Bible’s teaching. ‘**The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, though still united to Christ, rest in their graves until the resurrection**’ (Q 37).

The body is not a mere shell, or a prison for the soul, or something unclean to be discarded and destroyed at death. The Lord came to redeem us – body and soul. At His return He will raise and transform our lowly bodies to be like His glorious body, thus making us fit to live in the new heavens and new earth (Phil. 3:21, 2 Peter 3: 13). These bodies therefore have a glorious future.

There’s no more important chapter on the future resurrection of the body than 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul uses the image of a seed sown in the ground. That tiny, wizened, lifeless seed is sown in the

earth. It disintegrates and is somehow transformed into a beautiful flower. The apostle writes, 'Someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain'. (1 Cor. 15: 35–37). He continues, 'So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body' (1 Cor. 15: 42-44).

Burying the body is like sowing a seed. Both go into the ground, and in both cases, what comes out of the ground is organically continuous yet so much better than what was sown. Christ uses the same imagery for His own death and burial when He says, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit (John 12:24).

Whether in farming or at funerals burial isn't the end, but a beginning. In Christian burial we are not simply disposing of the remains, we're planting a seed. Just as we sow in hope of the harvest, so we bury in hope of the resurrection. This is the message we want to proclaim in the cemetery (which incidentally means 'sleeping place'- where the body sleeps awaiting the resurrection morning). Burial promotes that message – the hope of the resurrection. It sends the right signal in a way that cremation can't and doesn't.

Christian burial honours the biblical examples, follows in the footsteps of Christ, illustrates the biblical imagery, and promotes the biblical hope of the resurrection of the body. Thus, when we bury our loved ones and our church members, we say in word and deed, 'I believe in the resurrection of the body.'

When we discuss or make funeral arrangements, or when we are approached by a church member for guidance on the matter, we should state our very strong preference for Christian burial. We must however be sensitive to the fact that some who choose cremation may simply be carrying out the directions of their departed loved one. Some may be influenced by financial considerations (in such cases financial assistance could be offered). Some may be ignorant. And in some countries and cultures there may not be the choice that we have in this country.

4. Should a Christian Attend a Gay Wedding?

Recently, the well-known and respected reformed preacher, Alistair Begg caused a shockwave in the Christian world. On his *Truth for Life* radio programme, he tackled a sensitive question from a grandmother: whether she should attend a 'transgender' wedding.

The question of attending an LGBTQ+ wedding is just one of many complex issues Christian's face in our strange new world. It's a question that some of our members may already have faced or will potentially face in the future.

Begg confirmed with the grandmother her understanding of 'transgender' identity as conflicting with the Bible's teaching. 'Does your grandson understand your belief in Jesus?' 'Yes.'

'Does your grandson understand that your belief in Jesus makes it such that you can't countenance in any affirming way the choices that he has made in life?' 'Yes.'

What he said next, however, went viral through evangelical circles.

He said, 'Well then, okay. As long as he knows that - I suggest you go to the ceremony. And I suggest that you buy them a gift.'

Begg also claims that by attending the wedding, 'your love for them may catch them off guard, but

your absence will simply reinforce the fact that they said - these people are what I always thought: judgmental, critical, unprepared to countenance anything.'

Begg's answer provoked an avalanche of responses – and widespread criticism from many other equally respected and prominent leaders in the evangelical and reformed world (e.g. McArthur, Mohler, Trueman, etc). Dr. Steven Lawson responded, 'By even attending, much less bringing a gift, you are bringing your endorsement of approval of what is taking place.'

Kevin de Young has written clearly, compassionately, and courageously on this issue in a booklet 'The Case Against Christians Attending a Gay Wedding' (you can 'google' it). He begins, 'The case against Christians attending a gay wedding is relatively straightforward. We can lay out the case in three premises and a conclusion: -

*Gay 'marriage' is not marriage.

*A gay wedding celebrates and solemnises a lie.

*Attendance at a gay wedding bears public witness to the purported goodness of what is taking place in that public event.

He states, 'Christians can in no way support or celebrate a union that is an offence to God and is, in fact, no marriage whatsoever.'

He then addresses three common objections: -

*Being at a wedding doesn't entail agreement.

*Christians should show compassion and build bridges with unbelievers.

*Christians who refuse an invitation to attend a gay wedding are guilty of Pharisaical censoriousness.

He concludes, 'I know that the impulse to attend a gay wedding, or to allow that others may do so, is often borne out of a good and sincere desire to love our family and friends. There are few things more painful than making a decision that we know our child or grandchild will interpret as rejection. But we simply cannot bless, even by our mere presence, what we know to be a lie - a lie that Scripture calls an abomination and that according to 1 Corinthians 6 will destroy eternally the souls of those who continue in it.'

5. Archivist.

In May 2023, Synod appointed Mr John Audet as PCEA archivist. This committee recommends the continuation of Mr Audet in the role of archivist. He has built up a large personal database of PCEA history, focussing on the families connected with our church, and is planning to share this information by short publications, including 'History Corner' articles in *The Presbyterian Banner*. Over the past year, Mr Audet has received a significant number of historical photographs and notes from the late Donald Stewart (per Mr & Mrs Allan Stewart), the late Mrs Margaret Hockett, and the Neil family (per Mr Gordon Alex Neil). These are valuable items which are being digitised and incorporated into the archival holdings. Please see further information on the role of the archivist, attached as an appendix to these reports.

It's also timely to ask sessions and office bearers to consider informing the archivist of what historical materials exist in each congregation. It could be an old session book, deacon's court minute book, baptismal records, local historical documents, etc.

