

Synod  
2026

# The Synod of Eastern Australia

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS

178<sup>TH</sup> SYNOD

PCEA HASTINGS RIVER CONGREGATION

41 CAMPBELL STREET, WAUCHOPE

5<sup>TH</sup> TO 8<sup>TH</sup> MAY, 2026

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF EASTERN AUSTRALIA |

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## TIMETABLE FOR SYNOD 2026

TIME	TUESDAY 5 <sup>th</sup> MAY	TIME	WEDNESDAY 6 <sup>th</sup> MAY	THURSDAY 7 <sup>th</sup> MAY	FRIDAY 8 <sup>th</sup> MAY
	<b>SYNOD TO COMMENCE WITH SESSION 1 AT 4:30PM</b>	9:00am	<b>SESSION 3</b> Devotions and Prayer [SYNOD PHOTO]	<b>SESSION 6</b> Devotions and Prayer	<b>SESSION 9</b> Devotions and Prayer
		M/Tea 10:30am	Law & Advisory  Youth and Fellowship  Greetings from Delegate*	Inter-Church Relations  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	<b>SESSION 1</b> Constitution of Synod  Retiring Moderator's Sermon  Presbytery Rolls  Welcome to new members, guests, associations etc.  Election of Moderator for 2026/27	2:00pm	<b>SESSION 4</b>  Training of Ministry  Superannuation  Finance  Trust Corporations  Greetings from Delegate*	<b>SESSION 7</b>  Presbytery Reports  Missions  Greetings from Delegate*	<b>SYNOD CLOSSES AT THE END OF SESSION 9 AT 12:30PM</b>  <b>LUNCH TO FOLLOW BEFORE DEPARTURE</b>
6:00pm	DINNER	6:00pm	DINNER	DINNER	
7:00pm	<b>SESSION 2</b>  Moderator's Address  Administration	7:00pm	<b>SESSION 5</b>  Greetings from Delegate*  Church and Nation & Publications Banner  Information Technology Close	<b>SESSION 8</b>  Greetings from Delegate*  Mission Speakers  Close	
8:30pm	Close	8:30pm	Close	Close	

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, 5<sup>th</sup> May and conclude by Friday, 8<sup>th</sup> May, 2026. A detailed timetable is appended above.

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

**Ministerial Movements:** Rev. John Forbes was translated to Geelong Congregation and inducted 7th January, 2026. Rev. David Lachman, formerly a minister of the Southern Presbyterian Church, was called and inducted to the ministry in the Melbourne PCEA Congregation on 8<sup>th</sup> January, 2026.

**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, D. Lachman, Z. Dotson.

**Church and Nation and Publication:** D. Lachman (Convener), GD Ball, I Miller, JD Klazinga (Banner), D. Kerridge (Archive), M. Pilgrim.

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

**Youth and Fellowship:** S Carswell (Convener), J Forbes, M. Schmidt, M. Kerridge

**Finance:** AH Steel (Convener), DJ Ramsay, [TBA]

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

**Missions:** DK Muldoon (Convener), Barbara Schmidt, J Greensill, M. Hamilton, Z. Dotson

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

### Other Appointments

**PCEA Trustees for Victoria:** D. Ramsay (Secretary), R. Tso, D. Kerridge.

**Moderator Elect 2025:** Rev. Robin Tso

**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:

Item C1	Overture from Southern Presbytery re Bible Versions
Item C2	Overture from Southern Presbytery re Laying on of Hands
Item C3	Overture from Southern Presbytery re Southern Presbytery Fund

### PROPOSED DELIVERANCES

1. That the above Timetable for Synod 2026 be confirmed.
2. That the proposed Committee Structure, along with other appointments, as listed in the report be considered in the final session of Synod.
3. That Items C1 and C2 be taken with Law and Advisory business.
4. That item C3 be taken with Finance Committee business
5. That the following Examiners of Records be appointed:

Northern Presbytery	Rev. D. Muldoon and Mt Druitt Elder
Central Presbytery	Rev. D. Lachman and Ulverstone Elder
Southern Presbytery	Rev. D. Kerridge and Northern Rivers Elder

