

Synod
2025

The Synod of Eastern Australia

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS

177TH SYNOD

PCEA HASTINGS RIVER CONGREGATION

41 CAMPBELL STREET, WAUCHOPE

6TH TO 9TH MAY, 2025

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF EASTERN AUSTRALIA |

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TIMETABLE FOR SYNOD 2025

TIME	TUESDAY 6 th May	TIME	WEDNESDAY 7 th MAY	THURSDAY 8 th MAY	FRIDAY 9 th MAY
	SYNOD TO COMMENCE WITH SESSION 1 AT 4:30PM	9:00am	SESSION 3 Devotions and Prayer [SYNOD PHOTO]	SESSION 6 Devotions and Prayer	SESSION 9 Devotions and Prayer
		M/Tea 10:30am	Law & Advisory Training of Ministry Greetings from Delegate*	Inter-Church Relations Psalmody Greetings from Delegate*	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 2025/26	2:00pm	SESSION 4 Youth and Fellowship Superannuation Finance Trust Corporations Greetings from Delegate*	SESSION 7 Presbytery Reports Missions Greetings from Delegate*	SYNOD CLOSSES AT THE END OF SESSION 9 AT 12:30PM LUNCH TO FOLLOW BEFORE DEPARTURE
6:00pm	DINNER	6:00pm	DINNER	DINNER	
7:00pm	SESSION 2 Moderator's Address Administration	7:00pm	SESSION 5 Greetings from Delegate* Church and Nation & Publications Banner Information Technology Close	SESSION 8 Greetings from Delegate* (suggested PFCCI) Mission Speakers Close	
8:30pm	Close	8:30pm			

NOTE Delegates from other churches will be introduced by the ICR Convener and invited to speak by the Moderator as they are available, scheduled in one of the designated slots in sessions 3-8.

ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

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

Timetable: Synod is scheduled to commence at 4:30pm on Tuesday, 6th May and conclude by 12:30pm Friday, 9th May, 2024. A detailed timetable is appended above.

The committee recognises the benefits to this Church of the annual Synod being an in-person meeting and that provision should not normally be made for individuals to participate remotely by phone or video conference.

Money could be saved by having the whole Synod online but we choose to have an in-person meeting because it is of inestimable value to the church for commissioners and fraternal delegates to meet physically and to eat and talk together. Our sister churches (FC, FCC, RCNZ, OPC) do not offer participation by video-conference. ICRC does not allow it as they believe it undermines the purpose of their meetings. Apologies from members unable to attend physically are received and noted. The committee proposes that this policy be incorporated into Synod Standing Orders in a new section entitled "Synod Arrangements". We further propose that Act 6, 1983, as amended be incorporated into this section of standing order the current rules about deadlines for reports and correspondence and then rescind that Act. See deliverance 2 below.

Live-streaming of Synod proceedings in open-court is allowed at the discretion of the court.

Ministerial Movements: Rev. Robin Tso was translated to St George's Congregation and inducted 23rd August, 2024. Mr Zachary Dotson was ordained and inducted to the ministry in the PCEA on Friday, 8th November, 2024. Rev. Andres Miranda resigned from the PCEA ministry effective from 25th November 2024. Rev. Ian Hall remains available for a call.

Expressions of Sympathy: We express our deepest sympathy to the family of the late Mr Alex Neil, a long serving and faithful PCEA Elder, and member of this court at various times and to the family of Mr John Disney, Elder and member of Southern Presbytery.

Southern Presbytery Report 2023: Southern Presbytery's Report 2023 was deferred by Synod 2024 due to legal proceedings. The Law and Advisory Committee Report section 6 details the matters that were dealt with in 2024 regarding this. The Southern Presbytery Report 2023 will be presented along with their 2024 Report to this Synod.

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

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), D. Kerridge (Archive), I. Hall

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

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

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, Mark Hamilton, Zach Dotson

Training of Ministry: D Kerridge (Convener), R Tso, G Hamilton. I. Miller

Psalmody: D Kerridge (Convener), DA McIntosh, GD Ball, Julie Schmidt, AK Steel, G. King, G. Hamilton

Other Appointments

PCEA Trustees for Victoria: D. Ramsay (Secretary), R. Tso, Synod Clerk.

Treasurer: Alex Steel has (again) submitted his resignation as General Treasurer. Having fulfilled the role of Assistant Treasurer, Donald Ramsay is expected to be nominated to take on the role of General Treasurer.

Moderator Elect 2025: Rev. James Klazinga

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. Overture from Northern Presbytery re Financial Review for Small Charities.
2. Overture from Rev. John Forbes re Psalmody.
3. Petition from Southern Presbytery re Sale of Wantirna building.
4. Fraternal Greetings from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland.

PROPOSED DELIVERANCES

1. That the above Timetable for Synod 2025 be confirmed.
2. That a new section be added to Synod Standing Orders (Act 1, class 2, 1978, as amended 1984, 1991, 2008 and 2024) as follows, by amending and incorporating the wording of Act 1, 1983 “Reports and Correspondence to Synod” (as amended 1985, 1986, 1995, 2000, 2008, 2011, 2022). Synod now repeal Act 1, 1983. (*Words struck through are deletions, words underlined are additions*)

“VI – SYNOD ARRANGEMENTS

1. The Synod Treasurer forwards his report and annual accounts to Synod members at least 50 days prior to ~~the scheduled opening of Synod.~~
2. All documents and Committee Reports for transmission to Synod are to be lodged with the Clerk of Synod at least 45 days prior to ~~the scheduled opening of Synod.~~ Any document or report presented after that date must be accompanied by a letter showing cause why it could not be presented by the due date. The Administration Committee shall judge whether the reasons advanced are sufficient, and if there are extenuating circumstances shall transmit the same to Synod, reporting accordingly. If the Committee refuse to transmit any document it states reasons to those concerned, who, if aggrieved with the decision, may petition Synod in the usual way without conforming to the above mentioned deadline. ~~Appeal or complaint against the decision may be made to Synod in the usual way, without conforming to the above mentioned deadline. Such an appeal or complaint is heard by the Synod in the usual way for an appeal or complaint against the finding of a lower court, that is, with both the appellant or complainant and the Committee at the bar of Synod. Due to the nature of this case, however, the moderator, though a member of the Committee, should continue to preside and all other parties who are members of Synod are entitled to participate fully in deliberations once removed from the bar.~~
3. Requests for finance from Synod funds are to be forwarded by presbyteries direct to the Finance Committee to reach the Convener at least 60 days prior to ~~the scheduled opening of Synod, and a copy shall be forwarded by the Presbytery Clerk to any other Committee concerned. From 1986 requests for aid to extension and sanctioned charges are to be directed to the Church Extension and Supply Committee.~~
4. The Clerk of Synod shall arrange for Committee Reports and Recommendations together with Correspondence to be ~~printed, and he distributes them~~ circulated so that they are in the hands of members not later than 21 days before the opening of Synod, ~~extra copies being produced for binding with the minutes in due course.~~ Correspondence with the potential to impugn the

character or reputation of any person is not to be circulated to persons other than Synod members prior to Synod considering the same.

5. At the annual meeting of Synod participation by phone or video conference will not normally be allowed. In exceptional circumstances, such as presentation of an overture or petition by parties who live at a distance, request should be made to the Administration Committee at in reasonable time before Synod, which may approve the request if it sees fit.”

And that the words “At the annual Synod participation by video conference or phone will not normally be permitted” be added to section 5.4 of the Handbook; “Live-streaming of open-court proceedings may be allowed at the discretion of the court” be added to section 5.15.

3. That the Southern Presbytery Report 2023, deferred by Synod 2024, be presented along with the Southern Presbytery Report 2024.
4. That the proposed Committee Structure, along with other appointments, as listed in the report be considered in the final session of Synod.
5. That Correspondence item 1. be considered with Finance Committee business.
6. That Correspondence item 2. be considered with Psalmody Committee business.
7. That Correspondence item 3. be considered with Southern Presbytery Reports.
8. That Correspondence item 4. be noted (mentioned in the Inter-Church Relations Committee report).
9. That the following Examiners of Records be appointed:

Northern Presbytery	Rev. D. Muldoon and Mt Druitt Elder
Central Presbytery	Rev. Z Dotson and Geelong Elder
Southern Presbytery	Rev. D. Kerridge and Northern Rivers Elder

LAW & ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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

The committee met by video conference a number of times in the year and communicated by e-mail.

1. Safe Church. The committee is tasked with keeping the Safe Church policy and procedures under review and welcomes suggestions from users at any time, including feedback about workability.

2. Panel on Divorce, Separation and Remarriage. The panel consisting of J Klazinga, T Reeve, I Miller and J Forbes was appointed at Synod 2022. It was “*charged with preparing a statement for the PCEA Handbook to provide clear scriptural guidance on Divorce, Separation and Remarriage*”. An initial draft guidance has been produced by T Reeve and I Miller and is under discussion and review by the panel. The committee has reflected on its remit noting that the Handbook is not intended as a teaching manual but a guide for practice and procedure. The intention of the panel is that proposed additions to the Handbook will be concise and procedural in nature whereas extended guidance for the benefit of church members and office bearers would be made available separately. The panel seeks that its remit be clarified accordingly.

3. Handbook Update. The 2024 edition of the Handbook has now been published. Synod agreed for the committee to undertake a revision of Chapter 7 and also, in conjunction with the Training of Ministry Committee, a revision of the part of Chapter 4 entitled *Reception, Status & Oversight of Students and Home Missionaries*, and to report progress to Synod 2025. This remains a work in progress.

4. Compiling Acts of Synod. This work is underway with the Acts from 1990 to the present having been extracted from the Synod Minutes and Reports and listed.

5. Questions and Formula. Discussions at Synod 2024 indicated that some sessions have not retained records to enable them to prove the subscription of their office bearers. Current rules require that all office bearers subscribe the 1952 Questions and Formula. Sessions are required to retain records to be able to certify this to higher courts on request.

Church courts should also take note that the Formula refers to “*the questions already put to me*”, therefore, in every case where the Formula is to be signed, it must be immediately preceded by satisfactory answering of the Questions. If a person has not, at that time, answered the Questions then he is not in a position to honestly subscribe the Formula.

6. Concerns Notice. On 1st May 2024, members of Southern Presbytery and the Clerk of Synod received a Concerns Notice from Dr Ward’s lawyers in Melbourne. This legal notice alleged defamatory content in the Southern Presbytery Reports for 2023 and threatened defamation proceedings if amends were not made. Prior to the 2024 Synod, Southern Presbytery re-examined the report, found no defamatory content but amended a factually inaccurate section. Synod deferred the report's presentation until legal matters were resolved, likely by Synod 2025. The Church’s insurers confirmed professional indemnity cover, and legal advice recommended we make no response to the *Concerns Notice* and issue no public statements to avoid prejudicing the case. Despite further communications from Dr Ward’s lawyers, no court proceedings were raised. Later, in November 2024, Dr Ward threatened to apply to the Supreme Court for preliminary discovery of personal e-mails of all Synod members. However, the Law & Advisory committee explained that Synod was unable to control nor access the private communications of those who received copies of Synod 2024 reports. The Law & Advisory committee suspected that the legal threats were intended to influence the Southern Presbytery into withdrawing its report. Dr Ward also attempted to cast doubt on the accuracy of the work of Southern Presbytery members and the Law & Advisory Committee through various e-mails to Synod delegates and others. The committee thanks Synod members for their patience with the prolonged but necessary lack of communication, allowing the process to follow its proper course. Synod 2025 should provide the opportunity for members to scrutinise and review the work of the Committee on Synod’s behalf.

7. Review of Sustentation. The committee received a letter from Rev. Dr Dennis Muldoon requesting consideration of a proposal that ministers’ stipends be paid via Presbytery rather than by congregational treasurers. Various reasons were given: *Presbyterial* - the current practice is perceived to tend to a congregational mindset rather than a presbyterial one; *Logistical* - one person could interface with ATO about employment whereas, at present, multiple treasurers must do so; *Consistency* - currently superannuation is administered centrally whereas stipend locally. The full letter is included as an appendix to this report. The matter is a complex one requiring due care to assess both the biblical foundations and the legal and practical implications. At present, for example, presbyteries are not registered as separate legal entities with ACNC and ABR so may not be able to act as “employers” for ATO purposes. There is, however, biblical evidence for sustaining ministers from a common fund. It was the practice of Christ and his disciples as well the church in Jerusalem where, initially, funds were administered centrally by the apostles, and afterwards administered centrally on their behalf by the seven deacons. The committee is willing to consider and report on this matter.

8. Church insurances - clarification of remit. In 2021, following a proposal from this committee, Synod resolved that “*all matters relating to church insurances...be placed under the remit of a Synod committee*”. The intention was to ensure appropriate accountability at renewal time in the information collected, levies apportioned, and disclosures made. Some uncertainty exists regarding the extent of the remit, and it would be helpful to clarify the term “*all matters*”. It is understood that the initiation of an insurance claim, or other request for benefit under the group policy, is the responsibility of the relevant congregation, higher court or Synod committee that resolves to make a claim. Advice may be sought from the committee charged with overseeing church insurances, but its remit does not extend to initiating such claims directly.

PROPOSED DELIVERANCES

1. Panel on Divorce, Separation and Remarriage. Synod clarifies the remit of the panel such that proposed changes to the Handbook should be concise and procedural in nature. Extended guidance will be produced as well for church members and office bearers, and made available separately. A report of progress to be brought to Synod 2026.

2. Handbook Revisions. The remit for revision of Handbook Chapter 7, and part of Chapter 4, is continued. A report to be brought to Synod 2026.

3. Uniformity of subscription and retention of records. Synod instructs sessions to ensure that every serving office bearer of their congregation has answered the 1952 Questions in presence of session and signed the Formula. Sessions are to retain records to be able to certify this to higher courts upon request. Presbyteries may not sustain the commission of a representative elder who has not subscribed the 1952 Questions and Formula.

4. Requirement for Questions when signing Formula. When a person is called upon to sign the Formula he must first, on that same occasion, have the Questions put to him and answer appropriately. This requirement is evident from the Formula itself which refers to *“the questions already put to me”*.

5. Concerns Notice. Synod notes that the statutory time limit for court action by Dr Ward for alleged defamation has passed with no action raised. Synod commends the members of Southern Presbytery who have patiently endured the trouble brought against them in recent years, and especially in the past year, when they, along with the Synod Clerk, were personally threatened with legal action for seeking to report accurately on events that occurred within the bounds of the Southern Presbytery.

6. Review of Sustentation. Synod instructs the Law & Advisory Committee to examine the theological principles for the sustentation of the ministry and to consider the legal and practical implications of any change from our current system, and to bring a report to the 2026 Synod.

7. Church insurance – clarification of remit. The initiation of claims under the Church’s group policy is the responsibility of the relevant church court or Synod committee that has resolved to make a claim. Advice may be sought from the committee responsible for church insurances, but its remit does not extend to initiating claims itself.

APPENDIX 1

Letter from Dr Dennis Muldoon re Sustentation

Dennis K Muldoon
49 Wendy Av
Georges Hall 2198

To John Forbes
Convener
Law and Advisory Ctte, PCEA

6 January 2025

Dear John,

I write with a request that the PCEA L&A Committee give serious consideration to having the minister's stipends paid from Presbytery funds. Obviously, each congregation would pay a levy into this fund, but the Presbytery Treasurer will distribute this stipend equally to each minister in the Presbytery. I make this request for the following reasons:

1. Our present practice of congregations paying their minister a stipend is more 'Congregational' or 'Independent' than 'Presbyterian'.
2. Presbytery is best placed to assess congregations, and would be better equipped to assist struggling or new congregations.
3. Congregational Treasurers are required to deal with the ATO for one 'employee'. It would be more efficient for one Treasurer to deal with the ATO for multiple 'employees'. We already have centralised payment of superannuation through the Synod.
4. This is the practice in the Free Church of Scotland.