6. Praying. Praying. Praying.

The Central Presbytery have asked this Committee to organise a Day of Prayer and Humiliation. No doubt behind this request is the conviction that we have no good apart from God, that we can do nothing of any lasting value apart from Christ (John 15:5), and that unless the Lord builds the house the labourers build in vain (Ps. 127:1).

We know we ought to pray. But do we do it as we should – whether individually or in the prayer meeting?

The message of J. I. Packer's book 'Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God' is still as relevant today as it was when first published. Here is one quote: -

'It is a commission, not only to preach, but also to pray; not only to talk to men about God, but also to talk to God about men. Preaching and prayer must go together; our evangelism will not be according to knowledge, nor will it be blessed, unless they do. We are to preach, because without knowledge of the gospel no man can be saved. We are to pray, because only the sovereign Holy Spirit in us and in men's hearts can make our preaching effective to men's salvation, and God will not send His Spirit where there is no prayer. Evangelicals are at present reforming their methods of evangelistic preaching, and that is good. But it will not lead to evangelistic fruitfulness unless God also reforms our praying and pours out on us a new spirit of supplication for evangelistic work. The way ahead for us in evangelism is that we should be taught afresh to testify to our Lord and to His gospel, in public and in private, in preaching and in personal dealing, with boldness, patience, power, authority, and love; and that with this we should also be taught afresh to pray for God's blessing on our witness with humility and importunity. It is as simple - and as difficult - as that . . . it still remains that there is no way ahead but this, and if we do not find this way, we shall not advance' (p. 124).

Another writer in personal correspondence comments on the importance of prayer: -

James 5: 16, 'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.' 'Pray without ceasing', says the Holy Spirit through the apostle. 'Pray briefly and often,' says Spurgeon. Consider our Saviour, that the Lord Jesus arose a long time before daybreak on certain occasions in order to pray for especially great needs. He prayed at times with strong cries and tears. He at times kneeled to pray. He taught us to pray and not to faint. We read that we have not because we ask not. Here is the Son of God, Jehovah Jesus, omnipotence incarnate, and you would imagine that He would have no need to pray. Prayer is impotence grasping at omnipotence. But Christ was found in fashion as a man, and He is reaching out at omnipotence. His praying is the single greatest indication of His own dependency. In prayer He was acknowledging that with His own limited human resources He simply could not handle the task that lay before Him . . . Christ never failed. He was filled with the Spirit. He had the most outstanding gifts. No man ever spoke as He did. Yet here He is facing the future by going to His Father and effectually fervently praying in submission to God.

The application to us is clear. If He felt that He could not bear this load, He could not climb this mountain, He could not cross this river except by praying fervently to His Father, then how can we hope to cope with the demands of a local congregation and living in a hostile world day by day while saying to God, 'Father it's OK, we can handle it,' and never come before God with a crushing sense of our own great weakness, expressing our helplessness to revive God's work. There is no way we can face any Sunday without prayer, preach any sermon without prayer before and after, bring the gospel to a sinner without prayer.

The Holy Spirit's channel of power is the Bible, and our trusting in the Lord with all our hearts, not leaning to our own understanding, and then . . . praying, praying, praying, praying, praying'.

7. The Ingrown Church. (Reprint from 2003 Report).

C. John Miller in his book, 'Outgrowing the Ingrown Church' (Zondervan) identifies some of the marks of an 'ingrown' church. The ingrown church has tunnel or horizontal vision. It is blind (or unbelieving) of the promises of Scripture and the 'greater works' of John 14:12-14. It is frequently characterised by a sense of spiritual superiority by elevating a positive feature in the church life or

tradition and then comparing this feature with groups that lack this quality. It is a church where members use their tongues a great deal – not to witness or pray or praise or to affirm one another, but to publicly review one another’s flaws, doings, and sins. In the typical ingrown church, there is a hidden determination to eradicate enthusiasm that disturbs the comfortable routine. The ingrown church is concerned with its survival – not with growth through the conversion of the lost. The ingrown church is concerned to defend its traditions in the face of ‘outsiders’ who are seen as likely to subvert its traditions. No planning is devoted to finding ways to assimilate visitors into the fellowship.

Do we recognise any of these traits in ourselves? It’s one thing to make a diagnosis. But what is the prescription for healing and health? We know, of course, only the Holy Spirit can bring reform, renewal, and reviving. But if we compare the church to a boat, we need to have the boat in good repair and the sails ready. According to Edmund Clowney, ‘The church is called to serve God in three ways: to serve Him directly in worship; to serve the saints in nurture; and to serve the world in witness.’

It would be a useful exercise if we were to critically examine our activities in every dimension – the upward dimension of worship, the outward dimension of mission and the inward dimension of nurture and fellowship.

PROPOSED DELIVERANCES:

1. That Synod recognises and opposes the constant undermining by both Federal and State governments of traditional, moral, Biblical values and freedoms, as evidenced for example, in the introduction of the so-called Conversion Practices Bills; and in curtailing the freedom of Christian schools to teach and practice what they believe.
2. Synod expresses its doctrinal and conscientious objections to the monotonous repetition of the ‘Welcome to Country’ and ‘Acknowledgement of Country’ ceremonies at civic and religious occasions.

We commend the wording of a suitable alternative to the traditional wording of Acknowledgement of Country as endorsed by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in 2023:

-

‘We acknowledge the triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), the Creator of heaven and earth and His ownership of all things (Psalm 24:1).

We recognise that He gave stewardship of these lands upon which we meet to the indigenous occupants of the land (Acts 17:26).

We recognise that in His sovereignty, He has allowed other people groups to migrate to these shores. We pray for civil peace for all people groups in order that the gospel of peace would be freely proclaimed (1 Tim. 2:1-2)’.