## LAW & ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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

**1. Review of sustentation and “PayDay Super”** - *Per Minutes 25.8.6 - Synod instructs the Law and Advisory Committee to examine the theological principles for the sustentation of the ministry including the proposed introduction of “PayDay Super” from 1 July, 2026 and to consider the legal and practical implications of any change from our current system, and to bring a report to the 2026 Synod.*

Principles for sustentation are outlined in an appendix to this report. It is suggested that a common sustentation fund is the ordinary model given in Scripture. As employment regulation increases such a system could offer several practical benefits to the PCEA. If Synod agrees to explore this further it is proposed that the committee proceed to consider the detail of a workable system for the PCEA and bring proposals to the next ordinary Synod.

“PayDay Super” is legislation introduced by the federal government to ensure workers do not lose out on their superannuation entitlement due to it not being paid at the same time as wages. It seems a sensible and necessary provision but will require changes to the current PCEA system where stipend is administered locally, usually paid fortnightly, but superannuation is administered by Synod treasurer quarterly. “PayDay Super” means superannuation guarantee must be paid the same day as stipend/wages. A 7-day window is allowed for funds to clear but the effect is the same that it must be paid with the same regularity as stipend/wages. There are financial penalties for non-compliance. It is understood that the Superannuation Committee will be proposing that congregational treasurers now take full responsibility for superannuation payments. In the absence of a common sustentation arrangement this appears to be the only viable option. The Superannuation Committee will be offering to assist congregational treasurers to transition to the new system by 1 July 2026.

It is recognised that Synod holds funds for the purpose of superannuation with interest being added to a working balance annually from additional restricted funds held. This seems an appropriate time to streamline the management and application of these funds so that the superannuation committee can be dissolved in due course. It is suggested that the working account should, in future, be used solely to cover the superannuation obligations of aid-receiving congregations. This should be the first form of assistance given by Synod when an application for “Financial Assistance” is made. It can be administered relatively easily by the Synod treasurer without the need for a committee.

**2. Clarification of Westminster Confession 4.1, “in the space of six days”** – At Synod 2025, Rev. Dr. Dennis Muldoon gave notice of a motion for clarification of the phrase “in the space of six days” in Westminster Confession chapter 4.1. The moderator ruled that it be passed to the Law and Advisory committee for consideration. Essentially Dr Muldoon’s motion seeks a Declaratory Act. This is not a proposed change to the received doctrine of the Church, but a formal declaration of how the existing standards are to be understood. Being constitutionally significant it requires the consent of Presbyteries in accordance with *Barrier Act* procedure.

Differing opinions about the six days of Genesis 1 have existed within the PCEA, as also in the Free Church of Scotland and Church of Scotland since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Significant figures in these churches held views that, upon examination, do not accord with the doctrine of the Confession. This has been unsettling for the Church but, until now, no suitable opportunity has arisen to formally clarify the matter. The existence of error within the Church does not change the constitution or imply that the Church officially endorses or permits such error. A helpful principle is seen in the *Solemn League and Covenant* of 1643, where, in promising to uphold the doctrine, worship, discipline and government of the Church of Scotland, it was pledged, “*what we are not able ourselves to suppress or overcome, we shall reveal and make known, that it may be timely prevented or removed*”. In fulfilment of such an obligation, many within the PCEA have, through these years, continued to hold and teach the historic understanding of the six days of creation. It now appears, in God’s providence, that there is unanimity of opinion among all the inducted ministers and the time is opportune to provide official clarification for the future peace and stability of this Church.