Thanking you

Yours in Christ
Rev. Dr. Dennis Muldoon

TRAINING OF MINISTRY COMMITTEE

Members: DJ Kerridge (Convener); R Tso; G Hamilton; I Miller

The Committee deliberated during the year by email and met by video conference.

We rejoice that our recent candidate, Zach Dotson, has progressed beyond licensing and was ordained and inducted as a PCEA minister in 2024. One thing that his candidature has highlighted is the *ad hoc* manner in which we deal with candidates who do not conform to the standard laid out in the handbook. A review of the part of chapter four, dealing with the reception of students, was intended as a joint investigation with the Law and Advisory committee. Our respective committees are seeking to defer this review, but the main consideration will be how we deal with such non-standard applications for candidacy like Mr Dotson's. Each case is unique and therefore legislation may not be possible.

The convener reestablished contact with the Principal of Reformed Theological College (Melbourne), Phillip Scheepers. Dr Scheepers is now keen to progress the matter. At their meeting on 6th March, 2025, the Committee agreed to meet with Dr Scheepers and the RTC Board to discuss reestablishing the ties that were broken in 1979. At the time of writing, arrangements are still being made to find a suitable time to meet. We hope to present a brief supplementary report on the outcome of that meeting to Synod.

At our meeting on 6th March this year, the committee was able to join online with Rev Graeme Craig, Principal of the Free Church (Continuing) Seminary. Through warm and fruitful discussion, the committee is recommending a further strengthening of ties with the seminary by including the FCC Seminary in our list of Synod approved colleges for the training of candidates. The Synod approved the recommendation of FCC Seminary online courses in 2022 for those interested in the general study of theology, or with a view to ministry. As Mr Craig advised during the meeting that the online certificate course was not designed specifically for elder training, we can certainly recommend it as a good resource. Also, their main offering, the Diploma course, is intended to develop Godly, faithful Ministerial practitioners rather than a preparation for academia.

We continue in prayer that the Lord would provide us with men keen to pursue ministry in the PCEA, as well as those who are recognised by congregations to serve as elders. We appeal to the church to pray fervently that He will supply our need.

PROPOSED DELIVERANCES

1. That Synod now approve the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) Seminary as a Synod-approved College for the training of PCEA candidates.
2. That Synod welcome the re-establishment of ties with Reformed Theological College, Melbourne.
3. That we would fervently pray for the provision of candidates for the ministry, help from sister churches, and men ready for office-bearing in our congregations.

YOUTH AND FELLOWSHIP COMMITTEE

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

Youth Camp 2024

The youth camp ran over the long weekend from 4-7 October. John Forbes, Hastings, spoke on Heaven and Hell. The ages for the camp were narrowed this year to 14- to 25-year-olds. 13 campers from Brisbane, Northern Rivers, and Hastings congregations 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 2025 the camp is planned to run once again over the Easter long weekend. Jim Klazinga, Brisbane, speaking on the Trinity. Prices have been kept steady at \$100 for 18+ years and \$60 for students and unemployed. We have not yet considered family discounts.

Family Camp

It was with thankfulness to God that we were able to hold the Family Camp in July 2024 at Camp Elim, Forster approximately 45 minutes south of Taree, and 2 hours north of Newcastle. The camp coincided with the Queensland school holidays and was the last week of term for New South Wales. Being outside of NSW school holidays did make it cheaper, and with the approximately 90 campers meant we had sole use of the site.

While the weather wasn't the best, it was lovely to have a good crowd with the people from Charters Towers in North Queensland down to Tasmania.

We offered a capped fee for families which made the camp more affordable for families. Camp Elim also offered family capped rate. However, this will not be the case for the next camp.

David Lachmann, Southern Presbyterian Church in Hobart came with his family and spoke on "The trouble with tradition in a truthless time". Speaker costs and capped fees meant the camp cost the committee approximately \$3500.

It is planned to run the family camp again in 2025 at Camp Elim. Depending on costs and the number of people who attend will determine the future frequency of the camp.

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 2024 Essay question focussed on the life of Abraham. 16 young people participated (compared to 18 in 2023 and 20 in 2022). Book vouchers, from Reformers Bookstore or Koorong were awarded to participants, \$30 for seniors, \$25 for intermediate, and \$20 juniors.

Senior (age 14+) - William Kerridge (Northern Rivers), Grace Kerridge (Northern Rivers), Katherine Forbes (Hastings), James Forbes (Hastings), Donald Forbes (Hastings)

Intermediate (age 10-13) - James Kerridge (Northern Rivers), Emily Kerridge (Northern Rivers), Isaiah Hinze (non PCEA), Alexander Godden (Hastings), Lucas Godden (Hastings), Elisha Gullick (Hastings), Josiah Gullick (Hastings), Micah Rhodich (Hastings), Elsa Forbes (Hastings), Kenneth Forbes (Hastings)

Junior (age up to 9) - Samuel Godden (Hastings)

There were 15 submissions in 2024 (compared to 18 in 2023 and 20 in 2022). Book vouchers, from Reformers Bookstore or Koorong were awarded to participants, \$30 for seniors (5 essays), \$25 for intermediate (10 essays), and \$20 juniors. The total cost of awards was \$400.

Prescribed Youth Work 2025

It is hoped that the prescribed work, memorisation and essay questions will be published in the Banner soon. 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 about 70 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

2024 saw only 4 children submit answers for the whole year. This continues the pattern of the last few years with only 4 children completing search work in 2022 and 2023. 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 continue with the organisation of family and youth camps and encourages the church to pray for the practical planning and organisation of all activities. Pray that the events will bring deep spiritual growth under the ministry of the Word, with enrichment of Christian relationships, and a refreshing time of body and mind.
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 bring theological discovery, personal strength, and spiritual direction in the lives of 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 preparing the talks for the Youth and Family 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 continued 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, Mark Hamilton, Zach Dotson

The MC met in three Zoom meetings during the year. New members, Mark Hamilton and Zach Dotson, were welcomed at the first meeting. Members agreed to keep in touch with their assigned field, getting prayer points for the PCEA Missions prayer notes. At each meeting members gave updates on the fields assigned to them.

Vipin Reuben John from Chhapara commenced theological studies at PTS (Presbyterian Theological Seminary) Dehra Dun, India. A request was received from his Presbytery for help to purchase a laptop computer for Vipin. The MC decided to donate \$1000 to his Presbytery for this purpose.

The MC agreed to invite Rev Praveen Vishal and his wife Sandhya from the PFC-CI (Presbyterian Free Church of Central India) to visit our churches in Australia from February, and to speak at our Synod in May. The Presbytery of PFC-CI agreed to this proposal. A schedule was drafted, and airline tickets were purchased but they were refused visas, the reason being doubts that ‘the applicant genuinely intends to stay in Australia temporarily’. The Presbytery of PFC-CI has subsequently agreed to send Rev Samit and Mr. Pradeep to our 2025 Synod.

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**
7. **MERF**

1. **Australian Indigenous Ministries** (Mark)

We continue to receive prayer notes from AIM and circulate these prayer points in the PCEA Mission Prayer Notes.

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

Over the year regular prayer points were gratefully received via Jack Whytock. These covered a range of needs across the life and ministry of DTI including lecturers, staff, students, study terms and other pressing needs.

On the 14th February Principal Wilbert Chipenyu wrote:

Greetings from South Africa. Please find a brief description of the Dumisani ministry below.

Preamble

I always want to highlight on the purpose of Dumisani existence that we always pray about it and share with other brothers and sisters who could support us as the Lord leads.

Purpose of existence: Dumisani exists to transform the church in the Eastern Cape and beyond through reformed theological education. Dumisani is built in the Eastern Cape where the greatest number of “Christians” are members of the African Independent Church (AIC). These denominations have ordained Pastors and other titles such as Bishops and Apostles who serve in the church but have no theological education. These leaders take the African Traditional Religion (ATR) and incorporate it with Christianity on the pretext that they continue to honour their parents beyond the grave. Testimonies from students and alumni highlight that, before coming for study, ancestral worship seemed right as defined by the African culture but since their studies at Dumisani their worldview has completely changed. This is our prayer that we reach far and wide with the evangelical theological education. The theological education

transforms the church leaders who are equipped to be transformational agents in their congregations and families.

Result if purpose is not met: The AIC is left with many members who are church members BUT are not a church themselves. This is heart breaking to see church halls filled with people who are not living as Christians. Thus, failing the heart of Christ in the Great Commission to make disciples for Him.

Two obstacles to the Dumisani purpose:

1. Very few students from the AIC can pay for their studies since their churches are failing to sustain the Pastors in congregations, let alone studies.

1. We therefore have students' bursaries as priority number one in meeting the purpose of Dumisani's existence.

2. Due to testimonies of Dumisani alumni on reformed education, we have many possible students from very far away places who want to come for studies. Some of these might have tuition fees but Dumisani could not accommodate them since there only 4 student rooms which can accommodate 8 students sharing.

1. Student accommodation is the second need.

If the two needs are met, Dumisani will be able to fulfil its purpose of existence.

I am grateful that the lecturers are all volunteers. Some come as far as the United States as visiting lecturers at their own cost.

In Grace

Wilbert Chipenyu (Principal).

Further information can be found at <https://dumisani.org.za>.

3. Dr Dickson, India (Dennis)

Dickson writes with reference to Vet Net, India, 'We praise the Lord for sustaining us faithfully for one decade, post Dickson's open-heart surgery in September 2014. We desire to be faithful to the Triune God for we simply cannot reciprocate His divine care with love. 2024 was a fruitful year for Vet Net. The annual conference and short-term training and Vet camps were a blessing. It was encouraging to see 7 senior veterinarians, 2 aspirant young vets and 8 veterinary students involved in the cross-cultural vet mission. Besides these there were more than 20 volunteering vets and about 10 non-vets. Among the vets were 3 from the USA.

We look back and praise the Lord for the 50 multilingual prayer via Zoom sessions and 11 chain prayer sessions on Fridays. These prayer teams are like C.H Spurgeon's 'Heating Plant' for the Vet Net Foundation. I am grateful to the Lord and thankful to the prayer warriors. This year's short term Vet missions start with Vet Net going to Makunda Hospital, Assam, in March 2025'.

Dickson gives thanks for the birth of his second grandchild in Brisbane. He was able to spend time with the family over the Australian summer holidays. While here in Brisbane, his wife, Griselda, was busy ministering the word in South India. She spoke to some 200 missionary kids at Dhonor school. She spoke on personal counselling at a Union of Evangelical Students of India retreat.

4. Presbyterian Free Church of Central India (John Greensill)

The words of William Carey, "Expect great things from God and attempt great things for God," continue to inspire and challenge us in our gospel mission. His unwavering commitment to ministry in India serves as a beacon of encouragement for those labouring in the Lord's harvest. Carey's dedication reminds us that no opposition or hardship can hinder the power of the gospel, and his legacy continues to shape the work of missions today.

As we reflect on the past year, we lift our hearts in praise and thanksgiving to God for His provision and protection. In the midst of challenges, He has remained faithful, sustaining both the church and the mission schools. His hand has been evident in every step, opening doors, raising leaders, and strengthening the faith of believers. We are especially grateful for the perseverance of our mission workers, who tirelessly labour despite many hardships.

The reality of Christian ministry in India continues to be marked by an increasing rise in persecution and hostility. Opposition to the gospel is growing, and believers are facing difficulties in various forms, from social discrimination to direct threats. However, in the midst of these challenges, God is at work. The gospel continues to advance, new believers are being disciplined, and the church is being built up. Though the trials are real, they serve as a reminder that suffering for Christ is part of our calling, and we take heart in the promises of Scripture that assure us of His presence and victory. Despite these challenges, the church and mission schools are flourishing. The past year has been marked by significant growth in ministry, new opportunities, and remarkable achievements. The following report provides an update on both church ministry (PFC-CI) and mission schools in Chhapara and Lakhnadon.

Church Ministry (PFC-CI)

1. Inward Mission: Strengthening the Faith

The primary focus of the church remains the spiritual nourishment and strengthening of believers. This year, we have emphasized discipleship and deepening faith through systematic Bible studies, prayer meetings, and personal mentorship programs. Regular fellowship gatherings have created a strong sense of community among believers, encouraging them to stand firm in their faith despite external challenges.

2. Community Work and Outreach

Recognizing the need for holistic ministry, the church has expanded its efforts to serve the community in practical ways. A dedicated women's wing has been established to focus on outreach among the disabled and elderly. Through inclusive friendship programs, health camps, and house visitations, these women have become a source of comfort and care for many. Regular medical assistance has also been provided, ensuring that those with chronic illnesses receive the medication they need. This initiative has not only met physical needs but has also opened doors for gospel conversations, as many recipients have expressed their gratitude and curiosity about the Christian faith.

3. Women Empowerment Initiatives

Economic independence is crucial for the well-being of women in our community, particularly for widows and those from underprivileged backgrounds. The church has launched income-generating training programs, equipping women with skills in tailoring, handicrafts, and small-scale entrepreneurship. Additionally, investment opportunities have been introduced, allowing women to start their own businesses. This initiative has empowered many women to provide for their families and has also served as a platform to share the gospel through mentorship and fellowship.

4. New Candidate for Ministry

One of the greatest joys of this year has been witnessing the calling of Vipin John from Chhapara into full-time ministry. Vipin has shown great zeal and commitment to the gospel, and he is currently pursuing theological studies. His journey is a testimony to God's calling on young men to serve His church. We pray for his continued spiritual and academic growth, and we look forward to the impact he will have in the ministry in the years to come. His training will further strengthen the mission work in the region.

5. Church Construction

By God's grace, the church construction projects in Lakhnadon and Nagpur have been successfully completed. These new buildings are not just structures; they are places of worship, discipleship, and community transformation. The Nagpur church has now become a strategic base for expanding the gospel work in Maharashtra. With this new facility, we anticipate increased evangelistic outreach, discipleship programs, and ministry expansion into surrounding areas. We are thankful for the provision that made this possible and pray that these spaces will be used effectively for the glory of God.

Mission Schools:

1. Chhapara School

The mission school in Chhapara has seen significant growth, with student enrollment increasing at 15% per annum. This steady rise indicates the growing reputation of the school and the increasing demand for quality education. One of the highlights of this year was Sana Anjum, a student who passed the state board examination with the highest state rank. Her outstanding performance brought great recognition to the school, earning her multiple awards from the government. This achievement has enhanced the credibility of the institution, attracting more

students and families to our school. Infrastructure development is also progressing well, with seven additional classrooms nearing completion. The school remains committed to providing a Christ-centered environment, and although direct evangelistic activities are limited, the gospel is being shared through indirect means such as value-based education and personal interactions.

2. Lakhnadon School

The mission school in Lakhnadon has experienced modest growth in student enrollment. While the numbers have not increased dramatically, the school is recognized for its dedicated staff and strong Christian testimony within the local community. Teachers are not only committed to academic excellence but also to reflecting Christ through their lives and work. However, financial struggles persist, particularly in meeting salary commitments for staff. Despite these challenges, the faculty continues to serve sacrificially, trusting in God's provision. There is an urgent need for investment in infrastructure and facilities to enhance the overall learning experience and attract more students. We pray that the Lord will provide the necessary resources to strengthen this vital mission.

Conclusion and Prayer Points

As we reflect on this past year, we recognize both the challenges and the victories. We are humbled by God's faithfulness and encouraged by the fruit of our labours. However, there are pressing needs and areas where we seek the prayers and support of our partners in ministry.