Synod also affirms its positive desire to build bridges through the gospel with Aboriginal people in order to seek complete reconciliation.

3. Synod affirms its belief that Christian burial honours the biblical examples, including that of Christ; illustrates the biblical imagery, and promotes the biblical hope of the resurrection of the body in a way that cremation does not.
4. Synod approves the helpful counsel of Kevin de Young in his booklet ‘The Case Against Christians Attending a Gay Wedding’.
5. Synod acknowledges the work of Mr. John Audet as PCEA archivist and confirms his continuance in that role.

6. Synod acknowledges that we have no good apart from God, that we can do nothing of any lasting value apart from Christ (John 15:5), and that unless the Lord builds the house the labourers build in vain (Ps. 127:1). Synod acknowledges its need of reform, refreshment, and spiritual revival. Synod therefore appoints a day of prayer and humiliation (say 3rd August 2024) in order to seek God's mercy and favour on our church and nation.
7. Synod affirms that the Lord has called us to serve Him directly in worship; to serve the saints in nurture; and to serve the world in witness. Synod encourages sessions and congregations to examine their congregational life in light of this statement.
8. Synod expresses its appreciation to Rev. Jim Klazinga, for his excellent work as editor of the Presbyterian banner.

Appendix to Synod 2024 Reports

The Role of the PCEA Archivist

- a. The archivist is an 'employee' of Synod - receiving directions and reporting back annually. He/she does not have to be a current member under present rules. Mrs Sue Pacey, a member of the PCNSW, has been one of our approved archivists since the 1990s, being the Archivist and Librarian in charge of the Ferguson Memorial Library in Sydney. Many key records of the PCEA are held there (please refer to Dr Ward's list in Synod 2014 Reports). They are well curated, accessible to *bona fide* researchers and kept in special locked area which is temperature controlled.
- b. The main work is to curate historical material - seek (from churches and estates etc) and control acquisitions, preserve appropriate hard copies, prepare, and maintain digital records (in more than one location, including the PCEA website), supervise volunteers, liaise with other institutions and their staff who hold PCEA records (PCNSW -Mrs Sue Pacey and Mr Daryl Lightfoot and PCV - Mr Michael Smith).
- c. The archivist must have a good working knowledge of PCEA and associated Presbyterian history (especially Scottish history), with some ability to write articles as needed. (e.g. for TPB).
- d. An important aspect of the position is to answer queries and provide copies of material to researchers and others in a timely manner (a fee may be charged for costs involved).

ARCHIVIST'S REPORT to SYNOD 2014 (pages 21-25).

This report presented the last full listing of our holdings by former archivist Rev. Dr Rowland S. Ward who introduced his report as follows:

' I have continued collecting material, sorting it and, when complete and if relevant, binding same. I summarise past reports here and add some new data. The material is archives strictly so-called established by Synod 1989 (Act 2) as well as other material in line with the decision of Synod 1999 (minute 61).'

ARCHIVIST'S REPORT to SYNOD 1997 (Minute 97.48).

'The Archivist (Rev. Dr. R. S. Ward) presented a short verbal report. It was resolved that arrangements be made by the Archivist to accept the kind offer of the Ferguson Memorial Library of the P.C.A. in the State of New South Wales, to house Synod Minutes 1864-1955 on extended loan, access to be available to the ministers of the Church and *bona fide* researchers.'

Note: Current PCEA Archivist Mr John Audet is preparing a full updated list of all PCEA archival material.

T. M. Reeve
March 2024

PRESBYTERIAN BANNER REPORT

Editor: Rev. Jim Klazinga

Distribution:

For 2024, there are currently 93 paid subscriptions, down from 105 in 2023. 15 complimentary magazines are mailed out, including two to the PCEA archives, making for a total of 108 subscriptions, down from 115 in 2023. Currently, 120 copies are printed each month, down from 130 in 2023.

11 congregations have bulk subscriptions. All Nations and Knox are no longer receiving magazines. Currently, we have 87 bulk subscriptions going out to the congregations.

Currently, a low resolution pdf copy of the magazine is sent to 175 email addresses, many of whom are not PCEA members. Some email subscribers may be forwarding copies to others, so it's difficult to know the exact number of email recipients. Higher resolution pdf copies of each issue are made available on the PCEA website.

Finances:

At the time of the writing of this report, one congregation has not yet paid for their 2023 subscriptions, and one other congregation has not paid for their 2024 subscriptions. In addition, the All Nations congregation has not paid for either 2022 or 2023.

Bank Account Balance as of 18 March 2023 - \$3605.29

Income:

- Subscription Payments - \$3717.00
- Bank Interest - \$45.60

Expenses:

- Printing Expenses - \$2262.26
- Mailing Expenses - \$1219.17
- Bank Fees - \$0.70

Bank Account Balance as of 27 March 2024 - \$3885.76

Estimated Subscription fees outstanding as of 27 March - \$890

Estimated Costs for rest of year - \$2850

Estimated Balance at the end of 2024 - \$1926

At this point, it is not anticipated that we will need to increase subscription costs in 2025.

PROPOSED 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 the congregations.
3. Synod continues to support the printing and mailing of the magazine, along with distributing pdf copies by email and making it available on the PCEA website.
4. Synod again encourages Deacons' Courts to consider purchasing extra printed subscriptions for the purpose of: (a) giving as gifts to elderly members who are no longer able to come to church; and (b) making the magazine available for visitors.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

Members: D Kerridge; R.Tso, N. O'Dell

Website

The website CMS operating system had a major overhaul in 2024. Updating to the latest version required a complete re-install. At the same time the frontend of website also had major renovations, with changes to the Congregations page, removal of a lot of old unused elements. As always, it will be tweaked and adjusted and added to regularly. Comments are always welcome, but more welcome are contributions!