The key question relates to the intended meaning of the phrase “in the space of six days” in WCF 4.1. It is widely known that all members of the Westminster Assembly held to a literal interpretation of

Genesis 1, in which the days of creation are six, literal, consecutive, days. While acknowledging such unanimity, some argue that the Assembly did not intend to restrict alternative opinions about the timeframe. They claim that the phrase “in the space of six days” is merely a repetition of the words of Scripture leaving options of interpretation open. Contrary to this claim the following facts are pertinent:

1. The language of WCF 4.1 is a definite theological interpretation of Scripture and not mere repetition. While the phrase “in six days” is found in Exodus 20:11 and 31:17, the phrase “in the space of six days” is not found anywhere in Scripture. The additional words “in the space of” clearly affirm the belief that creation occurred within a specific biblically-defined timeframe of six ordinary days. It excludes interpretations that are merely allegorical, figurative or literary. The phrase seems to have come from John Calvin’s commentary on Genesis where he used it to exclude an instantaneous creation as well as what could be called a literary framework interpretation. Calvin writes, “*Here the error of those is manifestly refuted, who maintain that the world was made in a moment. For it is too violent a cavil to contend that Moses distributes the work which God perfected at once into six days, for the mere purpose of conveying instruction. Let us rather conclude that God himself took the space of six days, for the purpose of accommodating his works to the capacity of men.*”
2. The Westminster Assembly deliberately included reference to the timeframe of creation whereas other significant confessions of that era did not. Members of the Assembly were, doubtless, familiar with other confessions of their time, including the *Thirty-nine articles* of the Church of England, the *Helvetic Confessions* of 1536 and 1556, the *Scots Confession* of 1560, the *Heidelberg Catechism* of 1563, and the *Belgic Confession* as adopted by the Synod of Dort in 1618-19. None of these documents mentions creation “in six days”. If the Westminster Assembly wished to leave the timeframe as an open question then it would have followed the other confessions and left out any such reference. Rather, in both the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, as well the Westminster Confession, the phrase, “in the space of six days” is included. It is surely evident to any fair reader, that the Assembly intended to declare a literal six-day creation as the received doctrine of the Church.
3. The Assembly intentionally excluded non-literal opinions. It is certain that the Assembly was familiar with alternative views found in the writings of the church fathers and classical philosophers. These had reappeared in various forms over the centuries. They knew of the allegorical approach of Origen. They knew of Augustine’s early speculations about instantaneous creation. In essence this view poses the same challenge to a literal reading of Genesis 1 as long-age conjectures. Augustine later returned to a literal interpretation and vigorously rebutted philosophers of his time, some of whom asserted that the world always existed, while others claimed that it was formed out of the matter of pre-existing worlds. It is evident that WCF 4.1 was formulated to exclude all such known errors. It asserts that this world was not eternal but had a beginning. It asserts that this world was not formed out of pre-existing matter but out of nothing. Notably, also, it asserts a timeframe for creation - not instantaneous, nor immeasurably long, nor unknown, but “in the space of six days”. The precision of wording was intended to exclude all non-literal interpretations.

In progressing this matter the committee proposes wording of a Declaratory Act to be sent down to presbyteries under the Barrier Act. In the meantime, to preserve the present harmony, it is recommended that it also be passed as an Interim Act.

**3. Laying on hands at ordination** – An overture from the Southern Presbytery relates to this matter and may be taken together. The received practice of this Church is for ministers alone to lay on hands at the ordination of a minister. This is stated in the *Westminster Form of Presbyterian Church Government*, “*Every minister of the word is to be ordained by imposition of hands, and prayer, with fasting, by those preaching presbyters to whom it doth belong.*” The practice of ministers laying on hands was clearly stated in *The Practice of the Free Church of Scotland* used by the PCEA until 1992, but is not so clearly stated in the *Handbook of Practice and Procedure*. It is proposed to add appropriate clarification to Handbook 4.72.

**4. Seats on Presbytery and status of assessors** - There was uncertainty at Synod 2025 about seats on presbytery for those providing resident supply, as also of the status of presbytery assessors on Synod.

a) Seats on presbytery - Note that Handbook 4.3d is not only unnecessary but unhelpful in that it misstates the terms of Act 18, 1986. Propose that it be deleted.

b) Status of assessors on Synod - Assessors are appointed for the purpose of assisting or strengthening a presbytery, not to change the composition of Synod. Assessors are sometimes appointed only for a specific item of business that may come before a presbytery. Others have a right to deliberate and vote on all matters. In neither case does it seem appropriate that the composition of Synod should change. It is proposed to clarify this by amendment of Handbook 4.3e and 5.3l.