- Pray for the continued spiritual growth and perseverance of believers, especially in areas where persecution is increasing. May they remain strong in faith and bold in their witness.
- Pray for the success of community outreach initiatives, particularly the women's wing and empowerment programs. May these efforts open more doors for sharing the gospel.
- Pray for Vipin John as he continues his theological studies. May God equip him for effective ministry.
- Pray for mission schools, particularly regarding financial stability, infrastructure development, and staff salaries. May God provide the resources needed to sustain and expand this vital work.
- Pray for the continued impact of the Nagpur church base, that it may be a hub for gospel advancement in Maharashtra.

We trust in God's promises and look forward to seeing His work unfold in the coming year. To Him be all the glory!

Lakhnadon Christian Hospital: (taken from the annual report of the Emmanuel Hospital Association EHA report)

Lakhnadon Christian hospital, established in the early 1920s by Scottish Missionaries, has a rich history of serving the poor and marginalised in an area lacking medical facilities. Initially developed as a surgical unit under Dr D.M.MacDonald in the 1970s, the hospital expanded to offer services in surgery, paediatrics, obstetrics, gynaecology, psychiatry and medicine. The hospital now provides outpatient services for various infectious and non-infectious diseases, inpatient care with 12 general beds, 4 high dependency beds and 4 private ward beds. Special care is offered for paediatric patients, and the palliative care services were restarted in December 2022. In January 2022 a new team restarted clinical services, and there has been a steady increase in patient numbers. The hospital has plans for community outreach programmes, including village visits to raise health awareness. There are also plans to improve nursing care with weekly classes, to recruit specialist doctors in obstetrics, gynaecology and surgery, and to improve the very old infrastructure.

5. Annie Soper School, Peru

San Andres (Lima, Peru)

No report

6. International Mission to Jewish People (Ian)

Regular contact was maintained with Mark and Rahel Landrum, with Rahel sending in prayer requests for the work which were then passed onto the church wide prayer points.

In a recent update Rahel wrote, 'Please pray 2025 is going to be an abundant harvest year in the Jewish community in Sydney, that many would come to know safety in Jesus when there is so much antisemitism.'

The website at <https://www.imjp.org.au> provides a good insight of the work and how to be involved.

Vision

TO SEE A WHOLE CHURCH, THRIVING, ENRICHED BY THE FAITH OF JEWISH PEOPLE WHO HAVE BECOME DISCIPLES OF JESUS.

Mission

TO MAKE JEWISH DISCIPLES OF JESUS TO ENGAGE (AND INSPIRE) THE CHURCH TO SHARE IN OUR WORK THROUGH PRAYER, GIVING AND IN WELCOMING NEW JEWISH CHRISTIANS INTO THEIR CONGREGATIONS

Involvement

THROUGH PRAYER AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT, BE PART OF A MISSION THAT IS PASSIONATE ABOUT SEEING JEWISH PEOPLE BECOME DISCIPLES OF JESUS AND PART OF A UNITED AND WHOLE CHURCH BODY.



Daniel Zeunert MELBOURNE

Daniel is a missionary with the IMJP team working in Melbourne. There is a large Jewish population in Melbourne located mainly in the south eastern suburbs. Daniel hopes to bring the message of salvation through Jesus the Messiah to Jewish people across the city.

Daniel has recently completed a Masters of Divinity at Ridley College, and also works part time as a physiotherapist. He is married to Anna and together they have two precious children, Elijah and Dalcie.



Mark and Rahel Landrum SYDNEY

Mark and Rahel Landrum are Jewish believers in Jesus with extensive Jewish mission experience. They are on our International Mission to Jewish People team based in Sydney, Australia, which has a thriving Jewish community of about 50,000.

They enjoy ministering the truth and love of Jesus with Jewish people in Sydney and other places where they travel. They do this through personal visits with Jewish people, teaching group Bible studies teaching in churches about the Jewish roots of the faith.

Originally from the US and Israel respectively, Mark and Rahel have given their lives to Jewish mission and have served in Israel, Europe, North America, and Australia. Both Mark and Rahel have MA degrees in Cross Cultural Studies with an emphasis on Jewish Studies.

Rahel and Mark Landrum

7. Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF) (Zach)

This year, the Missions Committee continued its corresponding relationship with the Middle East Reformed Fellowship. Many congregations and individual church members support this worthy cause. Therefore, as the missions committee, we offer a brief report about MERF's work. MERF is continuing its Arabic outreach through the radio and the internet. Many Muslim nations are closed to missionaries and traditional church missionary work. Therefore, MERF utilizes the Internet and radio ministries to reach these nations. These ongoing ministries bring forth much fruit, encouraging many Arab believers and drawing many to Christ. This work has much to praise God for, mainly since the Gospel penetrates closed nations. Further, it edifies believers not regularly in fellowship with other Christians.

MERF also continues its work in Africa, particularly in North Africa, with its online ministry team. These believers, all converted from a Muslim background, are using the internet to do one-on-one discipleship in North Africa. They mainly focus on engaging with leaders among small groups of Christians and working to mould new leaders. This is vital work, and there has been much encouragement from it, and it must be remembered as a matter of prayer.

In Bangladesh, home to millions of Muslims, MERF is also working on continuing and furthering the impact of the Gospel. In Bangladesh, MERF has focused on educating elders, ministers, and evangelists. MERF held conferences in the country in 2024 to train men for the ministry. Further, this training will support the growing Christian movement in Bangladesh with sound doctrine. There is

much to pray for about Bangladesh, including the hope of a thriving Reformed Church within a few generations.

We were blessed by the visit of Dr Armin Sukri from MERF Indonesia to our last Synod, and to a number of our churches. The training centre at Makassar, which he supervises, conducts training programs for pastors, teachers and other church workers. He plans to conduct an 'Augustine program' training in August 2025.

Overall, MERF is staying faithful to the Scriptures, striving to focus on its Fourfold ministries of Evangelism, Church Extension, biblical training, and Diaconal Aid to the Muslim world.

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 approve the gift of \$1000 towards the cost of a laptop for PFC-CI student at PTS, Vipin John
- 3.** 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.
- 4.** Synod adopt the Missions Committee Budget 2025/26 and expresses its general agreement with the estimates for this period. In view of our limited resources, the budget reflects a rationalisation of projects supported, with a focus on the work of PFC-CI with whom we have a long-standing and close relationship.

Missions Budget 2025									
General Funds	Budget 2024			Actual 2024		Budget 2025			Estimate 2026
Balance 1 Jan		28736		28752		38534			44834
Income: Investments	13000			17714		13000			10000
Giving Miss General	2700			2110		2500			2500
reimburse airfares									
Income	15700	44436		19824	48576	15500	54034		12500
Expenditure									
IMJP	1000			1000		2000			2000
Visiting Miss. expenses	2000			4078		2000			2000
Dumisani Theo, Institute & Bible School	3000			3000		3000			3000
Admin: Postage, bank fee	200			330		200			200
PFCCI-presbytery	1500			1500		2000			2000
Total Expenditure	7700	7700		9908	9908	9200	9200		9200
Closing Balance		36736			38668		44834		48134

Missions Relief Fund 2025										
2025										
MRF Working Account	Budget 2024		Actual 2024		Budget 2025		Estimate 2026			
Balance 1 Jan		5577		3177		10917			9817	
Income Investments	5000			2884		5000			5000	
Other (Donation congs)										
Transfer from Equities Ac				13336						
Income	5000	10577		16220	19397	5000	15917		5000	14817
Expenditure										
Lakhnadon Christian Hospital	2000			2000		2000			2000	
Lakhnadon Mission School	800			800						
Chhapara Mission School	1000			1000						
Laptop for Vipin John				1000						
Education, diaconal aid PFCCI						4000			4000	
Annie Soper Scholarships	1200			1200						
Dr Dickson Delhi	1300			1300						
Mukti child sponsorships*3	1000			1000						
Fees and Charges	100			180		100			100	
Total Expenditure	7400	7400		8480	8480	6100	6100		6100	6100
Closing Balance		3177			10917		9817			8717

Equities Account	Budget 2024		Actual 2024		Budget 2025		Estimate 2026			
Balance 1 Jan		130087		127240		134963			139963	
Income Revaluation of shares & Managed Funds	5000			1673		5000			5000	
Income (Gain on sale M/Fund)	0			1174		0			0	
Total	5000	135087		2847	130087	5000	139963		5000	144963
		265174			274926					
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		135087			134963		139963			144963
Total Funds Held McSwan Missions Relief Fund										
		135087			134963		139963			144963
Net Movement from previous year		0								

INTER-CHURCH RELATIONS COMMITTEE

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

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

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 regarding sending a delegate.

2. CHURCHES WITH WHOM WE HAVE FRATERNAL RELATIONS.

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

The Convener attended the General Assembly of the Free Church in Edinburgh. Greetings were extended, highlighting the current challenge of a shortage of ministers in our denomination and the difficulties faced in recent years. It was encouraging to have the Moderator acknowledge the highest interchurch relation we share. The formation of new congregations, primarily in Scottish cities, was noted positively. However, the Assembly also faced the painful task of disciplining one of their ministers. The visit provided an opportunity to renew personal contacts with several ministers.

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

The Convener attended the General Assembly of the Free Church (Continuing) in Glasgow. It was heartwarming to be received as a corresponding delegate through the Federal Relations Act with our Synod. Greetings were extended, highlighting the current challenge of a shortage of ministers in our denomination and the difficulties faced in recent years. Gratitude was expressed for recent interactions, including pulpit supply by two of their ministers. They also shared the challenge of numerous vacancies on the Scottish mainland, experiencing a similar shortage of ministers and office bearers.

The Assembly noted the formation of new congregations in the USA and a church plant in Canada, which may, in due time, become a separate denomination. The Convener was especially delighted to meet ministers and office bearers from Europe, noting their congregations in France, Spain, and Portugal. The extensive efforts on Psalmody, particularly through technology, were commendable, with the 1650 Psalter App developed by one of their US ministers. The Convener was invited to preach in several vacant congregations, strengthening our ties.

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

Rev. John Forbes attended the RCNZ Synod in Christchurch in September 2024 and was able to have fellowship with the brothers, observe proceedings, and bring greetings from the PCEA. We are delighted to welcome Rev. Sjirk Bajema to our Synod.

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

Regrettably, due to changes in personal circumstance, Rev. Jim Klazinga was unable to attend. A letter of greetings was sent instead.

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.

The committee is yet to arrange a time with the RPCA concerning “a proposal for conference of psalm singing churches.”

2:6 The Australian Free Church.

We are delighted to welcome Rev. John Nelson to our Synod.

Following a request from the Australian Free Church in 2022 the Interchurch Relations committee has engaged in dialogue with a view to union. Discussions have been frank and amicable. Our churches profess to hold the same constitutional standards so attention has focussed on clarifying possible differences in interpretation of the constitution to ensure there is no unresolved incompatibility. There have also been discussions about the extent to which personal convictions or preferences may be

imposed on others as a matter of conscience. It is the sincere desire of this committee to see a healing of the breach between our two denominations. The committee proposes a two-stage process towards union.

STAGE 1 – That both churches agree in principle to the incorporation of the AFC into the PCEA on the basis of the clarifying statement below. This to be agreed by Synod in May 2025 and forwarded to the AFC Presbytery for acceptance.

CLARIFYING STATEMENT

It is recognised and acknowledged that:

1. Translators “may err” - It is not compatible with our received standards to teach that a particular translation of Scripture has been made that does not have the potential for mistake or error. It is acknowledged that even the best translations, being the work of fallible men, may err (per WCF 1.8 and 31.4).
2. No Bible version has constitutional status in this Church – The constitution of this Church does not bind it to the ongoing use of a particular Bible version. Ministers and members are free to question the accuracy or appropriateness of the wording of even the best allowed translation.
3. Constructive criticism of Scripture translations is legitimate but requires care – It is appropriate that allowed translations be reviewed and, where necessary, critiqued, but special care should be exercised so as not to disturb the peace of the Church and destabilise the confidence of the Lord’s people in God’s word.
4. Individual conviction or preference is not inviolable – There are legitimate circumstances where a minister may be expected to read publicly from an allowed translation that he does not personally consider to be the best. This may happen when preaching at another congregation, or at a meeting of Presbytery or Synod. There is a practical necessity for a minister to accommodate himself to these circumstances. It does not imply that he personally endorses that translation, nor can it be deemed a violation of his personal conscience.

STAGE 2 - Following acceptance by the AFC in 2025, the Southern Presbytery should enter into discussions with them regarding the practicalities of union. Consideration should be given to such matters as property, stipend arrangements, and the expectation of future support for the charges in Chadstone and Hamilton. Proposals will be presented for agreement by Synod 2026 at which time a date will be set for the union to take effect.

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

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

We are delighted to welcome Rev Bruce Backensto, to our Synod.

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

We are delighted to welcome Rev Samit Mishra, to our Synod.

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

We are delighted to welcome Rev David Lachman, of the Hobart SPC, to our Synod.

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

The CRCA synod met in Brisbane 20-23 May 2024. Jim Klazinga brought greetings from the PCEA, in which he briefly addressed some connections we have with them and areas where we might have even more cooperation:

- 1) Our two denominations are both members of the International Conference of Reformed Churches, currently the only ones in Australia.
- 2) In the past, we were involved with them in the Reformed Theological College, which relocated a few years ago from Geelong to Melbourne. Approaches have been made to re-establish RTC as one of our synod-approved colleges in training young men for ministry.

- 3) We could benefit from the safe-church training they provide for their congregations.
- 4) The synod delegates were encouraged to consider the possibility of pulpit exchanges with PCEA congregations.

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

3. CHURCHES WITH WHOM WE HAVE CONTACT.

3.1 Presbyterian Church of Australia

The Committee received a request from the Presbyterian Church of Australia (PCA) to establish closer interchurch relations through a memorandum of understanding, which was reviewed by the committee. The Committee has agreed to advise Synod of the PCA's request and propose that the PCA be thanked. However, it should be noted that PCEA ministers and congregations are already free to cooperate at a local level as they see fit.

3.2 Associated Presbyterian Churches of Scotland. 2018

The Convener met with Rev. John Ferguson and Mr. William Mackenzie in Inverness, where they shared a time of encouragement and fellowship, discussing common challenges such as the shortage of ministers. The Associated Presbyterian Churches have congregations in Dundee, Inverness, Harris, Kinlochbervie, Oban, and Stornoway. We continue to look to the Lord for guidance and support for the future.

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. Union with Australian Free Church:
 - a. Synod agrees in principle to the incorporation of the Australian Free Church into the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia on the basis of the Clarifying Statement in the report and invites the Australian Free Church likewise to confirm their in-principle agreement to union on this basis.
 - b. Following acceptance by the Australian Free Church the Southern Presbytery is instructed to enter into discussions with them about the practicalities of union, with particular reference to property and finance, and to bring proposals to Synod 2026 for agreement.

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
		2023	+	-	2024	2023	2024	>4	4-11	12-18	19-30	31-45	46-64	65+	Total			
Brisbane	2/3	52		3	49		30	4	0	0	13	5	11	10	43	3	0	9
Northern Rivers	3/2	33	2	4	31	44	35	1	4	7	2	3	3	22	42		1/12	N/A
Hastings	2/1	40	3	5	38	75	65	4	13	10	7	9	11	19	73	2	2/20	N/A

Brisbane

We give thanks to God for His continuing purposes being worked out in and through our congregation during 2024.

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 continues to be blessed by the consistent presence of visitors at our worship services, some of whom attend fairly regularly. The livestreaming of services continued, for use by those unable to attend the services in person. We continued to accommodate some senior members needing to join in worship via their phones.