Intranet

The PCEA intranet (accessed at <https://pceanorthern.sharepoint.com/>) is the common repository for documents (particularly Minutes and Reports, Decision Books etc) and general information for the work of our Synod and various Committees. Work being done in Law and Advisory Committee to database Acts and Decisions from past years will be stored here.

Committee work can be done and shared in real time on Microsoft 365 suite online using Word, Excel, Powerpoint, Outlook, etc. Microsoft Teams is available for meetings and integrated with the other parts of Microsoft 365.

DocuSign

DocuSign is available to execute documents for Trustees and any associated matters in Deacons' Courts.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE BUDGET

The costs incurred by the Committee for website and associated fees are in the 2023 Balance Sheet. Total \$2,405.46 (under 2023 budget by \$594.54).

Our proposed budget for 2024 is:

Proposed IT Budget

Website Costs \$1000

DocuSign \$150

PCEA Phone Server \$700

Online streaming service \$300

Other hardware/software \$450

Laptop for Hunter (part Synod usage for streaming etc) \$1200

TOTAL BUDGET \$3800

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. The Information Technology Committee proposed budget for 2024 be approved and funds provided for the work of this Committee.

PSALMODY COMMITTEE

Members: D. Kerridge (Convener), G. Ball, D. McIntosh, Julie Schmidt, Esther Hamilton

The Committee corresponded during the year via email.

It is a pleasure to report the success of the Psalmody Day/conference in Northern Presbytery in 2023. It was a great time of fellowship although there were fewer people present new to Psalms this year. This was not from a dislike of singing, rather an inability to be there on that particular day. The Committee commends such days as being of great value to improving our singing and bringing the congregations closer in fellowship within each Presbytery. Miss Julie Schmidt has expressed a willingness to help by travelling and teaching the singing at any future events.

The committee sees great value in each congregation learning a common repertoire of Psalms and tunes. The Youth and Fellowship Committee's prescribed work provides a great basis for, not only parents of Sunday schoolers, but all members to learn the Psalms alongside the children. This year's prescribed Psalms are 117 and 100 (Infants); 133 and 93:1-5 (Junior) and 119:9-18 and 36:5-10 (Senior). Tunes for these are currently left to each congregation to choose.

It is not an easy task to find consensus in moving toward Psalter revision, as was evident from discussions at last year's Synod. The only Synod-approved Psalter is the 1650 Scottish. However, there are some issues with maintaining the status quo - not least that we have three different Psalters from which our congregations sing and there has been a desire for singing from a modern version since 1976 (see Synod Psalmody Report from 1981 in *Our Banner* appended below) resulting in an undercurrent of tension. The Committee wants consensus and doesn't want to move forward in this matter without it. The damage has been done in trying to impose a Psalter, *fait accompli*, (albeit gratis) unilaterally, without consensus decision and collaboration at all levels. Conversely, there is an expectation that the Synod of the church is the place to resolve this decision so that all can support it.

The situation as it stands in each congregation is:

Brisbane - *Sing Psalms*
Northern Rivers - *Sing Psalms* with full Scottish Psalter attached.
Hastings - Scottish Psalter
Manning - *Complete Book of Psalms for Singing*
Newcastle - *Sing Psalms* / Scottish Psalter (separate books)
St George's - Scottish Psalter
Mt Druitt - *Sing Psalms*
Carrum Downs - *Complete Book of Psalms for Singing*
Narre Warren - *Complete Book of Psalms for Singing*
Geelong - *Sing Psalms* with full Scottish Psalter attached.
Ulverstone - *Sing Psalms* with full Scottish Psalter attached.

Thus, of our 11 charges -

Sing Psalms (SP) is in use in 6 congregations.

Scottish Psalter (1650) is in use exclusively in 2 congregations, in 3 alongside SP.

Complete Book of Psalms for Singing in 3 congregations.

Some of the ideas that came from the discussion at Synod last year were:

1. Adopt *Sing Psalms* (SP) as a Synod-approved version.

We have the rights to print our own Australian editions, but this is still not an approval of SP as the version for the church. If we follow this path, we don't have to discard the Scottish Psalter.

Concurrent use of SP with 1650 should be acceptable to most.

2. A "light revision" of 1650 to modern English version.

This would entail some work but not too hard. Comparison with / incorporation of some words used in SP and RPCNI versions would assist.

3. A motion was moved that we obtain the rights from the RPCI for use of their Psalter "to facilitate the creation and compilation of a new PCEA Psalter".

This motion was defeated. However, it is possible that the reason it was defeated was not because no-one wanted to consider a new Psalter, only that the multiplication of publication rights isn't really useful UNTIL we have decided that we want to move toward a new PCEA Psalter.

Two suggested options:

A. [Addressing point 1. above] To adopt *Sing Psalms* as a Synod-approved Psalter (without discarding the 1650 for those who want to use it concurrently or even exclusively). However, there is

still a difficulty for some in using Sing Psalms in that some chosen meters are considered impossible to sing. Some congregations (including the Convener's), get around this simply by using the SP/1650 combined book, and choosing the 1650 version when we cannot sing the other. Of course, that leaves us singing an older English version some of the time.

An alternative or concurrent proposal:

B. [Addressing points 2 and 3 above] To begin with a selection of Psalms from, say 1-25, and work on a modern rendering of the 1650 by comparison with other Psalters, or an easy metered SP version directly to include in a supplementary book available in 2025 for consideration at Synod, which would eventually become the PCEA Psalter under full consultation. The very process started in 1976 but short-circuited with the unilateral publication of a not fully authorised Psalter. We are authorised to use choices from *Sing Psalms*. The necessary rights could be obtained from the RPCI as needed.