**5. Terminology for *Special* meetings** – The original PCEA Handbook replaced the Latin terms *in hunc effectum* and *pro re nata* with the terms *special* and *extraordinary* respectively. The nomenclature has not proved sufficiently clear. Even the Handbook confuses the terms by referring to an *extraordinary* (i.e. *pro re nata*) meeting as a *special meeting* in 4.12. The problem is that both types of meeting are *special*, in the sense of being specific and limited, and both types of meeting are also *extraordinary*, in the sense of being unusual. The only difference is that one is appointed in advance for specific business that was anticipated, whereas the other is called for urgent business that was not anticipated. It would be more helpful if both were referred to as *special* meetings, but with one having the additional designation of *urgent*. It is proposed, therefore, that the term *special urgent* meeting be adopted in place of *extraordinary* meeting, and the Handbook updated accordingly.

**6. Eligibility for call where no mutual eligibility relationship exists** – Current rules, as outlined in Handbook 4.52, allow applications from ministers of churches with whom no mutual eligibility exists. In such cases, however, the minister only becomes eligible for call after he has resigned his existing charge, moved within the bounds of the PCEA, and been admitted as a PCEA minister upon signing the Formula. There are practical problems with this process. On the one hand it involves significant risk and uncertainty for the applicant and his family. For instance, he could give up his previous church and livelihood and be received as a PCEA minister only to find that no PCEA congregation is able or willing to call him. On the other hand, the current process can also place undue pressure on church courts to approve an application. The committee therefore propose an amendment to Act 18, 1983 (as amended 2004, 2012) to allow a man to apply to be examined and approved by Synod, made eligible for call in the PCEA, and to receive a call, without first having to resign his existing charge.

**7. Repeal Act 10, Synod 1988, Sale of Congregational Property (Excluding places of worship)** – This Act allowed Presbyteries to approve, “in the name of Synod”, the sale of property other than places of worship. This stands in opposition to both Property Acts, which clearly state that the permission of Synod is required for sale. The Act specified as a condition of manse sale that the provision of a new manse must be assured upon the sale of the old. In practice this has too often been ignored, and significant funds have subsequently had to be allocated to assist or rescue congregations that lost equity by selling a manse and failing to buy another. In recent years this has been the case for Brisbane, Ulverstone and Narre Warren. It seems that the Act has also tended to give a false impression that places of worship belong to Synod whereas other property belongs to congregations. There is, in fact, no legal or ecclesiastical difference in ownership, and no reason why properties should be treated differently. It is proposed that Act 10, Class 2, 1988 be repealed and Handbook 3.22 amended.

#### **8. Psalm versions and uniformity**

The importance of uniformity in worship has long been recognised as a fundamental principle within this Church. Elders and deacons, on taking office, promise to “*observe uniformity of worship and of the administration of all public ordinances within this Church*”. In November of 1649, when the Commission of Assembly of the Church of Scotland agreed to give up its old psalter and adopt new metrical paraphrases of the Psalms, the Act stated that this was “*for uniformity in this part of the Worship of God*”. From May 1650 the new paraphrases came into use as the only paraphrases of the Psalms to be used in churches and homes throughout Scotland. It was a significant change to the church life of the nation. The willing reception of this demonstrated the genuine and widespread desire for broader church unity. From 1643 the nations of Scotland, England and Ireland had covenanted themselves to work towards uniformity of religion. It was the key motivation behind the formation of the Westminster Assembly. In accordance with this commitment, the Scottish Church,

which already had its own reformed standards of doctrine, worship and government, willingly adopted a whole new set of standards produced in England, including the Confession of Faith, Directory for Worship, and Catechisms for teaching. Painful experience had shown that without uniformity there would be no unity or strength in the church. The new psalter, which also began as a production of the Westminster Assembly, was intended to be a part of this uniformity. For the Scottish Church and nation uniformity was not mere preference but a duty and a spiritual necessity.