Membership: Disjunction certificates were issued to Ben and Zara Saljooghi, who in late 2023 had moved to Maclean and become members of the Northern Rivers congregation.

Nathan Oliver Klazinga, son of Ben and Claire, was baptized on 21 January.
Joseph Micah Klazinga, son of Micah and Lauren, was born on 3 April, and was baptized on 26 May.
Julianne Ruth Morrison, daughter of Weylin and Irene, was born on 5 July and was baptized on 18 August.
Jim Busch went home to be with the Lord in June. We continue to pray for his wife Jean.
No new members were welcomed into the congregation.

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 2024.

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 good. However, this year, our expenses were greater than our income, depleting our savings a bit, entirely due to the fact that a new church car had to be purchased to replace the old church van.

We continue to maintain a Diaconate Fund, although no new offerings were collected for it in 2024. The money in the fund remains available to help members and others who find themselves confronted with a financial emergency. Offerings continued to be collected 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. One fortnightly mid-week Bible Study met on zoom, making use of online study courses offered by Ligonier Ministries. A number of young adults meet regularly and conduct their own studies on the Westminster Confession. 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 began to conduct classes after every other morning service. The class is studying and discussing the Heidelberg Catechism. 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. Ken Stebbins led a series of studies on the book of Ruth.

Northern Rivers

Services were conducted in Maclean, both morning and evening throughout 2024. The services are livestreamed via YouTube and on the phone for those unable to attend. Sunday School is conducted after the morning service.

Wednesday morning Bible studies continue with a time of fellowship prior to the study. Westminster Confession classes take place on Wednesday night in the church library.

Attendance at services has fluctuated in 2024. We gained two new members through transfer of membership but lost two members who moved to another church. We lost two very supportive adherents but gained two keen adherents who were married in the church. Sadly, we mourned the deaths of Bruce Campbell, a long serving Deacon in the congregation late in 2024, and Miss Jenny Wallace, daughter of Mrs Barbara Wallace.

The Annual PCEA Youth Camp took place on the October long weekend (4th -7th October). The speaker was the Rev. John Forbes, who spoke on the subject of Heaven and Hell. The topic gave opportunity for interesting discussions, and integrating the camp with congregational worship gave the congregation the blessing of meeting with young people from around the denomination. 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.

We continue to rejoice that the Maclean Manse, used as an Op-Shop by the Lower Clarence Christian Education Association (LCCEA), raises substantial funds to provide SRE teachers in local schools. In turn, the LCCEA makes a donation to the Northern Rivers Congregation. The Manse has had major work done, being completely repainted externally and reroofed.

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.

The "manse" in Lismore has been sold, pending approval of a boundary adjustment. We look forward to being able to use some of the proceeds in 2025 for repair and maintenance of the church building and upgrade of the Hall in Maclean.

Hastings River

Services and activities: Public worship in Wauchope is at 10am and 4pm each Lord's Day with a service in Kindee at 7pm on the third Sunday of each month. Two midweek meetings for Bible study and prayer are held during term time on Wednesdays at 10am and 7pm. The ordinance of the Lord's Supper was held three times in 2024 - in February, June and November. A time of psalmody is held monthly.

Sunday School and Youth: The Sunday School currently has two classes - junior and senior – with around 20 children. We encourage memorisation of scripture, psalms and catechisms as set by the PCEA Youth and Fellowship committee. A Sunday School outing and congregational picnic was held at Pilot Beach Dunbogan in December 2024.

People: There were two baptisms during the year. There were also three new communicant members – two by certificate and one by profession of faith. Sadly two of our members died during 2024 – John Tibbs and Shirley Hamilton. Both had been significant in the life of the congregation over many years and will be greatly missed.

Finance and Property: An upgrade to the church hall was begun in December 2024 to modify the layout to provide a separate meeting room and a store room, and to install a new kitchen. We humbly acknowledge the Lord's kindness in sustaining the life and fellowship of the Hastings River congregation over the past year.

CENTRAL PRESBYTERY REPORT

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

The Central Presbytery held two regular meetings during the year. Additionally Pro re nata and Special meetings were held culminating in the Induction of Rev Robin Tso as minister of St Georges congregation on 23 August 2024.

Following are the congregational reports submitted on 18 March 2025 when, *inter alia*, congregational reports were presented.

Rev Trevor Leggott, Elder presented the **Manning Report**.

On Saturday 1st March we had our Annual Congregation Meeting, chaired by our Interim Moderator, Rev Robin Tso.

Since the vacancy commenced in January 2024, we have been thankful to the Lord for a constant supply in our pulpit, and a genuine evidence of Christian fellowship and care amongst our people. We continue with services by telephone, as well as on-line live services, and we seek to continue our regular communion services on the months with a 5th Sunday. In the twelve months we have had twenty different preachers, as well as being ably supplied by our elders as needed. It has been a blessing to have been able to keep up good ministry based on a solid Reformed and Presbyterian background. We keep a close lookout for a suitable man to be called as our minister, although there are presently very few options apparent, either here at home or from overseas.

Wednesday morning Bible study at the church hall, and Thursday evening at Tinonee, have been very well supported and appreciated with good numbers attending each week. There has been good participation and signs of spiritual growth, and this coupled with warm Christian fellowship. Our prayer meeting before the morning service have continued with a number of different men leading as needed.

Our weekly average attendance continues at about 50 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. There continues to be a good spirit of fellowship amongst the congregation, and 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.

We thank the Lord for his sustaining grace and mercy.

Communicant members:	(2023) 34	(2024) 35
Adherents:	(2023) 10	(2024) 11
Baptised Children:	(2023) 1	(2024) 2
Average Lord's Day attendance:	(2023) 48	(2024) 50

Safe Church Training: All Office-bearers are up to date with Working with Children Check. We currently don't undertake any Sunday School or youth work.

Minister's Leave entitlements used during 2024 : Vacant congregation.

Mr. Ian Miller, Clerk of Session presented the **Hunter Report**.

This year the congregation encountered an unanticipated event with the departure of Rev Tso, Mrs Tso and children on Rev Tso's induction as Minister of St Georges Congregation on 23 August 2024. Rev Tso, prior to his relocation, provided doctrinally sound, challenging and helpful preaching and teaching on the Hunter. Rev Tso, Mrs Tso and the children were farewelled with much affection and tears. Rev George Ball and a few local office bearers provided valuable pulpit supply.

Appointed as Interim Moderator, Rev Dr Muldoon diligently organised pulpit supply which included some younger men who may be considered for a future "call" to the Charge.

The **mid-week Bible study** used Matthias study booklets as an aid. A study of Deuteronomy was completed, and a study of the Book of Acts was commenced.. Regular fervent prayers were directed to the Throne of grace for various people and matters such as our persecuted brethren worldwide, the furtherance of the glorious gospel through our sister congregations, various missions and our nation. The **Cardiff All Ages Sunday School** comprised of three classes: infants, primary and one adult class. Psalm singing practice was conducted prior to class lessons led capably by Mr King. We are grateful for the Lord's provision of faithful and capable teachers of the younger classes including Mrs Fluit and Mrs Oringo.

Mr Miller led adult studies which critiqued various contemporary doctrinal errors and heresy including Federal Vision Theology, and the New Perspective on Paul. Mr Fluit, Mr Barnes, Mr Miller and Mr Oringo provided helpful leadership in presenting a series of critiques of common religions in Australia. The Scriptures firstly and the Westminster Confession of Faith were the standards by which all were compared.

The congregation enjoyed informative and helpful **mission presentations** on Mission night at Synod 2024 and occasional presentations by Rev Don Burgess regarding the Mitamisiyi Orphanage, Kenya. We are thankful for the admittance to communicant membership of Mrs Brown, Mr Brown and adult daughter Miss Brown, Rev Siebbert and Mrs Siebbert, and Rev Hall and Mrs Hall. The overall communicant membership remained stable compared to the previous year. We pray that Bible studies being conducted with some of the young adults will be blessed with saving faith and future communicant membership.

In good spirits, united in Christ and the great commission, we look forward to the Lord's provision of our needs in 2025.

Communicant Members: 48 (2023) 50 (2024) **Adherents:** 20 (2023) 12 (2024)
children: 15 (2023) 12 (2024) **Young people:** 2 (2023) 3 (2024)

Average Lord's Day attendance: am: 55 pm: 50 **Sunday school**
classes: 3 **students:** 11 (infants, primary) + 12 adults.

Elders: 1 + 1 Assessor **Deacons:** 5

Safe Church Training: 4 Adults completed Refresher training.

Minister's Leave entitlements used during 2024 until 23 August: 2 weeks.

Mr Alex Steel, Elder presented the **St Georges Report**.

2024 saw big changes in the life of St Georges Congregation.

The vacancy in the pastoral office was filled on 23rd August with the induction of Rev Robin Tso following a call from the Hunter Congregation. It only lasted just under nineteen months during which time Rev Tso was the Interim Moderator.

Pulpit supply for the Lord's day was filled by ministers from our own denomination, other reformed preachers from other churches and two from overseas – Rev William Macleod and Rev Kenneth Macdonald, retired ministers from the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing). The elders and a deacon also assisted with some Lord's Day services and the mid-week prayer meetings.

Seven people were added to the communicant membership during the vacancy with the transfer/removal of five during the same period.

The minister and his family have settled in well to life in a city charge and his ministry is being appreciated by the congregation. Attendance at the services did not decline during the vacancy and have been stable since. Practically at every Lord's Day morning services we have visitors, mostly from overseas.

A regular Wednesday mission meeting was started, aided by video services and installation of a large screen in the Session room. Presentations by *Indian Reformed Fellowship (Aust)*, *Jericho Road (Mission to prisons/Hospitals etc)*, *Seamen's Christian Friend Society* and *Reformed Protestant Mission (Sri Lanka)*.

An extensive internal renovation of the manse was undertaken which has enabled the minister and his wife to provide hospitality to large numbers of the congregation. The restoration and repair work of the church steeple and replacement of the roof recommenced in February 2025 with the inviting of tenders for the work to be undertaken. Sale of the 21 units at Lindfield was completed in June after providing accommodation for some of the congregational members and others for 45 years.

Challenges were experienced by people attending church services by car with on-street parking fees increasing and city traffic flow becoming more restricted. The Deacons' Court therefore arranged pre-paid private parking at a cheaper rate for any wishing to use it – street parking costs approximately \$18 per service.

However, with the introduction of additional *Metro* train services and a new station close to the church, it has been a benefit for some who travel to services by train.

The congregation continues in good spirits and is appreciative of the minister's preaching and pastoral care.

Communicant Members: (2023) 29 (2024) 30 **Adherents:** (2023) 11 (2024): 11

Children & Youth: 8

Attendance: Lord's Day : am: 40 -50 **pm:** 20 – 30

Wednesday meeting: 12 – 15

Sabbath School Classes: Nil

Elder: 2

Deacons: 3

Safe Church Training: No Teachers/helpers due for 2025 Refresher training

Nil due for Triennial training 2025

Minister's Leave entitlements used during 2024: vacant congregation.

Rev Dr Dennis Muldoon presented the **Hawkesbury-Nepean report.**

On Sundays there were two Worship services, one at 11.00am and the second on zoom or by phone at 5.00pm. On the first Sunday of every month, however, we enjoyed lunch together as a congregation and then our second service is held straight after lunch at 1.00pm. On Sunday mornings we conducted a Sunday School at 10.00am and this includes classes for primary and high school students. Our Tongan brothers and sisters held a Tongan Language Fellowship at 10.00am. The minister conducted a service in a Nursing Home in Chester Hill every week. Beeuw Dykstra, another member of our church, helped with a devotional time at Governor Phillip Nursing Home in Penrith.

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.

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 Loudon'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.

SOUTHERN PRESBYTERY REPORT 2024

Moderator: Rev. George Ball 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.
			2023	+	-	2024	Deaths	2023	2024	<4	4-11	12-18	19-30	31-45	45-64	65+	Total				
All Nations	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Carrum Downs	2	0	21	0	15	6	0	25	15	1	1	2	4	4	4	4	20	0	0	0	0
Geelong	1	0	11	0	0	11	0	10	10	0	0	0	0	0	3	11	14	0	0	0	0
Knox	0	0	8	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Narre Warren	2	0	18	0	6	12	1	32	20	3	0	0	6	4	6	6	25	2	0	0	0
Ulverstone	1	1	26	2	5	23	1	35	25	3	2	3	2	4	4	6	24	0	0	0	5
Southern Pres	6	1	84	2	34	52	2	102	70	7	3	5	12	12	17	27	83	2	0	0	5

The Southern Presbytery held 11 ordinary meetings and two extraordinary meetings during 2024. Many of those meetings related to the trials, licencing, calling, and ordination and induction of Mr Zachary Dotson. Considerable ministry and pastoral work has also been required to support the congregations following the resignations of Ian Hall, Ian Hamilton, Andres Miranda, Terry Buck, and the passing of John Disney.

The efforts of George and Rhoda Ball in taking up the pastoral care of Carrum Downs and Narre Warren have been invaluable, as has the work of the Synod-appointed assessors to Southern Presbytery. There have been many long-distance trips for pastoral visits, Presbytery, Session, and congregational meetings, pulpit exchanges, and extensive maintenance and security work on the church buildings. It has been encouraging to see the unity of purpose for the building of God's kingdom from men who have other charges and responsibilities. It is our prayer that God will bless the work in the Southern Presbytery.

All Nations Report

Following the secession of all members and office bearers in 2023, All Nations PCEA has continued as a legal entity until various administrative matters can be resolved. It is hoped that this will be accomplished and the entity dissolved in 2025.

Carrum Downs Report

The year ended with 6 members, 12 adherents (though their make-up has entirely changed during the year), 2 teenagers, and two children. The attendance has been as low as two, as many as 20, but by the end of the year the average was around 15.

It's a fragile work, but there is great scope (and hope) under the blessing of God, for a man with a vision, and with a heart for God and a heart for souls, to exercise a ministry here.

Extensive maintenance has been carried out on the church property after years of neglect.

Geelong Report

The Lord has continued to provide for the spiritual and physical needs of the congregation throughout 2024. Despite the lack of availability of some local ministers and men to provide regular supply of the pulpit, we have continued to meet for worship every Lord's Day. Much of the preaching has been provided by Rev. Alastair McEwen, Nigel Cunningham, and Donald Ramsay (using sermons from Rev. Martin Williams).

With the sudden resignation of Ian Hamilton (Ulverstone) on 5 April 2024, Rev. Dr Dennis Muldoon (Hawkesbury-Nepean) was appointed Assessor Elder for the Geelong Session. Our Interim Moderator, Rev. Andres Miranda, conducted the worship services 3 times during 2024, in order to observe the Lord's Supper. Following his resignation from the PCEA in November, Rev. Dr Dennis Muldoon took on the duties of Interim Moderator and Martin Pilgrim (Ulverstone) was appointed Assessor Elder for Geelong. Mr Muldoon visited the congregation in December to encourage the congregation and to lead the worship service, teaching on blind Bartimaeus made well (Mark 10:46-52).

The morning service continues to be a source of great encouragement and edification. Our time of fellowship after the service focuses on questions and issues arising from the sermon and how they impact our lives. The spiritual and physical needs of individuals are shared and prayed for during the service as well as privately throughout the week. This year has seen significant health issues for many in the congregation.

The generosity of the congregation to God's work has continued faithfully. In addition to our local needs, we have supported mission work locally and overseas. The manse continues to be rented to a Christian family who help maintain the grounds. This provides an additional source of income which helps us as we wait for God's provision of a full-time minister for the congregation. Sadly, our dear sister in Christ, Margaret Frost, passed away from pneumonia on 25 February 2025.