[From *Our Banner*, 1981 Synod Report

“PSALTER REVISION

.... this Committee [was] set up in 1976. ...The Committee was authorised to produce in inexpensive but attractive format a selection of alternative versions with music after reviewing same and seeking wider comment from other informed persons and taking into account the comments of congregations noted at Synod 1979. The booklet is to be made available for those requiring it at a moderate charge, and to be used where judged for edification. Its value and use are to be reviewed by Synod in three years time. Rev S.N.Ramsay is holding some \$250 which will be available to assist production. The only question is whether Staff or Sol-fa should be provided. Readers' views are sought. The Committee were also able to report having contact with Prof. Hugh Blair of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland, as well as others interested in the production of an accurate modern Psalter. Synod reappointed the Committee for 5 years to pursue this project.”]

PROPOSED DELIVERANCES

1. That Synod commend the usefulness of Presbytery Psalmody Days to encourage Psalm singing, learning tunes and parts to enrich our singing, and foster inter-congregational fellowship.
2. That Synod encourages congregations to memorise and sing the prescribed Psalms alongside the children as an exercise in familiarisation and to build a common repertoire throughout the denomination.
3. That Synod adopt *Sing Psalms* as a Synod-approved Psalter.

SUPERANNUATION AND INSURANCE COMMITTEE

Members: R Tso (Convener 2016), Messrs 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: 15%
- Self-supporting congregations (with minister aged 75 and over): Superannuation Guarantee Rate (currently at 11%)
- Aid-receiving congregations: 8%
- Vacant congregations: 2%

1.2 Superannuation Support Fund & Superannuation Levy Account

a. **The Superannuation Support Fund (SSF) Capital Account** Balance as at 31/12/23 was \$218,337 being an increase of \$1,380 since 31/12/22. The increase was entirely the result of the revaluation of invested funds.

The SSF Working Account balance as at 31/12/23 was \$45,099 being an increase of \$1,552 since 31/12/22. The increase was income generated by the capital account.

b. **The Superannuation Levy Account** balance as at 31/12/23 was Nil. The balance as at 31/12/22 was \$9,441. This situation arose from:

- Levies received from Congregations were less than contributions paid to their superannuation accounts.
- This aspect has been gradually reducing the levy account balance in recent years to the point where it was necessary during 2023 to transfer \$5,692 from the *Superannuation Support Fund* to provide for the deficit as at 31/12/23. See Note 5 in the printed Balance Sheet for details.

All congregations were up to date in terms of payment of their levy.

2. Contributions to ministers' Superannuation accounts

2.1 Contribution Rates

- Inducted ministers :17%

- Inducted ministers (from age 75): Superannuation Guarantee Rate (currently 11.00%)

3. Superannuation overview

3.1 Default Fund

All but one of our ministers have chosen HESTA, our default fund, for their contributions. The default for HESTA is a *Balanced Growth Fund*.

3.2 Performance

The net return on HESTA *Balanced Growth Fund* for twelve months ending 31/12/23 was 10.46%.

The historical performance as at 31/12/23 for the past 5 years was 7.63%.

B. LONG SERVICE LEAVE/ANNUAL LEAVE

We remind Synod members of the provision by Synod 2003 (Minutes 03.41.6-7) 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.

The committee is made aware of the challenges that Presbytery, Sessions and Deacons' Courts have in monitoring ministers' leave entitlements to ensure ministers do not suffer burn out through failure to take it, even though it has been the yearly deliverance from the report.

To ensure that the commitment is met, the committee is intending to provide a template of minister's LSL/Annual Leave register, along with a yearly email reminder for better supervision and reporting.

C. REVIEW OF ANNUAL LEAVE/LONG SERVICE LEAVE

Current policies:

Page 14 of the Handbook 3.16b. four weeks annual leave, plus an extra week (which must be taken) or in lieu one week of LSL to age 70 (see Act of Synod 2003 deemed Class 1 by Synod 2008).

From Synod's minutes 2003 (03.41.6-7):

"At the written request of a minister to his Deacons' Court the terms in 6 above shall be varied so that the Congregation assumes responsibility for providing Long Service Leave at the rate of one week per year in lieu of the extra week of annual leave in 6 above. If this option is taken, the Long Service Leave cannot be accumulated beyond 10 years, and cannot be cashed out except for amount due at the time of death or retirement. So long as a person completes 5 years service within the PCEA, the LSL accumulates from the beginning of his service until he reaches his 70th birthday. In the event of transfer from one congregation to another the liability for LSL is to be adjusted between

the congregations concerned. LSL liability (if any) is to be noted on Congregational Annual Accounts”.

Current difficulties

Our current policies on both annual leave and long service leave are combined which is very different from the arrangement in secular employments, as well as the policies in other similar Christian denominations. As it is shown from the survey below, all the denominations have treated these two matters separately.

It is important to note that in State acts (1955 NSW, 2018 VIC, and 2016 QLD) regarding Long Service Leave that it can accumulate beyond 10 years.

PCNSW:

- Four weeks annual leave including four Sundays (the cost of pulpit supply to be provided by the congregation).
- One week’s study leave per annum cumulative to a maximum of four weeks.
- Separate LSL policies

PCV

- Five weeks annual leave.
- One-week study leave per annum for professional development...
- Separate LSL policies

RPCA:

- Five weeks annual leave
- Separate LSL policies

Proposal

Annual Leave

Annual leave be provided for all serving ministers within the PCEA.