The Australian context is different. Unlike Scotland or England, Australia has never had a united national Church or a common Psalter. The 1650 Psalter continued to be used in the PCEA by default but, over the past half century or more, there has been recognition that the syntax and archaic word forms are increasingly difficult for worshippers. From the 1970s Synod began to work to produce supplementary versions of the Psalms in more accessible language. While there were differences of opinion about the project there was a common recognition of the principle of uniformity and an expectation that the PCEA could only move forward with general consent. Somewhere along the way the commitment to uniformity has been completely lost. Eight years ago, in 2018, the PCEA had 13 congregations using 3 different metrical psalters. Synod agreed unanimously that the situation was not desirable. In 2019 there was also unanimity in appointing a Psalmody Committee with a clear remit to work towards the adoption of a common Psalter within the PCEA. Last year, however, the committee was dissolved after reporting that they had encountered a lack of commitment for such unity in the committee and wider PCEA. The result is that, after a 7-year process intended to recover uniformity in this area, we now find ourselves more divided than before. Today the PCEA has less congregations but more psalters – 10 congregations now using 4 different metrical psalters. If this was a problem in 2018, is it not a greater problem today? The singing of Psalms is meant to unite us but, in this area, we are publicly divided. We are not aware of any other psalm-singing denomination in the world so internally divided over Psalm versions.

How did we get to this point? A full analysis of all theological and human factors is not within the scope of this report but rather the legal and constitutional matters. The most significant legislative disturbance to our principle of uniformity can be traced to 1991 when hasty legislation was enacted that purported to give a right to sessions, rather than presbyteries or Synod, to oversee and control the Psalm versions in use in congregations. This Act (Act 12, Class 2, 1991) was not duly considered, being introduced on the floor of Synod by notice of motion, rather than by overture or committee deliverance. It was passed by a majority in the face of *dissent with reasons* from 5 members, including 2 senior ministers. It fundamentally changed the governing structure of the PCEA. The Act stated, “*The Synod take note of the diversity of Psalm versions currently in use within the Church, and encourage Sessions to maintain close supervision of these.*” A similar enactment followed in 1992, per minutes 71(4). It too was raised as a notice of motion without prior consideration. It said, “*...Synod remind Sessions to monitor closely the use of versions of the Psalms so as to ensure accuracy and a reasonable commonality of tunes and metres with the 1650 Psalter, and further request that well-considered efforts to further improve the manner of praise be implemented.*” There were two dissents from senior ministers, one with reasons stating “*...the resolution is inimical to uniformity of worship throughout congregations.*” This has proved true. Our recent 7-year attempt to bring uniformity has shown evidence of the obstacle created by these enactments. The perception has spread that congregations have a right to do as they please and don’t need to regard the views of others. Sessions may oversee Psalm versions without regard to the views of their minister, the higher courts, or the more general opinion of the church. While these enactments remain it is evident that “*uniformity in this part of the Worship of God*” has become virtually impossible to attain. In addition, they should be deemed unconstitutional as they stand in direct opposition to our stated principle that the minister is responsible for worship and is accountable to presbytery, not session, for the mode of conduct of all parts of it (Handbook 2.8). As a first step in seeking a way back to “*uniformity in this part of the Worship of God*”, the Synod enactments of 1991 and 1992 should be declared unconstitutional and should be repealed.

**9. Panel on Divorce, Separation and remarriage** - The panel carried out work during the year and will report separately.

**10. Rewrite Handbook chapter 4 – Reception of Ministry candidates.** This significant project to be carried out in conjunction with Training of Ministry committee has not yet been started due to pressure of other matters.

**11. Rewrite Handbook Chapter 7 – Discipline.** The project has not yet been started due to pressure of other matters.

**12. Safe church policy and procedures** – The committee has an ongoing remit to review and update Safe Church procedures. Comments are invited at any time from individuals and church courts. It is noted that in Victoria and Tasmania the compliance requirements go beyond the national standards to include matters relating to culture and identity. Some questions have arisen about how best to address this. The committee will give attention to this in the coming year in consultation with the congregations in Victoria and Tasmania.