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 as we commit ourselves to His service in our daily lives.

Knox Report

There were no worship services or other activities at the Knox PCEA church during 2024 following the departure of all communicant members and adherents associated with the church in Wantirna. Some members sought disjunction certificates while others were removed from the roll after due notice.

The PCEA archives were relocated from the Knox church to Maclean, NSW, when Rev. David Kerridge was appointed as the PCEA archivist at Synod 2024.

Maintenance work was undertaken on the building and grounds, including the upgrading of all door handles and locks, and the installation of internet-connected security cameras. This was necessary to ensure insurance coverage while the building was unoccupied.

More recently, two church groups have independently expressed strong interest in leasing the church building with a view to subsequently purchasing the church and manse, should Synod approve the sale. Extensive cleanup of the interior and exterior has now been completed in order to facilitate these options.

Narre Warren Report

It has been a tumultuous year in the life of the congregation, witnessing the loss of both elders (John Disney through death and Terry Buck resigned) and the resignation of the minister, Andres Miranda, in November. While the congregation has been in steady decline over recent years, it is now reduced to its smallest number. The year ended with 12 communicant members and 6 adherents. The condition of the property both inside and out gave evidence of years of neglect. With the help of some willing volunteers toward the end of the year a lot of maintenance work was done, and more is planned.

The congregation, though small and largely elderly, give evidence of appreciation of the ministry of the word. A ladies bible study meets fortnightly, where there is active participation by all who attend. Though the morale of the congregation has understandably been shaken, yet the prayer of those who remain is that they might once again see growth and that the Lord will provide a pastor in due season.

Ulverstone Report

Services and Meetings

The congregation meets for public worship each Sabbath at 10:30 am and 4 pm, with an altered afternoon service time of 2 pm on the first Sabbath of each month. A congregational lunch is held in

conjunction with the altered afternoon service time, offering a time of fellowship and easier access to the afternoon service for members who travel long distances to worship. The congregation live-streams services via Zoom, allowing those with illnesses and those who live far away an option to attend both services. Midweek meetings are held on Thursday evenings at 7:30 pm during school term. The women of the church continue to meet one Wednesday each month for a time of devotion and a craft activity.

The congregation suffers from many health afflictions, however we are grateful to the Lord for the commitment of our members. There has been a natural turnover of membership throughout the past several years, but the Lord continues to provide for this congregation. Our congregation is united, committed to reformed doctrine and the teaching of the whole Word of God. The congregation are most supportive of the ministry and are joined with the elders in seeking to expand the reach of the church in Ulverstone; some members have provided funds for a SermonAudio account to expand the reach of the congregation. We pray the Lord may use this to His glory.

The congregation continues to enjoy close fellowship with like-minded churches in Tasmania, enjoying particularly close relations with the Southern Presbyterian Church. We are encouraged by visits from members of the SPC, EPC, FRC, and PCT, among others.

Session

Long-serving elder Mr Ian Hamilton resigned as an elder on 5th April 2024. The Session hosted a congregational meeting on 25th April to reassure the congregation. Subsequently, the Session held an election in which Mr Martin Pilgrim was elected by the congregation as an elder. He was ordained on 4th August 2024. Mr Pilgrim has assumed the role of Clerk of Session and representative elder to the higher courts of the church.

Since 2022, the pulpit has been supplied by Mr Zach Dotson. With his licensing, the congregation called Mr Dotson as their pastor. He was duly ordained and installed by the Southern Presbytery on 8th November 2024. Rev Dotson replaced Interim Moderator Rev John Forbes as the Moderator of the congregation. The local elders, Rev Dotson and Mr Pilgrim, are assisted by two assessor elders, Rev George Ball, and Dr Donald Ramsay.

Deacons' Court

The Deacons' Court consists of the members of the Session, along with long-serving Deacon and Treasurer Mr Robert Hingston. Due to age and health, Mr Hingston has requested to retire and has begun handing over duties to other men. Mr Pilgrim has assumed the role of Clerk of Deacons' Court, and Mr Robert Kingston has taken on the role of treasurer. The similarity of name between the incumbent and incoming treasurer has, on occasion, caused mild confusion.

We give thanks to God for the many mercies and blessings which He has bestowed upon us. We thank Him for His kindness and His providence, in particular for sending a man to fill our pulpit. We pray that, if it is in accordance with His divine will, we may be given spiritual and temporal growth and that the work in Ulverstone may increase and reach more of the community, through which God's name may be glorified.

CHURCH AND NATION AND PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE

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

1. The Civil Threat to Christian Freedom.

Dr. Mark Durie, Senior Research Fellow at the Melbourne School of Theology, writes,

In recent years there has been a slew of laws enacted around the country that limit religious freedoms. A case in point is the Victorian Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Act 2021, which took effect in February 2022. This Act bans conduct “directed towards a person” which could “change” or “suppress” their sexual orientation or gender identity, these concepts being understood very broadly. Sexual orientation, for example, includes sexual behaviours and relationships, as well as inclinations. As a result, the scope of behaviour potentially penalised as a “conversion practice” is correspondingly broad. The Act specifically targets religious practices, including prayer and therapeutic counselling. The consent of the person is declared to be irrelevant.

Other jurisdictions are also bringing in change-and-suppression laws. One is already in place in the Australian Capital Territory; New South Wales has passed a law that will take effect this year; South Australia is adopting a similar law; and a Queensland law bans change-and-suppression practices by medical providers.

The Victorian Act poses a particular challenge to churches due to its vicarious liability provision. In Victoria, if a church worker, whether an employee or a volunteer, engages in a “change or suppression” practice, church authorities can be found guilty as well, unless they can show they have taken preventive precautions . . .

In the UK, the 2024 Cass Review reported a huge increase in children seeking gender services in recent years but found that there is a weak evidence base for “affirming” medical interventions, which can have devastating irreversible impacts including infertility, sexual dysfunction, incontinence and osteoporosis. In particular, the Cass Review found that there is a lack of valid evidence that “gender-affirming” treatment reduces suicide.

Since the release of the Cass Review, the UK has banned new prescriptions of puberty blockers for the treatment of gender dysphoria, a decision that was upheld by the High Court. Meanwhile, other nations across Europe have also been winding back “affirmation” policies, including Finland, Sweden and Norway. France and Germany are now moving in that direction too.

Adding to concerns about harmful practices was the recent leaking of files from the World Professional Association of Transgender Health (WPATH), whose guidelines have underpinned “affirmation” regimes around the world, including Australia. These files reportedly reveal that WPATH members knew they were performing life-changing, harmful procedures on patients who were too young or too unwell to give informed consent. In the US, a recent legal case has shown WPATH trying to suppress publication of the results of a review that they commissioned from Johns Hopkins University. Reportedly, WPATH leadership became “painfully aware that there are many gaps in research to back up our recommendations” . . .

Another driver of change has been lawsuits against gender-affirming clinics, including those brought by “detransitioners” who were guided into undergoing medical transitions which they later regretted. The Tavistock Clinic, the only NHS gender clinic for children in the UK, was shut down in the face of mass legal action over its medical “affirmation” of gender transitioning children, many of whom were same-sex-attracted girls with complex psychiatric problems . . . The scandal of the Tavistock Clinic has shown that what is pseudo-scientific is mandating “affirmation”. What churches need to grasp is that this Act is not targeting their (alleged but unproven) “change and suppression practices”, but their theology of human sexuality and their pastoral care. The state is dictating to the Church what it can believe and how it must worship to stay out of legal trouble . . .

2. Statement to the Prime Minister.

We the members of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (formed in 1846) meeting in Wauchope, NSW, from 6th-9th May 2025 send greetings to the Prime Minister ???? and his Government. We congratulate you on your election. You take up the reins of government at a time when the world is very unstable and volatile. You face many social problems at home, with the scourge of domestic violence, the rising rate of crime especially among teenagers, and the rising tensions between some religious and cultural groups. You face many economic challenges, with the rising cost of living, the rising cost of energy, the rising cost of housing, providing adequate defence for our nation - to name but a few.

When Solomon became king of ancient Israel he was overwhelmed by the responsibility and privilege of the task. He asked the LORD for an understanding mind to discern between good and evil (1 Kings 3:9). We encourage you to do the same.

Please remember that you are in office ultimately by the LORD's permission. The Bible reminds us that, "there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God" (Romans 13:1).

Please also remember that there is One in heaven who is King of kings and Lord of lords, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Scriptures emphasise that it is the duty and privilege of the individual, the church, and the nation to acknowledge His sovereignty, to trust and obey Him, to thank Him for all His mercies, and to look to Him for all needed blessing (Psalm 2: 10-12). His name will endure when all others will be forgotten (Ps. 72: 17-19). We are also assured that He will return and 'will judge the world in righteousness' (Acts 17:31).

We as members of the church are exhorted to "pray for kings and all those in authority that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth." (1 Tim.2: 1-3). We therefore assure you that we will endeavour to pray for you at such a time as this and exhort you to seek that which is right and abhor that which is evil.

For your information, we as a church have appointed ?/?/25 as a special day for prayer and fasting for the church and the nation.

3. The Challenges Facing the PCEA

We are all too aware of the many challenges and problems we face. But how do we respond to them? Panic? Complain? Blame call? Change our principles and practices? Become demoralised and give up? Resign?

It may be helpful to be reminded of the essential nature of the church. This year marks the 1700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed. It seems appropriate to quote from it, 'We believe in one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church'. Note that it identifies four basic attributes of the church.

The church is one – because God is one (John 17:11 and 21, Eph. 4: 4-6). The church is one because Christ, through His work of the cross, abolished the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2: 14-18). The church is one – when it submits to its one head, the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 2: 20-21 and 4: 12-13). Though the church appears divided and fragmented, yet the unity of the church is not primarily external but internal and spiritual in character. We should remember that our essential unity is not because we are members of the same denomination, or that we sing psalms, or that we use the same bible translation, or whatever. But the real basis of our unity is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The church is holy, not because we are made up of perfect people - clearly, we are not - but because of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for His people once for all upon the cross by providing us with the gift of salvation (Heb. 10:10 and 14 and Eph. 2:21). We are holy by virtue of our union with

Christ. We are, however, also called to be holy and strive for peace and holiness (Heb. 12:14, 1 Peter 1:16). We are to be in practice what we are in principle.

The church is catholic – which simply means general or universal. We do not confess our faith in the Roman Catholic Church! But in the catholic or universal church. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is not restricted by time, geography, race, or culture (Heb. 12:22-24, Rev. 5:9). Whilst we use (the helpful?) distinctions such as the church visible and invisible, or the church militant and triumphant, we should never lose sight of the fact that the church in every age, and generation, and place, is an integrated and interrelated cohesive church. A useful reminder to us in our small corner.

The church is apostolic. By this we don't mean the Roman Catholic doctrine of apostolic succession. But we mean that the church's teaching must be clearly founded on and subject to the teaching of the apostles (Acts 2: 42, Eph. 2: 20-21, 2 Tim. 2: 1-2, and 4: 1-5). This is the faith we believe is faithfully summarised in our subordinate standards – the Confession of Faith and Catechisms. This is the faith that must be proclaimed without hesitation or deviation.

We ought therefore to examine ourselves in light of God's Word (2 Cor. 13:5). A slogan that emerged from the Reformation was the Latin phrase, '*semper reformanda*' – which means 'always be reforming'. This doesn't mean that the church must be constantly updating her Confession. It means rather that the church which is reformed must always be reforming according to the Word of God. It was a call to ongoing repentance and recommitment and submission to the authority of the Word of God and the Lordship of Christ.

4. Christian Liberty.

In chapter 20 section two the Westminster Confession states, '**God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in anything contrary to His Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such doctrines, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience**'.

No doubt the Westminster divines were thinking primarily of the many Roman Catholic and high Anglican innovations and additions that are contrary to Scripture or in addition to it. But Evangelical, Reformed and Presbyterian churches are not immune from their own kind of innovations (perhaps in more subtle ways) which can easily become elevated to the level of commandments.

There are a number of grey areas in the worship and life of the church which Scripture does not directly or unambiguously address. E.g. the time of worship, the order of service, do we sit or stand or kneel for prayer, do we sit or stand to sing, do we sit or stand when the word is read, do we sing three psalms or four, how long should the sermon be, should the Lord's prayer be recited, how often should communion be observed and how, what is the appropriate dress code for men and women, should there be a children's address, is it appropriate to have a church luncheon, is it appropriate have a congregational meeting on the Lord's Day, is it appropriate to use overheads, is it appropriate for children to pass around the collection basket, should there be a children's church, etc!

No doubt we all have (strong!) opinions and preferences on many of these things. Wouldn't it be wonderful if everyone agreed with you - but especially with me! We are convinced that our preferences are correct and everyone else is in error. We believe we could improve our fellow Christians if only we could make them in our image.

But what about when we don't see eye to eye? We all agree (I hope!) that 'the whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either set down in scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men' (WCF 1:6). Yet claiming the Confession doesn't guarantee agreement on every practice.

We all agree (I hope!) in the application of the regulative principle of worship, 'the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped . . . any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture' (WCF 21:1).

We might even appeal to certain Bible passages (e.g. 1 Cor. 11: 1-16, 14:34, etc.) which appear to legislate on some matters relating to worship – but even here there are sincerely held differences of interpretation and understanding.

What then should we do? We should welcome the wisdom of the Westminster divines. Conscience is not Lord. But God alone is Lord of the conscience. Since our consciences are fallible, we must seek to have them ruled and directed by the Word of God. The Confession helpfully steers us away from the twin dangers of legalism on the one hand, and antinomianism on the other. Where there are differences of preference or opinion, we need to follow the biblical principles set out in the Confession and in the proof-texts provided, e.g. 1 Corinthians 8, 10: 23-33, 1 Cor. 13:1-7, Romans 14:1-5, James 4:12, etc.

Let a man be convinced in his own mind (Rom. 14:5). But let him hold to his convictions with great humility, knowing that knowledge puffs up, but love builds up (1 Cor. 8:1). Let him treat a brother who disagrees with him with dignity and respect.

5. Pray Till You Pray.

To encourage us in prayer, the following is a quote from Paul Levy's monthly letter to the congregation of The International Presbyterian Church, Ealing, West London, in Nov. 2024.

I am reading the biography of the 19th Century Scottish Minister Alexander Moody Stuart. He was part of a golden generation of Scottish Ministers which included Robert Murray McCheyne and the Bonar brothers, that did so much good for the gospel. Moody Stuart gave 3 instructions on prayer which I've found helpful:

1. Pray *till* you pray
2. Pray *till* you are conscious of being heard
3. Pray *till* you receive an answer.

This is helpful to us because there is a recognition here that prayer is not always easy. Very often it can feel as if we are going through the motions, rattling through a list. Lists are helpful for prayer. I was once bemoaning them, when my mother said to me, 'when you go to the shop, do you find a list restrictive?' It's a great point that when I go to the shop, I make sure I have a list to remind me what I need. However, the danger in prayer is we go onto autopilot, and we think we've prayed by going through our lists.

Moody Stuart recognises that we need to pray until we pray. That is, in prayer we are engaging with God, seeking to bring our utter impotency before him. It is the practical expression of our need, without him we cannot work, we have nothing. There is a reliance and dependence on God which gives expression to prayer. It is a recognition that we need God and God is one who has drawn near, who is able, who does act, who does love and who gives. Our hearts are stirred as we bring before him his character and his nature, and we are reminded of our privilege.

We move from going through our list to realising we are in the presence of God, that his Son is interceding for us. His Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and it is at that point we can, "pour out our hearts before him" (Psalm 62:8). We need not, nor can we hold anything back from him. We are coming to one to whom all hearts are open, he knows us, he understands us and yet he loves us passionately. He delights to hear us pray.