- Five weeks fully paid annual leave shall be available each year on a pro-rata basis.
- Annual leave may be taken in any manner as may be mutually agreed by the minister and session.
- Relief pulpit supply is to be provided in this period.
- Annual leave is accumulative but should not exceed 10 weeks accrued leave.

Long Service Leave

Ministers who serve with the church for 10 years are entitled to two calendar months’ long service leave, or less on a pro rata basis.

Long service leave varies state by state with formal minimums currently applying to states where the church is represented:

- NSW: 8.67 weeks after 10 years’ continuous service and 4.33 weeks for each subsequent five years.
- QLD: 8.6667 weeks after each period of 10 years’ continuous service.
- TAS: 8.6667 weeks after 10 years of continuous service and 4.33 weeks for each subsequent five years of continuous service
- VIC: Accrues at a rate of one week for each 60 weeks of continuous employment (approximately 0.866 weeks per year) and can be taken any time after 7 years continuous service.

Note that service is deemed to be continuous when a minister transfers between congregations of the church.

When a minister resigns from the church, they are usually entitled to long service leave they haven't yet taken, paid on a pro-rata basis if they have completed the following service.

- NSW: After 5 years
- QLD: After 7 years
- TAS: After 7 years
- VIC: After 7 years

It is proposed that long service leave be uniform for all ministers according to the following criteria.

Long service leave only applies to ministers for periods of continuous service within the PCEA.

Accruing LSL:

- Long service leave accrues at a rate of 0.866 weeks per year (i.e., 2 months after 10 years).
- Where there is a break in continuous service, a minister must make application to Presbytery, with assistance from Superannuation and Insurance Committee if necessary, regarding their ongoing accumulation of long service leave.

Taking LSL:

- Long service leave may be taken after 10 years of continuous service, and after each subsequent 5 years of continuous service.
- A minister is required to give 3 months' notice to his congregation and must obtain approval from Presbytery prior to the taking of any long service leave.

LSL Termination Payments:

- Unused long service leave is payable as a termination payment based on the cash stipend plus exempt fringe benefits at the date of termination.
- Pro-rata payments are available after 7 years' service have been completed.

D. Church Insurance

Our insurer, the ACS Mutual officially withdrew from the National Redress Scheme on the 30th of June 2023. As a result, the excess amount of levy of \$825 was refunded to the Synod, and it is planned to be credited to each congregation at the next insurance renewal.

Since then, the committee was in touch with the Law and Advisory Committee, to inquire if there was any urgent need for our denomination to join the scheme ourselves as a denomination. They advised the matter would be referred to Synod.

There was also a delay in issuing the invoices for insurance renewal on the part of the insurer. They also miscalculated premiums due to the change of the registered address of the Committee from Victoria to NSW. Adjustments to the premiums were made.

PROPOSED DELIVERANCES

1. Synod approves the following changes regarding ANNUAL LEAVE/LONG SERVICE LEAVE for ministers:

a) Annual Leave

Five weeks fully paid annual leave be provided.

Refer to Appendix "A" for details to be included in "Classified Decisions of Synod principal decisions of on-going significance" – "Superannuation & Insurance Committee"

Handbook Page 14 (3.16.b) be amended accordingly.

b) Long Service Leave

Long Service Leave be provided to ministers for periods of continuous service within the PCEA.

Refer to Appendix "A" for details to be included in "Classified Decisions of Synod principal decisions of on-going significance" – "Superannuation & Insurance Committee".

To be added to Handbook Page 14 (3.16)

2. Synod instructs 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.

3. Synod approves the committee's intention to provide a template of minister's Annual Leave/Long Service Leave register, to be sent to all Deacons' Court.

APPENDIX "A"

CLASSIFIED DECISIONS OF SYNOD

Principal decisions of on-going significance

SUPERANNUATION & INSURANCE COMMITTEE

Annual Leave

Annual leave is provided for all serving ministers within the PCEA.

- Five weeks fully paid annual leave shall be available each year on a pro-rata basis.
- Annual leave may be taken in any manner as may be mutually agreed by the minister and session.
- Relief pulpit supply is to be provided in this period.
- Annual leave is accumulative but should not exceed 10 weeks accrued leave.

Long Service Leave

Long service leave only applies to ministers for periods of continuous service within the PCEA.

Accruing LSL:

- Long service leave accrues at a rate of 0.866 weeks per year (i.e., 2 months after 10 years).
- Where there is a break in continuous service, a minister must make application to Presbytery, with assistance from Superannuation and Insurance Committee if necessary, regarding their ongoing accumulation of long service leave.

Taking LSL:

- Long service leave may be taken after 10 years of continuous service, and after each subsequent 5 years of continuous service.
- A minister is required to give 3 months' notice to his congregation and must obtain approval from Presbytery prior to the taking of any long service leave.

LSL Termination Payments:

- Unused long service leave is payable as a termination payment based on the cash stipend plus exempt fringe benefits at the date of termination.
- Pro-rata payments are available after 7 years' service have been completed.

FINANCE COMMITTEE

(Incorporating General Treasurer's Report)

Members: AH Steel (Convener), GD Hamilton, 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 (\$1,225 per week - reviewed annually on 1st January) together with the present basis of review be continued.

2. Financial Assistance

Two requests were received for financial assistance for the current Synodical year (2024/2025):
Central Presbytery approved a request from Hawkesbury-Nepean Deacons' Court of up to \$6,000 after receiving pledges totalling \$7,000 from two Deacons' Courts within the bounds, their original request was \$13,000.

Southern Presbytery approved a request from Narren Warren Deacons' Court of up to \$22,600 after receiving pledges totalling \$24,000 from the other three Deacons' Courts within the bounds, their original request was \$46,600.