**13. Acts of Synod - 1980 to present** – The full list of Acts of Synod from 1980 to present is available. Rev. David Kerridge, as Archivist, has prepared a database that will allow for better categorising and searchability of the various Acts, but significant data entry work is required to put the Acts into the database.

## **PROPOSED DELIVERANCES:**

### **1. Sustentation and “PayDay Super”**

1. **Sustentation** - Synod recognises the biblical example of a common fund as the ordinary means for sustentation of ministry and instructs the Law and Advisory Committee to bring forward detailed proposals to the next Synod for how such a fund could be operated within the PCEA.
2. **“PayDay Super”**
  - a) Congregational treasurers are advised that the administration of superannuation as part of payroll will be expected of them from no later than 1 July 2026 and that, if necessary, the Superannuation Committee can assist them in transitioning to this new system.
  - b) Synod instructs the Superannuation Committee to give consideration to how the management of the relevant centrally held funds may be streamlined with a view to dissolving the committee.

### **2. Declaratory Act re Westminster Confession 4.1**

Synod resolves to send the following overture to presbyteries in accordance with Barrier Act procedure, in the meantime passing it as an Interim Act. Returns from Presbyteries are to be sent to the Synod clerk no later than 31 December 2026:

#### **WHEREAS**

1. This Church has been unsettled at times by diversity of opinion over the meaning of the phrase “in the space of six days” in Westminster Confession 4.1,
2. In the providence of God, this Church now finds itself with unanimity of opinion among the inducted ministers and opportunity to make a declaration on the matter,
3. It is highly desirable for the future peace and stability of this Church that the matter be clarified,

#### **NOW THEREFORE**

Synod, with consent of Presbyteries, declares that:

The phrase “in the space of six days” in Westminster Confession 4.1 is held to teach, as the received doctrine of this Church, that the creation occurred in the timeframe of six, literal, consecutive, days. This Church disowns allegorical or figurative interpretations which seek to accommodate instantaneous creation or creation over long ages, as also literary interpretations in which the creation week is held to be merely a literary framework rather than a literal, historical account.

**3. Laying on hands at ordination** – To ensure that the existing position of the Church be better understood and uniformly practiced, Handbook 4.72 be amended to read: “The person is then ordained to the office of the holy ministry by prayer and the laying on of the hands of the ministers of presbytery...”

**4. Seats on presbytery and status of assessors** – Synod clarifies that assessors are not ordinary members of a presbytery and do not, by virtue of their appointment, have a right to sit on Synod.

a) Delete Handbook 4.3d and place the asterisk after 4.3c

b) Renumber Handbook 4.3e as 4.3d and add: “Such membership is extraordinary and does not convey a right to sit on Synod.”

Amend first line of Handbook 5.3 to read: “The Synod consists of all ordinary members of presbyteries...”

**5. Special (urgent) meetings** – Synod resolves that what was previously called an *extraordinary* or *pro re nata* meeting should now be called a *special urgent* meeting. Handbook 4.16 is to be amended accordingly, together with all other references throughout the Handbook.

**6. Amend Act 18, 1983, (as amended 2004, 2012)** - Synod amend the last two paragraphs of *Act 18, Class 2, 1983 (as amended) anent Admission of Ministers from other Churches* as follows:

The presbytery has no power to admit him, but transmits its report to the Training of Ministry Committee, together with any remarks or recommendations it may see fit to add. The Training of Ministry Committee makes such further enquiries as seem appropriate and the case is reported to the next meeting, or a special urgent meeting, of Synod for its decision. Synod will normally interview the applicant and may set additional requirements as appropriate.