This takes time. In our human relations, if we are to have important conversations, we know that we must give time to them; put the phone down, get away from the screens. It is no different with God. It is why Jesus tells us to go into our closet (Matthew 6:6).

We need to see how cold our hearts often are. They need to be warmed by God's love and grace in his Son. It is by engaging with God in his Word and prayer that the ice of our hearts is melted. As our minds and hearts understand the love of God in Christ, our affections are stirred and our wills motivated. We become conscious that our every moment is lived before God by his Spirit.

Moody Stuart's second instruction is to pray until you are conscious of being heard.

Having prayed until we pray, recognising who God is and what he's done, understanding his heart for sinners, appropriating his love for his people; we then become conscious that he has heard us. At times in conversation people will say, 'I don't want you to do anything – I just want you to listen'. It's

often a cry of anguish, where someone feels they haven't been heard. It is a horrible thing for one to feel that their voice is not listened to . . .

It is possible to be in a conversation where you are speaking with people and you become conscious that they are not listening; but that is never the case with God. Moody Stuart instructs us to pray until *we* are conscious that God has heard us.

His third instruction follows on from this – pray until you receive an answer.

We know he does not always answer, 'yes'. He sometimes says, 'no', and often he says, 'wait'; but we must get to the point where we are aware he has heard and answered. The call to prayer is a call to perseverance – Jesus tells us to 'ask, seek, knock (Matthew 7:7-12)', to keep on asking (Luke 11: 8) . . . and to not give up (Luke 18:1-8).

There are many times when God is asking us to wait, and the temptation for us is to give up. Like you, there are people I have been praying for, for decades. I can think of one non-Christian friend who I think we have prayed for most days over 25 years and yet she has still not trusted Christ. I can often feel ashamed about asking the same thing over and over again, but God encourages me to do that. The longer we have prayed for something the more difficult it is to keep going, but the life of faith is one that says we will not go away, we will keep knocking, we will keep asking. God has given us this right and privilege to come to him – he is not fed up with us. Our asking will get bolder, our seeking will be more intense, our knocking will become louder. Do not give up praying for people.

One last thing, it is tempting to read this and privatise it. Private prayer is essential: Jesus commands it, but it would seem that corporate prayer – where the church gathers together to pray – is most prevalent in Acts. These truths of, 'praying until we pray, pray until we are conscious of being heard, and pray till we receive an answer', are as applicable to our church gatherings for prayer. It speaks of an urgency, perseverance, deliberateness and doggedness in prayer. May that increasingly characterise us as a church.

6. Books. Books. Books.

We are in possession of a couple of boxes of 'A Witness for Christ: the PCEA 1846-1996' published 1996. If anyone would like some copies, please let us know.

7. The National Curriculum

Parents who entrust their children to a secular or religious school for a comprehensive education need to be aware of the insidious nature of aspects of the National Curriculum. This curriculum is developed and reviewed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (a Federal Government funded statutory body). Since 2014 all states and territories in Australia have increasingly been implementing aspects of the Foundation to Year 10, and Years 11 to 12 components. The curriculum is mandatory for all schools, public, private, secular, and religious. The comprehensive curriculum is arranged into eight Learning Areas which include a range of essential concepts and skills and engaging learning experiences. There are three cross-curriculum priorities to be embedded to varying degrees, in all learning areas, two of which are of particular concern to the Christian: **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories (ATSI), and Cultures and sustainability.**

In developing the first key concept of the ATSI priority: *the special connection to Country/Place by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and celebrates the unique belief systems that connect people physically and spiritually to Country/Place*, students K-12 are intended to gain an appreciation of an animistic religion and to participate in celebrating the religion. Additional to promoting aspects of indigenous culture, science and history within learning activities, weekly "welcome to country" and daily "acknowledgement of country" ceremonies are held in many schools. Such emphasises are clearly contrary to God's command in Exodus 20:3 "You shall have no other gods before me".

Becoming more common in classrooms is the employment of the Marxist inspired "critical theory" in evaluating the impact of colonialism upon the indigenous population of the past to the present. That is

a perspective that identifies only what can be regarded as the negative and destructive impacts upon an assumed idyllic indigenous lifestyle prior to colonisation. None of the benefits of western civilisation are appropriately acknowledged: the saving gospel of Christ, a corresponding law and order system, medical care and hospitals, more permanent housing, roads, bridges and so on. In assessing the influence of western civilisation there is a rejection of the exhortation of Scripture to think upon (Philippians 4:8) “ whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy”. An outcome for many students is to develop a loathing of western Judeo-Christian culture and a sense of not belonging in this land.

Sustainability, another cross-curriculum priority, provides useful opportunity for instruction in responsible stewardship of God’s provision, though God is not mentioned in this regard. However, contemporary “climate science” is accorded truth status leading to a “climate alarmism” of alleged impending destruction of the climate and all life on earth unless appropriate action is taken. Urgent environmental, social, and political action by students is encouraged. Unsurprisingly, student anxiety is common.

Missing in the world’s doomsday scenario is the Lord’s assurance in Genesis 8:22, ‘While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease’.

PROPOSED DELIVERANCES:

1. Synod urges members to pray for the reformation and revival of the church and seek the Lord’s mercy on our nation. It appoints a day of prayer and fasting on . . . and encourages its members to also make this matter a regular part of personal and corporate prayer. The Lord’s words to Solomon in 2 Chron. 7: 14 are still relevant, ‘If my people who are called by my name humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land’.
2. Synod approves the article ‘Pray till you pray’ by Rev. Paul Levy (Ely IPC) with the hope it may encourage us all to continue in the ministry of prayer and intercession.
3. Synod approves the statement to the Prime Minister.
4. Synod recognises the obligation upon us to maintain and exercise Christian liberty in light of the teaching of the Westminster Confession of Faith chapter 20 section 2.
5. Synod urges parents (and grandparents) to regularly discuss with their children (and grandchildren) the nature of their studies and seek to equip them with a Christian worldview.
6. Synod gives thanks for the faithful work of the editor of the Presbyterian Banner, Rev. Jim Klazinga, and for his endeavour to keep us connected and informed through its pages.

PRESBYTERIAN BANNER REPORT

Editor: Rev. Jim Klazinga

Distribution:

For 2025, there are currently 95 paid subscriptions, up 2 from 93 in 2024. 89 of these are bulk subscriptions going out to the congregations. 15 complimentary magazines continue to be mailed out, including two to the PCEA archives, making for a total of 110 subscriptions. Currently, 120 copies are printed each month.

Currently, a low resolution pdf copy of the magazine is sent to 171 email addresses from around the world, down from 175 at this point last year. Email subscribers are encouraged to

forward copies to others. Higher resolution pdf copies of each issue continue to be 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 four congregation have not paid for their 2025 subscriptions.

Bank Account Balance as of 18 March 2023 - \$3885.76

Income:

- Subscription Payments - \$2280.00
- Bank Interest - \$39.64

Expenses:

- Printing Expenses - \$2262.26
- Mailing Expenses – \$1295.06

Bank Account Balance as of 31 March 2025 - \$2647.64

Estimated Subscription fees outstanding as of 31 March - \$1290

Estimated Costs for rest of year - \$2900

Estimated Balance at the end of 2025 - \$1038

At this point, it is hoped that we will not need to increase subscription costs in 2026.

PROPOSED DELIVERANCES:

1. Synod continues to endorse The Presbyterian Banner as the official magazine of the PCEA.
2. 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.
3. Synod expresses thankfulness for the assistance of the Presbyterian Banner liaisons from the congregations.

ARCHIVIST REPORT

Archivist: D. Kerridge

In taking over the Archivist position from Mr John Audet after Synod 2024 there was much to be done in transporting, auditing and cataloguing the Archive.

During 2024, with the invaluable assistance of Mr Donald and Mrs Peggie Ramsay, the archive was transported to Maclean. Glass-fronted bookcases were purchased to house archive items. By a gracious donation from St George's Deacons' Court, the Archive has also acquired a compactus storage unit.

I was able to establish contact with Mrs Sue Pacey and Mr Daryl Lightfoot from the PCNSW Archive (Ferguson Library), who were very helpful in providing confirmation of their holdings on our behalf. In the same vein, I was able to correspond with Mr Michael Smith, the Archivist for the PCV regarding our holdings there. Mr Smith was very helpful in assisting me with setting up the new system for access to our Archives that they also use: ArchivesSpace.

Our Archive's metadata will now be available through a link from the main PCEA website to public.pceaarchives.org. This will enable anyone to conduct research to identify and request access to relevant items, as well as providing an up-to-date inventory of the Archive itself.

The historical magazine Archive, currently made available on the PCEA website using a document management component, is gradually being transferred to a more robust and permanent digital object archive platform, Omeka S. PCEA Publications over the years, especially booklets and pamphlets by Ministers will be made available on another site on the same platform – PCEA Publications. Please see the Information Technology Report for more information about the digitising of archive material. At the end of last Synod, a large collection of Central Presbytery's records was received and has begun to be accessioned. The Archive is requesting the same from other Presbyteries and congregations. Please contact the Archivist before sending items, as some may still be required to be held locally. Photographs and ephemera will also be gratefully received and can now be displayed digitally (Originals can be returned to owners if they prefer).

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. That Presbyteries, Congregations and individuals consider donations to the PCEA Archive.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

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

The Committee corresponded by email during the year.

Website

The PCEA website has had only minor adjustments to menu structures and some cosmetic changes to the frontpage in 2024. requires contributions from congregations to be truly representative of the denomination. We request that anyone who is in need of an overhaul for their congregational website talk to the Committee.

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 was to be available on the intranet. However, with the advice of the Law and Advisory Committee that this should be a public repository, the decision was made to database the Acts of Synod using Omeka S, the same digital archive platform that will be used for the Historical Magazine archive and PCEA Publications (see Archivist Report). Work has already begun on this, and you can see early efforts at <https://pcea.org.au/archives/s/synod-of-eastern-australia/page/welcome> . Once proof reading has been done by Mr Tom Reeve, this will be linked to the main website.

Archive

As mentioned in the Archivist report, a database system for cataloguing the Archives of the church has been set up by the Convener. It utilises ArchiveSpace, an open-source system used by University libraries and archival organisations (including PCV) to store metadata in industry-standard formats (see <https://archivesspace.org/features>). It has two parts: A “frontend” for the public to search and browse archives, and the backend to organise, catalogue and describe items. The cost to host the app from an Amazon EC2 instance is minimal due to Connecting Up non-profit credit which also covers the costs for current S3 website, Banner and Historical magazine archive storage

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE BUDGET

The costs incurred by the Committee for website and associated fees are in the 2024 Balance Sheet. Total \$2,392.67 (under 2024 budget by \$1,407.33).

Our proposed budget for 2025 is:

Proposed IT Budget

Website Costs \$1200 (price increase announced at time of writing with current provider, Ventra IP)
DocuSign \$150
PCEA Phone Server \$700
Online streaming service \$300
Other hardware/software \$450
Connecting Up non-profit credits for Amazon S3 and EC2 \$350
Synod tech costs \$650 (allowed for but not expected)

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, G. Hamilton, Allan Steel, G. King

The Committee corresponded during the year by email.

The Committee was tasked in 2024 with two major projects. The first, to determine the faithfulness (accuracy) of *Sing Psalms* to the original Hebrew, was presented, perhaps intentionally, as a Promethean task. The second was to begin to create and compile a new PCEA Psalter - something that had been agreed upon at various times by various Synods for over 40 years. The initial intention was to combine the two goals. Utilising the findings of an examination of all translations for faithfulness would be a necessary resource for the work of finding the best translations to incorporate into a potential new PCEA Psalter. Allan Steel presented an analysis in November, 2024. We also received a spreadsheet analysis from Rev. John Forbes which has gone a long way to answering the first part of our task. However, the whole project has stalled due to many factors. These factors mirror the wider state of our denomination and so bear close attention.

In discussions with members of the Committee, and others from various congregations, there is not a concerted drive towards a new Psalter at this time. The intention of the Committee was for a new Psalter to be a result of consensus and co-operation throughout the denomination. We do not have this regarding a common Psalter. There are other issues that demand our immediate attention in the church and the Committee, for differing reasons, requests that we focus our attention more on the main task of promoting exclusive Psalmody within the church. To do otherwise at this time might prove further

divisive in a volatile environment. This does not preclude further investigation and research of the matters remitted to us last year (and previously).

Happily, the Committee can report another blessed and useful Psalmody Day within the Northern Presbytery in 2024. We understand the current difficulties of replicating this in other Presbyteries but ask that those Presbyteries devote some time to consider ways to improve, practice and promote Psalmody in their congregations.

The PCEA website now has a dedicated section devoted to Psalm-singing. You are very welcome to submit articles to this section of the website. Julie Schmidt curates a YouTube site @PCEAPsalms with a growing number of recordings of Psalms sung by PCEA members.

PROPOSED DELIVERANCES

Nil

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 31/12/24 was \$225,517.26 being an increase of \$7,180.26 since 31/12/23. The increase was entirely the result of the revaluation of invested funds.

The SSF Working Account balance as at 31/12/24 was \$50,414.7 being an increase of \$5,315.70 since 31/12/23 The increase was income generated by the capital account.

b. **The Superannuation Levy Account** balance as at 31/12/24 was Nil. This was after transferring \$9,896.04 from the SSF Working Account to cover the shortfall in levies received from congregations. All congregations were up to date in terms of payment of their levy, at the time of this report.

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 three 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 9.76%. The historical performance as at 31/12/23 for the past 5 years was 7.67%.

B. Establishment of a Centralised Long Service Leave Fund for Ministers

Introduction:

The Superannuation and Insurance Committee proposes the establishment of a centralised Long Service Leave (LSL) fund for ministers. Currently, many congregations are unaware of their minister's LSL entitlements, leading to significant financial burdens upon the minister's retirement. The payout for LSL can be substantial, potentially rendering some congregations unable to meet these obligations or becoming financially unviable to call a new minister. A centralised fund, monitored by the Superannuation and Insurance Committee, would alleviate these issues and ensure financial stability across congregations.

Proposal:

We propose the following guidelines for the establishment and management of the centralised LSL fund:

1. Initial Fund Allocation:

Set aside an initial amount of \$80,000 in a LSL fund, taking \$40,000 from the Superannuation Support Fund (SSF) working account, current balance of \$50,414, and \$40,000 from the SSF capital account. This allocation will cover current LSL liabilities.

2. LSL Levy:

Impose an LSL levy on congregations with an ordained minister eligible for LSL. This levy will ensure that all congregations contribute fairly to the fund.

3. Levy Calculation:

Set the LSL levy at 0.9 times the weekly minimum stipend. This rate is calculated to cover LSL entitlements, assuming a 4% annual increase in the stipend.

4. Annual Review:

Review the LSL levy annually on January 1st to adjust for changes in stipend rates and ensure the fund remains adequately funded.

5. Approval Process:

Require applications for LSL leave to be approved by the Session and Presbytery. These approvals must be reported to the Superannuation and Insurance Committee for monitoring and record-keeping.

6. Refund of Levy:

The LSL levy payments be refunded to the contributing congregation(s) on a *pro rata* basis when long service leave is taken. The refund will cover the cost of pulpit supply during the minister's absence.

Conclusion:

The establishment of a centralised LSL fund will provide financial stability and predictability for congregations, ensuring they can meet their obligations to ministers without jeopardising their financial viability. We recommend the Synod approve this proposal and implement the guidelines outlined above.