Both requests are recommended on a strictly needs basis.

The Committee requests Deacons' Courts to include a starting balance in their budgets when seeking financial assistance to more accurately reflect estimated need.

The willingness of Deacons' Courts to pledge funds to reduce the call on Synod, is pleasing, where specified "Stipend Relief" funds are currently inadequate to meet the requests sought.

3. The Capital Assistance Fund

As at 31/12/23 assets totalled \$420,989 which was an increase of \$8,772 on 2022. There was no expenditure.

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

General Treasurer's Report to Synod follows the *Proposed Deliverances*.
For estimates of the major working funds to 31/12/24 – See Appendix "A"

PROPOSED DELIVERANCES

1. We record our thanks to God for the sufficiency in temporal blessings the church as a whole has enjoyed since last Synod.
2. Adjustment of the Minimum Stipend, Cash and Non-cash components (Excluding Manse, Car and Telephone) for 2024/2025 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. Financial Assistance of up to \$ 6,000 for 2024/2025 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.
4. Financial Assistance of up to \$ 22,600 for 2024/2025 Synodical year be granted to the Narren Warren 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'S REPORT

1. Financial Needs

All financial needs of the Synod were adequately provided for during 2023 with total funds decreasing by \$90,740 to \$2,361,638 after allowing for \$364,810 held on behalf of others (Mission Fields, Congregations, Bequests etc.)

Whilst income increased because of improved bank interest rates the net decrease was mainly caused by increased expenditure in financial assistance granted to congregations (2) – deficit of \$45,353 met from Synod General Working Funds.

2. Synod General Working Funds

Synod General Working Funds held, as at 31/12/23 was \$780,555. This was a decrease of \$40,743 on 2022. Refer to the printed Balance Sheet and Statement of Income & Expenditure as at 31/12/23 for details.

3. Books of Account Audit

An unqualified Independent Assurance Report has been obtained from GPA Accountants, Chartered Accountants of Kingsgrove NSW and is included in the published Financial Statements prepared by Mr John Audet, General Treasurer 31/12/23.

PROPOSED DELIVERANCES

Nil.

FINANCE COMMITTEE - APPENDIX "A"

**BUDGET - SYNOD MAJOR WORKING FUNDS
for twelve months ending 31/12/24**

Fund	Balance as at #####	Estimated Income/Int Divs/Revaln to 12/24	Estimated Givings & Other	Estimated Expenditure to 12/24	Estimated Surplus (Deficit)	Estimated Credit Balance 31/12/24	Estimated Deficit Balance 31/12/24
Capital Assistance Fund	420,989	9,000	0	0	9,000	429,989	
Church Extension	1,566	300	100	0	400	1,966	
Stipend Relief	0	3,000	500	28,000	-24,500	0	-24,500
Information Technology	0	0	0	3,800	-3,800	0	-3,800
Missions - General	28,736	13,000	2,700	7,700	8,000	36,736	
Miss Relief (Equities)	130,087	5,000	0	0	5,000	135,087	
Miss Rel (Working Fnd)	5,577	5,000	0	7,400	-2,400	3,177	
Training of Ministry	214,430	12,000	500	1,500	11,000	225,430	
Youth & Fellowship	20,139	800	13,500	17,800	-3,500	16,639	
General Funds	780,555	25,000	800	36,500	-10,700	769,855	

Notes:

Stipend Relief Fund

Assumes undrawn 2023/24 approvals will be drawn before the end of April .

Anticipated deficit can currently be met from General Funds.

Information Technology

Anticipated deficit can currently be met from General Funds.

TRUST CORPORATIONS
NSW TRUST CORPORATION
THE TRUSTEES FOR THE SYNOD OF EASTERN AUSTRALIA
Members: Moderator, Clerk and Treasurer

Bequests - Nil

Deed Box The Deed Box of the Trustees of the Synod of Eastern Australia is held as an archive with Daniel Butt and Co., Solicitors, Suite 4, Level 1, 1 Stanley St, Maclean NSW. A NSW conveyancing is now conducted using eConveyancing.

No physical deeds were lodged or uplifted during 2023.

Common Seal

DocuSign (a digital signature application) has been used to execute Trustee documents under the Common Seal for the following:

04/07/2023 **GST Private Binding Ruling Application re 3 Beaconsfield Pde, Lindfield**
06/07/2023 **Biodiversity Values Explanation Report Application re 3 Beaconsfield Pde, Lindfield**
29/11/2023 **Deed of Variation re 3 Beaconsfield Pde, Lindfield**

Review of Results as at 31/12/23

Diversification

Specified Capital Funds - 31/12/23

Actual Amount	Actual %	Asset Class	Strategy Range	Strategy Benchmark
Invested	of total		%	%
61,130	18%	Cash/Term Deposits	10% - 30%	20%
269,814	82%	Equities	70% - 90%	80%
330,944	100%			100%

No change in the spread of investments was made during 2023.

Return:

Growth –

Total Trust Funds (Specified Capital Funds) increased by \$4,499 (1.13%) during 2023 against a Target of 4.1% (CPI). “Real value” (keeping up with inflation) was not therefore achieved.

Income – Income of \$11,372 represented a return of 9.1% against a Target of 4.92% (2020 Average Official Cash Interest Rate of 3.92% Plus 1.00%).

Investment Strategy Objectives –

Growth – **Not Achieved** for 2023 and still behind with CPI added since 1998.

Income - **Achieved** for 2023.

PROPOSED DELIVERANCES

1. Nil

QUEENSLAND TRUST CORPORATION
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF EASTERN AUSTRALIA

Members: Moderator, Clerk and Treasurer

Deed Box and Common Seal: All title documents relating to the Queensland Trust Corporation are lodged with related NSW and Victorian documents with Daniel Butt and Co., Solicitors, Suite 4, Level 1, 1 Stanley St, Maclean, NSW.