Authority to admit him having been granted by Synod, the clerk of presbytery is to add his name to a special list entitled “Ministers of other churches eligible for call” and inform him in writing that he is now eligible for election and call by congregations of this church for a period of three years. If he has resigned from his previous denomination, is resident within the bounds of the presbytery, and wishes to be admitted as a minister without charge, then the presbytery requires the applicant to answer the questions prescribed in Act of Synod 1952 (II) for “Probationers before they are licensed to preach the gospel”, and to sign the Formula. After prayer and a suitable address by the moderator, he is admitted into communion and declared a Minister (or probationer) of the church eligible for call, but he may not moderate meetings of Presbytery or Synod until he has been duly inducted to a charge.

**7. Act 10, Synod 1988 anent Sale of Congregational Property (Excluding places of worship)**

a) Synod repeal *Act 10, Class 2, Synod 1988 anent Sale of Congregational Property (Excluding places of worship)*.

b) Handbook 3.22 is amended as follows:

#### 3.22 MORTGAGE/SALE OF PROPERTY

Where mortgage or sale of congregational property is desired, the Deacons’ Court shall ensure that the congregation and relevant higher courts are informed of the reasons for the sale and/or mortgage, the purposes for which the funds realised will be used and how repayment will be funded. Sale, mortgage or other encumbrance of church property cannot take place without the approval of the congregation and relevant higher courts. The sale of church property requires the approval of the congregation. In respect of congregational property in New South Wales, the proceeds of a mortgage can only be applied to the erection, improvement or maintenance of a church, manse or school-house on land held for the congregation. (Synod of Eastern Australia Property Act 1918, section 10). [~~Relevant Synod legislation includes Act of Synod 1958 (Class 1) re Victorian Act; Act of Synod 1984 re NSW Act.~~]

~~Synod 1988 (Act 10) gave authority to the Presbytery of the bounds to approve in the name of Synod the sale of property other than places of worship where a) the Congregation has been informed of the reasons for the proposed sale, and the purpose for which the funds realized will be used, and has given its consent, certified to the Presbytery by extract minute; b) in the case of the sale of a manse the Presbytery has been satisfied that the provision of a suitable manse is assured upon the sale of the old; c) the sale and related purchases are handled in their legal aspects by a competent firm of solicitors; and d) in all respects the provisions of the applicable Act of Parliament, and legislation of Synod are adhered to.~~

~~The congregation must consent as certified by extract minute; in the case of a manse the Presbytery must be satisfied that the provision of a suitable manse is assured upon the sale of the old; a competent firm of solicitors must handle the legal aspects; and the legislation of the Synod and the applicable Act of Parliament must be adhered to. Sales of places of worship require Synod approval.]~~

Should it be impracticable to wait until the annual Synod, a congregation desiring to mortgage property (~~other than church buildings~~) may submit a Presbytery-approved proposal to the Finance Committee in terms of the existing Capital Assistance Fund procedure and the Administration Committee is authorised to make a decision after receiving recommendation or otherwise from the Finance Committee. (Act 9, 2008)

## **8. Psalm versions and uniformity**

1. Synod acknowledges that the current diversity of psalters in use within our small denomination tends to disunity. Synod recognises the historic principle of uniformity and recommits to work towards uniformity in psalm versions, as also in all other significant areas of worship.
2. Synod rescinds, as unconstitutional, Act 12, Class 2, 1991 and the resolution of Synod 1992, minutes 71(4) - *“Synod remind Sessions to monitor closely the use of versions of the Psalms so as to ensure accuracy and a reasonable commonality of tunes and metres with the 1650 Psalter, and further request that well-considered efforts to further improve the manner of praise be implemented.”*
3. Synod reaffirms that oversight of the mode of conduct of worship within congregations belongs to presbyteries not sessions, as reflected in Handbook 2.8.

## Appendix A

### Biblical Principles for Sustentation of Ministry

**Principle 1 – God has called some men to be ministers of the Word** – Scripture teaches that, for the spiritual safety and strengthening of his church, God equips and calls some men to minister the Word as pastors and teachers. “*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers*” (Ephesians 4:11). Not every Christian man is called to this work nor does God give everyone the spiritual gifts necessary for it. “*Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles?*” (1 Corinthians 12:29). The possession of the necessary gifts does, however, place an obligation upon a man to prepare himself to take up the work (Luke 9:59-62).