PROPOSED DELIVERANCES:

1. **Synod approves** the establishment of a centralised Long Service Leave (LSL) fund for ministers to ensure financial stability and predictability for congregations.
2. **Synod agrees** to set aside an initial amount of \$80,000 in a LSL fund to cover current LSL liabilities, and thus **authorises** the drawing of \$40,000 from the Superannuation Support Fund (SSF) working account, current balance of \$50,414, and \$40,000 from the SSF capital account.
3. **Synod agrees** to impose an LSL levy on congregations with an ordained minister eligible for LSL, ensuring fair contribution to the fund.
4. **Synod approves** setting the LSL levy at 0.9 times the weekly minimum stipend to cover LSL entitlements, assuming a 4% annual increase in the stipend.
5. **Synod agrees** to review the LSL levy annually on January 1st to adjust for changes in stipend rates and ensure the fund remains adequately funded.
6. **Synod approves** the requirement that applications for LSL leave be approved by the Session and Presbytery, with these approvals reported to the Superannuation and Insurance Committee for monitoring and record-keeping.
7. **Synod approves the refund of LSL levy payments to the contributing congregation(s) on a pro rata basis when long service leave is taken.**
8. **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.

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, the *WPI* as published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the *Consumer Price Index (CPI)* the committee recommends the current level (\$1,267 per week) and basis of review of the minimum stipend be continued.

2. Ministers' Stipend paid from Presbytery funds /Equal Stipend

The committee was asked to consider whether ministers' Stipend could be paid from Presbytery funds – “each congregation would pay a levy into this fund, but the Presbytery Treasurer will distribute this stipend equally to each minister in the Presbytery”.

We pointed out the request did not fall within the responsibilities of the Committee, provided information to assist the enquirer and recommended that if he wished to present his proposal to the church for consideration that he do so via petition to Synod through Presbytery.

3. Pulpit Supply Fees

We were also asked to review the rate paid for pulpit supply which is currently 10% of the weekly minimum stipend per service, plus travelling allowance. (Handbook 2019 Page 99)

Other Presbyterian churches in NSW and Victoria have varying rates where more than one service is taken using the same sermon.

We recommend our rate be increase from 10.00 % (\$126 per service) to 12.00% (\$152 per service) of the weekly minimum stipend and where travel is by private motor vehicle, reimbursement be at the same rate as Synod Commissioners (See 4. Synod Commissioners' Expenses)

Deacons' Courts are to keep in mind their ability to vary these figures - "The provisions of (2) above apply to ministers, probationers, students and missionaries of the PCEA, but may be negotiated as local circumstances dictate. In regard to supply by others, the figures are not obligatory but may be varied according to local circumstances as determined by Deacons' Courts." (Handbook 2019 Page 100 last paragraph)

4. Synod Commissioners' Expenses

A review of the current rate of "Synod Delegates' Expenses (Handbook 2019 Page 98) was undertaken by comparing rates paid by PCNSW and PCVic, however it was found they have different approaches for reimbursement for their ministers where they use their private vehicles for church related business.

Also, by reference to figures produced by the *Australian Automobile Association* (AAA), and noting the Australian Taxation Office's current rate for Income tax deductions for work-related car expenses is 88c per kilometre, the Committee recommends Synod approve a current rate pf 58c per kilometre. This figure equates to 66% (two thirds) of the AAA's car running expenses for 2023 (fuel and tyres) and also the ATO's deduction rate for 2024.

We further recommend the rate be reviewed annually and adjusted when necessary to 66% of the ATO's deduction rate.

Handbook 2019 Page 98 Point 3 be deleted - Reimbursement for travel by motor vehicle.

3. Financial Assistance

One request was received for financial assistance for the current Synodical year (2025/2026):

Central Presbytery approved a request from Hawkesbury-Nepean Deacons' Court of up to \$6,000 after receiving pledges totalling \$9,000 from the other three Deacons' Courts within the bounds, their original request being for \$15,000.

The request is recommended on a strictly needs basis.

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. The General Treasurer will advise Deacons' Court when funds pledged are to be transferred to the Synod bank account.

4. The Capital Assistance Fund

As at 31/12/24 assets totalled \$420,989 which was an increase of \$17,004 (4%) on 2023. There was no expenditure.

Loans –

No loans were outstanding as at 31/12/24.

Gift –

The Committee received an application from the Clerk of Synod on behalf of Ulverstone Deacons' Court seeking a gift from Synod funds of \$466,435 to assist in the funding of a proposal to purchase and renovate a manse property.

Refer to Appendix "B" for the Committee's recommendation.

5. 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 31/12/25 – See Appendix "A".

PROPOSED DELIVERANCES

1. We record our thanks to God for the continual temporal blessings the Synod and the church overall has enjoyed during 2024.

2. Adjustment of the Minimum Stipend, Cash and Non-cash components (Excluding Manse, Car and Telephone) for 2025/2026 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. Pulpit Supply Fees be 12.00% of the weekly minimum stipend and where travel is by private motor vehicle, reimbursement at the same rate as Synod Commissioners.

4. Synod Commissioners' Expenses where travel is involved by motor vehicle be reimbursed at 66% (two thirds) of the Australian Taxation Office's tax deduction rate for use of private vehicles for work related purposes - the rate to be reviewed annually and adjusted, when necessary, in line with the ATO's rate.

(Synod Delegates' Expenses Handbook 2019 Page 98 Point 3 be deleted)

5. Stipend Assistance of up to \$6,000 for 20125/2026 be granted to Hawkesbury-Nepean Court as follows:

- Strictly on a quarterly needs basis.
- Applications be submitted to the General Treasurer on a calendar quarter basis i.e. 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.

6. The prayer of the Petition of Ulverstone Deacons' Court for financial assistance of \$470,000 be granted in the following terms:

Amount: \$470,000

Funding:

\$200,000 - Capital Assistance Fund

\$270,000 – Synod General Funds

\$470,000

Drawdowns:

The Deacons' Court's contribution of \$315,000 to be fully applied in the purchase of the dwelling with the balance thereafter drawn as required for renovations from the remaining Synod funds provided. The Synod Finance Committee Convener to oversee drawdown(s) for the renovations.

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GENERAL TREASURER

Report to Synod 2025

1. Financial Needs

All financial needs of the Synod were adequately provided for during 2024 with total funds increasing by \$100,855 to \$2,474,200 after allowing for \$375,437 held on behalf of others (Congregations – Equities/Bequests)

Income increased because of improved bank interest rates and return on investment in equities. Expenditure decreased by a reduced call on Synod for finance assistance.

2. Synod General Working Funds

Synod General Working Funds held, as at 31/12/24 was \$831,905. This was an increase of \$39,644 on 2023. Refer to the printed Balance Sheet and Statement of Income & Expenditure as at 31/12/24 for details.

3. Books of Account Audit

An unqualified Independent Assurance Report has been obtained from Mr Lester Barkley of Barkley & Associates Pty Ltd, Chartered Accountants of Highton VIC, and is included in the published Financial Statements.

Because most of the accounting work during 2024 was performed by the Assistant Treasurer, the records maintained by him are in Geelong, his long association with Mr Lester Barkley in “auditing” Geelong Congregation’s books of account, and the inconvenience of continuing to have the *Assurance Report* undertaken in NSW, it was decided to have the 2024 examination undertaken by him in lieu of Mr George Azzi of GPA Accountants in Kingsgrove NSW.

Mr Lester Barkley has a long family connection with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Australia and the Reformed Theological College, with Professor Alexander Barkley being the founding principal of the College in Geelong. Lester Barkley has reviewed the Geelong PCEA accounts since 2017, as well as the Melbourne accounts in 2023 and 2024. Mr Barkley now devotes much of his retirement to assisting churches, Christian schools, and other non-profits organisations with accounting and auditing services.

PROPOSED DELIVERANCES

1. That Synod confirm the decision to have the review of the books of account for the year ended 31/12/24 conducted by Lester Barkley & Associates of Highton VIC in lieu of GPA Accountants of Kingsgrove NSW.
2. The Clerk send a letter of thanks to Mr George Azzi, Accountant, of GPA Accountants for his long association with the auditing of Synod accounts, being formerly with Partlett, Chave & Rowland and of recent years in his own practice. The Synod has appreciated his advice from time to time and efficient service over the years.

FINANCE COMMITTEE APPENDIX "A"

Ulverstone Congregation - Purchase or Construct of a manse

(Summarised from the Deacons' Court Petition and supporting information)

Background

The congregation's manse was sold during a past vacancy and the proceeds invested in shares requiring the renting of a basic three bedroom house at \$920 per fortnight (\$23,920 pa) for the present minister and his family of three young children. A dwelling more suited for a manse is needed to provide for a study and extra bedrooms.

Also, for the long-term financial health of the congregation it would be advantageous to own a manse as the share portfolio has lost value in comparison to the housing market with the rental property at \$920 per fortnight (\$23,920 pa) consuming all the income earned from the shares.

Property Considerations

Some suggested parameters for consideration of a property:

Need to have:

- 4 or more bedrooms
- 2 bathrooms (of which may be an ensuite) to allow for a dedicated guest bathroom
- Within a 10-minute drive of the church

Nice to have:

- Extra room for use as a study, preferably separate or away from living areas in the house to allow for private thought or conversation as necessary
- Located within Ulverstone or West Ulverstone

Availability of Properties/Location

There were several properties for sale (5/3/25) in or around Ulverstone which may be suitable with prices ranging from \$550,000 to \$735,000, though the market does go far higher than this. Most properties appear to have been built in the 1970s and 1980s and would likely need some renovations and maintenance to ensure the asset does not deteriorate over time. It is estimated that around the \$650,000 mark is likely what will be necessary to purchase a property, not including any renovation costs.

The congregants in Ulverstone cover a broad area, from Wynyard and Elliott through to Port Having the manse central to the area served is an important element of selecting a suitable location; Ulverstone falls approximately in the centre and is where most of the congregants live.

Whilst the majority of background research has been conducted on purchasing a property, it would be imprudent to exclude constructing a manse. Careful planning may allow costs to be lower than purchasing and renovating an existing property, and it would allow the design to be customised to suit the needs of a manse. Plots of land appear to sit around \$180,000, though this has not been thoroughly researched, nor has the cost of construction been evaluated.

The Ulverstone congregation is currently making a small loss each financial year. Offerings have slowly increased year on year. The income from the share portfolio contributes significantly to the financial stability of congregation by, as previously mentioned, paying rental fees. If the congregation

was to purchase a property it would consume this source of income, leaving no income stream to service a mortgage.

Proposal

To purchase and renovate a manse property:

Costs – To purchase and renovate

Purchase price & Renovations	\$750,000
Transfer duty/fees	\$ 28,935
Legal Fees (say)	<u>\$ 2,500</u>
Total Cost	\$781,435

Less

Funds on Hand * Say -	<u>\$315,000</u>
<u>Amount Required</u>	<u>\$466,435</u>

* Funds on Hand - Share Portfolio (Hutton Bequest \$88,868 Manse Fund. \$240,823 = \$329,621)

It is anticipated that the purchase and renovation, or construction cost of the manse will be less than \$750,000 plus duties and fees. The residue of the requested money not spent on the property is to be retained by the Capital Assistance Fund.

COMMITTEE COMMENTARY

Viability -

The proposal is viable in that the Deacons' Court has adequate funds otherwise held to provide for any variations in costs etc. as outlined herein in addition to the contribution of \$315,000 being offered.

Synod funds available –

\$437,992 – Capital Assistance Fund
\$826,921 – Synod General Funds

It is recommended the amount requested of \$466,435 be rounded up to \$470,000 and rather than applying the whole of the current balance of the *Capital Assistance Fund* (CAF) to it only \$200,000 be gifted with the balance of \$270,000 coming from *Synod General Funds* (M Hockett Bequest). This will reserve \$237,992 in the CAF for future capital needs of other congregations. It is considered the balance of \$270,000 is an appropriate use of some of the Hockett bequest of \$794,000 which was left to the Synod's discretion to apply.

The Committee Notes –

- Their contribution of \$315,000 represents 40% deposit of the total outlay.
- The Deacons' Court have researched current availability of dwellings for sale in the Ulverstone area, made comment on the possible alternative of buying vacant land and building but at this stage has not researched such in detail.
- They have also provided details of the spread of congregational members.
- As well, supplied the congregation's Financial Statement as at 31/1/24 together with eight summary details and floor plans of properties currently (5/3/25) for sale in the Ulverstone area.

Overall - a well presented proposal.

RECOMMENDATION

Recommendation made on the basis of purchasing and renovating an existing dwelling. More specific detail to be submitted to the Synod Finance Committee to assess viability, controls etc. involved in providing the funds for progressive housing finance.

Synod approve a gift to the Ulverstone Deacons' Court to purchase and renovate a dwelling suitable for a congregational manse:

Amount: \$470,000

Funding:
\$200,000 - Capital Assistance Fund
\$270,000 – Synod General Funds
\$470,000

Drawdowns:

The Deacons' Court's contribution of \$315,000 to be fully applied in the purchase of the dwelling with the balance of the gift thereafter drawn as required for renovations from the remaining Synod funds provided. The Synod Finance Committee Convener to oversee drawdown(s) for the renovations.

Actual purchase to be subject to the consent of the congregation and approval by Session and Southern Presbytery.

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SYNOD FINANCE COMMITTEE - APPENDIX "B"

BUDGET - SYNOD MAJOR WORKING FUNDS for twelve months ending 31/12/25

Fund	Balance as at 31/12/2024	Estimated Income Int/Divnds to 12/25	Estimated Givings & Pledges	Estimated Expenditure to 12/25	Estimated Surplus (Deficit)	Estimated Credit Balance 31/12/25	Estimated Deficit Balance 31/12/25
Capital Assistance Fund	437,994	8,000	0	200,000	-192,000	245,994	0
Financial Assistance	0	2,500	9,000	15,000	-3,500	-3,500	3,500
Missions - General	28,736	13,000	2,700	7,700	8,000	36,736	0
Miss Relief (Equities)	134,963	5,000	0	0	5,000	139,963	0
Miss Rel (Working Fnd)	10,917	5,000	0	6,100	-1,100	9,817	0
Training of Ministry	230,969	15,000	2,000	1,500	15,500	246,469	0
Information Technology	0	0	0	3,800	-3,800	-3,800	3,800
Youth & Fellowship	15,613	1,500	500	1,500	500	16,113	0
General Funds	780,555	1,700	1,500	6,000	-2,800	777,755	0

Notes:

Capital Assistance Fund -

A request from Ulverstone Congregation for assistance of up \$466,435 is to be considered by Synod.

If granted \$200,000 is recommended to come from Capital Assistance Fund and \$266,435 from General Funds

Estimated deficits in " Financial Assistance" and "Information Technology" can be covered by "General Funds"

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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. No physical deeds were lodged or uplifted during 2024.

As NSW conveyancing is now conducted using eConveyancing, the solicitor above has again suggested that we remove the deed box from their safe and deposit it in our own archive as the deeds contained in it are now only of historical interest. The deeds for Queensland, and Letters Patent are held at the solicitors in Maclean. The Queensland Government introduced and mandated eConveyancing from 20th February 2023 for most transactions. Advice will need to be sought as to whether the documents relating to Queensland will have to continue to be held in safekeeping with the solicitor or whether they too are just of archival interest, as it is unclear (at time of writing the report) whether an exemption applies for the PCEA in QLD.