PROPOSED DELIVERANCES

1. Nil

VICTORIAN TRUST CORPORATION
THE TRUSTEES FOR VICTORIA OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF
EASTERN AUSTRALIA

Trustees: WI Hall (Secretary), Synod Clerk, Synod Treasurer, D. Ramsay, R. Tso

*Incorporated by The Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia Property Act 5691, Victoria
1953*

Trustees: WI Hall (Secretary), Synod Clerk, Synod Treasurer, D. Ramsay, R. Tso

Property Holdings

The last schedule of real property was provided in 2015. The following is the current list.

SCHEDULE OF REAL PROPERTY AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2023

CT & Folio ref	Address	Land m2	Improvements
VICTORIA			
Geelong Congregation, Newcomb (City of Greater Geelong) 8191/599	12 Coppards Rd, Newcomb	4,267m2	BV dwg 280m2 built 1968, bought 1989 \$228,000; renovated 2006; Church & hall 316m2 built 1991; 15 car spaces and ex- tennis court. [2 lot\ subdivision possible.] All-up cost 1990/91 \$529,000
Knox Congregation, Wantirna (City of Knox) 9706/731	358 Mountain Hwy, Wantirna	1,441m2	Brick church/hall 245m2 built 1987; 20 car-spaces; air con 2000; land purchased 1986. - \$73,919. All-up cost 1986/87 \$214,000
9613/915	360 Mountain Hwy, Wantirna	726m2	BV dwg 208m2 plus DLUG built 1987, extended 1997; land purchased 1986 - \$36,469. All-up cost 1986/1997 \$161,000
8458/720	10 Bentley Street, Wantirna	979m2	Three x 2BR units totalling 265m2 plus single garages built 2007; land purchased 2004 - \$260,000. [Capable of strata sub-division.] All-up cost 2004/07 \$628,538
12066/208	22 Frost Street, Carrum Downs	360m2	BV dwg 194m2 inc double garage built 2019 All-up cost 2019/20 \$584,000
Narre Warren Congregation, Narre Warren (City of Casey) 9542/544	108 Prospect Hill Road	1,901	Brick Church/hall 267m2 built 1990, air con 2001, 29/31 car spaces; land purchased 1987 - \$75,840. All-up cost 1987/90 \$302,000.

All Nations Congregation, Mulgrave (City of Monash) 10290/987 91 Tiverton Drive	2,835 m2 BV church/ hall 273m2 1972; virtually rebuilt 1997; extended to 407m2 after purchase 2009; 29 asphalt car spaces & grass.[Only 870m2 .free of power line easement.] All-up cost 2009 \$395,000
Carrum Downs Congregation (City of Frankston) 5647/205 8 William Road	1420m2 BV church/hall 230m2 2018; 22 car spaces. Land purchased 2014 \$415,000 All up cost 2014/2018 \$898,097
TASMANIA	
Ulverstone Congregation (Central Coast Council) 3468/087 13 Leven Street 3587/002	559 BV church 160m2 built 1977; land purchased 1975 \$2,000 All-up cost 1975/79 \$22,500

2. Investments

Funds held by the corporation for Synod at 31/12/2023 totalled \$423,345, representing an increase of 0.71% on 2022 (\$420,344) Of this total, \$336,680 is held in shares. Share values increased by 0.92% during 2023 after falling by 4% the previous year. The overall income return on funds (shares and cash) was 6.5%, up from 4.50% the previous year. A similar result is likely this year as return on equities continues strong and interest rates appear to have levelled out somewhat.

3. Common Seal Applications during 2023

Nil

4. Optus Tower Lease (Narre Warren P.C.E.A)

The planning application to construct a telecommunications tower at Narre Warren was refused by the City of Casey Council. Property consultants Proptel advised that they were working through Council's grounds of refusal and would be looking at potential changes to location within the Church allotment.

CORRESPONDENCE
FRATERNAL GREETINGS



INTERCHURCH RELATIONS COMMITTEE
of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand

Rev Reinier Noppers
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+ 64 (0) 221 325 445

90 Highsted Road, Bishopdale
Christchurch 8053
New Zealand

To:
Robin Tso
Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia

By email to robin@hunterpcea.org

1st February 2024

Dear Brother Robin;

Greetings in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the head and King of the Church.

Thank you for your kind invitation to attend your Synod 2024 at Hunter Presbyterian Church, 155 Adelaide St, Raymond Terrace, NSW, 2324.

We are unable to send a delegate to your General Assembly this year but please extend our greetings to the brothers as they meet.

We continue to treasure the bond we have with your churches, and hope to be able to send a delegate in the next triennium.

The Reformed Churches of New Zealand continue to give thanks for our Lord's blessings. We have a number of men currently studying for the ministry or serving as 'vicars' (interns for a year after their seminary study) in our churches. Many of our congregations have grown in size due to a steady influx of immigrants from a wide variety of different ethnicities. We currently have 21 instituted churches and two preaching posts.

Our next Synod is due to be held in Christchurch in September 2024 and you should have received an invitation recently. I was also thankful to be able to meet briefly with br Jim Klazinga on a recent visit to Christchurch in 2023.

We pray that the Lord of the Church may bless your deliberations with wisdom and bring outcomes that are to His glory and honour.

We pray for God's blessing upon the ongoing work of the PCEA and that together we may continue to be part of the growth of His Kingdom and through the unity of brothers and sisters in the Lord.

May His Name be glorified.

Rev. Reinier Noppers