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

15/1/24 – Perdix Construction Pty Ltd - NSW Residential Building Contract for Works on a Cost Plus Basis

15/05/2024 Contract for sale of 3 Beaconsfield Pde, Lindfield, NSW

Other significant matters requiring Trustee action:

08/08/2024 Contract for sale of 3 Hayes Street, Goonellabah

11/11/2024 Authorisation for A Steel to act on behalf of Trustees re St George’s property valuation request

18/02/2025 Designation of David Kerridge as Senior Managing Official (SMO) for purpose of NAB account - from NAB Customer Confirm process begun November, 2024

Bequests -

Review of Results as at 31/12/24

Diversification

Specified Capital Funds - 31/12/24

Actual Amount	Actual %	Asset Class	Strategy Range	Strategy Benchmark
Invested	of total		%	%
61,130	17%	Cash/Term Deposits	10% - 30%	20%
308,087	83%	Equities	70% - 90%	80%
369,217	100%			100%

The two remaining investments in Managed Funds were redeemed during 2024.

Return:

Growth –

Total Trust Funds (Specified Capital Funds) increased by \$38,273 (11.5%) during 2024 against a Target of 2.1% (CPI). “Real value” (keeping up with inflation) was therefore achieved in 2024.

Income – Income of \$38,021 represented a return of 11.4% against a Target of 5.35% (2024 Average Official Cash Interest Rate of 4.35% Plus 1.00%).

Investment Strategy Objectives –

Growth – **Achieved** for 2024 but still behind with CPI added since 1998.

Income - **Achieved** for 2024.

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. That the Deed Box of the Trustees of the Synod of Eastern Australia be uplifted from safe deposit with Daniel Butt and Co. and deposited in the PCEA Archive.

QUEENSLAND TRUST CORPORATION Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia

Members: Moderator, Clerk and General Treasurer

Deed Box and Common Seal: All title documents relating to the Queensland Trust Corporation are lodged with related NSW documents at Daniel Butt and Co., Solicitors, Suite 4, Level 1, 1 Stanley St, Maclean, NSW. Please refer to the TSEA Report regarding the matter of eConveyancing.

Further to the eConveyancing issue, the incorporation of Queensland property under letters patent is something to monitor, especially if there may be future property transactions. Paxton Hall, lawyers in the PCQ case regarding the receivership of their nursing homes, gives this general advice to all who operate under Letters Patent:

“If your legal form is letters patent and an unincorporated association, then it is essential that your trustees, committee and senior management all have a grounded understanding of the different legal structures and their operation. Regular education is required in the onboarding of officials and management staff to avoid confusion. Inadvertent conflating the letters patent and an unincorporated association can be a recipe for legal troubles.

Purchasers of property from letters patent institutions, particularly land, should also treat such transactions with caution as the transaction may be disrupted by the Courts if a breach of trust may be involved or the transaction is not in the best interest of the charity.”

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. That the Trustees seek advice to clarify the current situation regarding eConveyancing in Queensland and report to Synod 2026.

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

Trustees: D Ramsay (Secretary), Synod Clerk, Synod Treasurer, R. Tso, WI Hall
Incorporated by The Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia Property Act 5691, Victoria 1953

Property Holdings

The property holdings remain unchanged from the schedule provided to Synod in 2024. However, substantial extensions to the Mulgrave church building (\$550,000) and car park (\$150,000) were completed in 2022 and 2024 respectively, with the funding coming from the Victorian State government. Due to a significant cost over-run in the building extension, an additional \$172,165 was supplied by Knox PCEA in 2022, bringing the total expenditure to \$872,165.

Bequests

Nil

Common Seal Applications

Nil

Deeds

In Victoria, land titles are managed and held by the Victorian Registrar of Titles, who maintains the official Register of land, which is a digital record of land ownership and related information.

Investments

Funds held by the corporation for Synod at 31/12/2024 totalled \$445,319.39, representing an increase of 5.19% on 2023 (\$423,345). A total of \$355,175.06 is held in shares, with share values increasing by 6.24% during 2024, compared with 0.92% the previous year. The overall income from all funds (shares and cash) was \$25,832, corresponding to a 6.1% return on equity, compared with 6.5% the previous year.

Optus Tower Lease (Narre Warren PCEA)

In response to Council's refusal of the previous application, Optus has engaged the Downer Group to prepare a revised application to construct a telecommunications tower at Narre Warren. The new application, which includes a change to the location within the Church allotment, is to be submitted to the City of Casey Council in the first half of 2025.

CORRESPONDENCE

Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia NORTHERN PRESBYTERY

OVERTURE

Financial Review for Small Charities

To the Synod of Eastern Australia appointed to meet in Wauchope on Tuesday 6th May 2025, the overture of the Northern Presbytery respectfully shows that:

WHEREAS

1. Synod 2017 required that congregations classified as Small Charities by ACNC must obtain a professional Review or Audit of their annual Financial Statements.
2. The requirement goes beyond the ACNC rules which did not, and does not, require Small Charities to obtain a Review or Audit.
3. The requirement has put significant financial burden on congregations that comply, as a Review has been known to cost around \$2,000 in real instances.
4. Synod and presbyteries are aware that the requirement has not been universally complied with.
5. The benefit of a professional Review or Audit of a Small Charity is seriously limited because the reviewer classifies such accounts as “special purpose”, meaning that proper methods of accounting need not apply and the reviewer can approve accounts where significant information is missing and where irregular, confusing and wrong methods of reporting are apparent.

NOW THEREFORE

The Northern Presbytery respectfully overtures Synod to take these premises into consideration and resolve that the wording of Handbook 3.15 and the related Act of 2017 be amended as follows:

DELETE “While the ACNC does not require Small Charities to submit a Review or Audit report with their Annual Information Statement, SYNOD requires either a Review or Audit report to form part of the congregation's Annual Financial Report when presenting it to the Presbytery of the bounds for attestation (see 2.33).”

REPLACE WITH “Congregations classified as Small Charities are required by Synod to have their annual Financial Statement examined. They may obtain a professional Review or Audit or they may appoint as examiner a competent independent person who is not a member of the court.”

Or do otherwise as the Synod in its wisdom deems fit.

OVERTURE
Review of New Psalm versions

To the Synod of Eastern Australia appointed to meet in Wauchope on Tuesday 6th May 2025, the overture of John Forbes, minister, respectfully shows that:

WHEREAS

1. This Church currently has different metrical psalters in use in different congregations,
2. Synod has recognised the need for a common psalter and resolved to work towards this:
 - i. Synod 2018 - “*Synod agrees that it would be desirable if all our congregations sang from the same psalter.*” (Minutes 18.31.8),
 - ii. Synod 2019 - “*...The committee to consider and recommend options to improve the praise of the denomination and to progress towards the adoption of a common and fully supported Psalter.*” (Minutes 19.50.8),
 - iii. Synod 2024 – “*...the Psalmody Committee create and compile a new PCEA Psalter beginning with Psalms 1-25...*” (Minutes 24.2.27),
3. Synod has also agreed in principle that accuracy of Hebrew translation must be analysed prior to adoption of any Synod-approved versions, thus requiring investment of significant time and effort (Minutes 24.2.27),
4. It is evident that this is a difficult remit for the current Psalmody Committee,
5. Believing it to be a priority for this Church to pursue unity in this area, and earnestly desiring to see meaningful progress, I have carried out work on translational analysis of metrical psalms from various psalters and offer this along with new revised versions in the associated spreadsheet entitled, *Metrical Psalms – Analysis and Alternatives 2025*, being an analysis of psalms 1-11, 84, 100, 117, 120, 124, 134 and 143,
6. An earlier version containing most of this work was sent to the Psalmody Committee in January for consideration,

NOW THEREFORE

I, John Forbes, respectfully overture Synod to take these matters into consideration and resolve to circulate the spreadsheet entitled *Metrical Psalms – Analysis and Alternatives 2025* to presbyteries and other interested parties within the Church for their consideration, and to invite ministers, office bearers, congregations and presbyteries to review the new versions for accuracy and useability, and to provide feedback.

Or do otherwise as Synod in its wisdom deems fit.

J.C.A Forbes, Minister - Hastings River



Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia
SOUTHERN PRESBYTERY

Presbytery Clerk
Dr Donald Ramsay

14-20 McPherson Road
Waurin Ponds, VIC 3218
dramsay@pcea.org.au
Mobile: 0435 180 664

PETITION FOR SALE OF WANTIRNA CHURCH

To the Synod of Eastern Australia meeting in Wauchope on 6th May 2025 the petition of the Southern Presbytery humbly shows that:

WHEREAS

1. Due to the events of recent years the Knox congregation has been left with no communicant members and no PCEA worship services in the church building.
2. The other congregations in Melbourne, namely Narre Warren and Carrum Downs, have few members, no office bearers, and are not financially viable.
3. In these circumstances Southern Presbytery has agreed to work to restructure the congregations within its bounds in order to form a single viable Melbourne congregation and also use existing resources to provide viability of the Geelong congregation.
4. The name of Knox PCEA has been changed to Melbourne PCEA and a process is underway to unite the existing congregations into this one entity to form a single Melbourne congregation with two worship centres at Narre Warren and Carrum Downs.
5. The Wantirna (Knox) church building is surplus to requirements and, in recent months has been leased to another church who have also expressed a strong desire to buy it.
6. The deacons' court of Knox has requested that the Southern Presbytery petition Synod for permission to sell the Wantirna church.

NOW THEREFORE

The Southern Presbytery asks Synod to take these matters into consideration and grant permission for the sale of the Wantirna church, with the proceeds from the sale to be held by the Synod in a fund to be designated "Southern Presbytery Ministry Fund", and to be released upon request from the Southern Presbytery for the provision of ministry and other congregational needs within its bounds, or do otherwise as in their wisdom they may deem fit. And your petitioners will ever pray.

Dated the 11th day of March 2025.

Donald Ramsay
Clerk of Southern Presbytery

FRATERNAL GREETINGS

Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland

Business of Synod Committee



Clerk of Synod
11th March 2025

Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia
Rev. Robin Tso

Dear Robin,

Greetings in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. On behalf of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland I invite the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia to send a delegate to address the meeting of our Synod in June. This year the Synod will be held in Armagh City Hotel. The meetings commence on Monday 9th June and run until Wednesday 11th June.

At the Monday evening meeting the outgoing Moderator will preach and the Moderator for the coming year will be appointed. During Tuesday the Mission Committee report will be considered and time will be set aside for prayer for mission work. Delegates from other churches will be invited to address the Synod at various times during the Synod meetings. Each delegate will be given ten minutes to address the court. Our Synod meets on Wednesday morning for prayer and the business concludes on Wednesday afternoon.

We are happy for delegates to be in attendance for the entire Synod, which is followed by Mission Focus on the Wednesday evening.

I understand that with the distance and expense involved you may not feel able to appoint a delegate – if that should prove to be the case we would be pleased, nearer the time, to receive a letter or video conveying fraternal greetings. On the other hand if you are able to appoint a delegate we will do all we can to make him welcome and provide hospitality and preaching opportunities if that were desired. Please let me know as soon as a decision has been made so that I can make any arrangements necessary at this end.

Yours in Christ,

Samuel. G. McCollum (Clerk of Synod)

Clerk: Rev S. G. McCollum, B.Sc., 27 Portstewart Road, Portrush, County Antrim, Northern Ireland BT56 8EH
Telephone: 028 70823794 E-mail: rpciclerkofsynod@aol.com

SYNOD STANDING ORDERS

[Act 1, Class 2 of Synod 1978 as amended 1984 and 1991, 2008 and 2024.]

The Synod adopted the following Standing Orders, while reserving the right to suspend Standing Orders upon a resolution of the court, and any motion to do so shall take precedence over other business that may be before the house.

I - MOTIONS

1. Every motion, whether original or amended, if not already in the hands of the Clerk shall be given in writing to the Clerk as soon as it shall have been made to the house.
2. Every such motion shall be legibly written in ink, and any alterations or deletions shall be initialled by the mover of the motion.
3. When a motion has been duly seconded, it shall not be competent to make any alteration upon it without the permission of Synod, excepting in the shape of an amendment, or second or third or subsequent motion as the case may be, regularly proposed to Synod.
4. The person who makes the first motion shall be entitled to the privilege of giving a reply, in which new matter may not be introduced; and thereafter the debate shall be held to be definitely closed, and no other person shall be entitled to speak except with regard to the manner of putting the vote.
5. Where an amendment, or second or third or subsequent motion is involved, the manner of taking the vote is to put the amendment against the motion or the second and third motions against each other in the first instance. The one of these which is carried by a majority is then put against the first motion. When only one motion remains, or if an amendment has become the motion, the vote shall then be taken for or against that motion.
6. When the recommendations of Standing Committees are in the hands of members as prescribed by Synod, any competent amendments, alternative proposals or additional motions relevant to the business of that Committee shall be given in writing to the Clerk not later than the session preceding that in which the business of that Committee is to be taken up by Synod, and shall be read to the court before the close of that session.
7. To ensure careful consideration and wise decision making, copies of correspondence for transmission to Synod shall be supplied with the Reports. Any non-procedural proposal that arises from late correspondence or on the floor of the Synod that is not already anticipated in the prayer of an overture or petition regularly before the Synod, or the subject of a notice of motion in terms of clause 6 of this Act, shall be held over until the next session and, if contentious or of complexity, referred to a representative ad hoc committee for report to the next or later session, before being debated.

II – LENGTH OF SPEECHES

1. In the discussion of any question the proposer of each motion may address the house for not longer than 20 minutes in proposing his motion, and the seconder for 10 minutes; And no subsequent speaker including the proposer shall address the house for no longer than 10 minutes; and that these limits shall only be exceeded when the Moderator shall have ascertained that the house desires any speaker to continue, and shall intimate the ascertained desire to that effect.
2. When a Convener not being a member of Synod is permitted to present his Committee's Report, the Convener and the mover of the Deliverance shall be required to come to an arrangement by which their combined speeches shall not exceed the time normally granted to the mover of a motion in terms of Standing Order II (1) or as that Order may be amended by this or any subsequent Synod.
3. A member of Synod in moving or seconding an Amendment shall confine himself to the matter of the Amendment and shall have the right to speak at a later stage to matters in the Report and other amendments, provided that the total time taken in speaking shall conform to Standing Order 2.1.

III – DISSENTS

No dissents against any Deliverance of the Synod shall be given in until the minute in which it is pronounced is, for that sederunt, disposed of, the minutes are completed and adjusted, and the house is ready to proceed to other business.

IV - LETTERS ADDRESSED TO THE MODERATOR

All letters addressed to the Moderator for the purpose of being communicated to the Synod shall, in the first instance, be laid by him before the Bills and Overtures Committee who shall advise the Moderator as to the way of disposing of them.

V - THE CONDUCTING OF CAUSES

It was resolved that:

1. That as far as may be possible, a separate sederunt shall be set apart for Causes, and it shall be understood that Friday forenoon [i.e., the last day of Synod] shall be mainly devoted to that purpose.
2. That in no case shall there be more than two speeches for each party at the Bar, including the reply to which the appellant or complainant shall be entitled: and where there are more than two parties, there shall be only one speaker, and one speech for each, besides the reply - it being understood that where there is more than one complainant, each shall be considered as a different party only in case of it appearing to Synod that the complaints rest upon distinctly different grounds.
3. That previously to hearing the parties in any Cause, the Clerk shall read the following announcement, viz.:

The members are reminded that justice requires that the pleadings at the Bar be heard by all those who vote in the Cause, and that, in particular, no member ought to vote against either side of the Bar who has not heard the pleadings on that side.

That the Clerk of Synod shall not issue papers to the members of Synod with reference to cases which he thinks require to be conducted with closed doors until specially instructed by the Synod to do so; but he shall report such cases to the Synod Administration Committee for its information.

That the Synod Administration Committee shall, in their first Report, specify any case which, in their judgement, requires to be conducted with closed doors; and any case which does not appear to them of that character, though the Clerk may have reported it as such.

That in every case which the Synod appoints to be conducted with closed doors, any instruction to issue the papers shall be accompanied by a special exhortation to the members to keep them private.