**Principle 2 – The ministry of the Word is a whole-life calling** – To become a minister of the Word is not a small or light undertaking. Our Lord called his disciples to leave their homes and livelihoods to serve the gospel (Matthew 4:18-22, Luke 5:27-28). Similarly, the prospective minister must be prepared to give up ordinary career prospects to enter the service of Christ. This often involves giving up homes, lands, and family (Matthew 19:27-30). Paul’s counsel to Timothy is a reminder to all pastors that their whole life is to be devoted to the Word, “*Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.*” (1 Timothy 4:14-15). A recurring title of ministers in the New Testament is, literally, “slaves of Christ” indicating the special claim of Christ upon their lives (Rom 1:1, Gal 1:10, Col 4:12, Phil 1:1, Jas 1:1, Jud 1:1).

**Principle 3 - Ministers of the Word are to be sustained financially by the church** – It is evident that a man giving up other work and career to devote his life to the ministry of the Word requires an income from it. The principle is stated in 1 Corinthians 9:1-14, especially v11 & 13-14 “*If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things?... Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.*” The church, therefore, has an obligation to provide financially for ministers. Every individual Christian has an obligation to contribute in proportion to income and in accordance with particular needs (1 Corinthians 16:2). This includes appropriate support for those training to be ministers.

**Principle 4 – In ordinary circumstances Ministers should be remunerated well above subsistence level** – The principle is stated in 1 Timothy 5:17-18, “*Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE AN OX WHILE IT TREADS OUT THE GRAIN, and, THE LABOURER IS WORTHY OF HIS WAGES.*” Sometimes misunderstood as if *honour* means merely respect due to ministers. In context, however, we understand this to be referring to sustentation. In v3, where widows in poverty are to receive *honour*, we understand this to mean they are to be provided for by the church. Minimal but enough to sustain them. But those who rule the church as ministers of the Word are ordinarily to receive far more than such a basic subsistence. They should have enough to live on and more besides.

**Principle 5 – In ordinary circumstances sustentation of ministers should be via a common fund** – Our Lord Jesus Christ taught and lived out a model of collegiate ministry in which ministers of the word (or trainees for the work) learned, collaborated and laboured together in the service of gospel and were sustained together out of a common fund. John 13:29 describes the money bag for which Judas had responsibility. Out of this the needs of Christ and his disciples were met and, evidently, a proportion was given to the poor. This model was continued afterwards by the apostles by whom, initially, the common fund for sustentation and poor relief was administered. In time, as the burden of poor relief grew such that it required full time employees, an order of deacons was established (Acts 6:1-7). It is evident that the seven appointed in Jerusalem did not operate at a congregational level but at what we may call a “presbytery” level. The concept of collegiality in word and doctrine is at the heart of the Presbyterian system of government, but the associated operation of a common fund has not always been possible due to circumstances. There have been times, however, when both have been recovered to some extent and found together, such as in the ancient missionary churches of Iona and Lindisfarne, in Geneva in the time of Calvin, in the Scottish church in the decades after the Reformation of 1560 (see 2<sup>nd</sup> Book of Discipline, 8.7), and in the Free Church of Scotland at the Disruption.

The principle of a common sustentation fund for religious workers is evident in many places in the Old Testament, such as among the “schools” of the prophets in the days of Samuel, Elijah and Elisha (1 Sam 19:19-25, 2 Kings 2:1-15, 4:38-44, 6:1-7) and in the system of support of the Priests, Levites, Singers and Gatekeepers under the reforms of Nehemiah (Neh 10:38-39, 13:6-14). By contrast, there

are few examples of direct individual employment of religious workers and, where it does occur in Scripture, the examples are generally negative, as in the case of the Levite who became Micah's personal priest in Judges 17:7-13. Direct funding tends to create a perception of an employer/employee relationship which does not properly reflect the status of the minister of the Word. This issue was evident under the system of patronage in Scotland through the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries when the local landlord paid the minister's stipend. Some landlords came to think of the minister as their own personal employee. They thought the choice belonged solely to them and expected that the minister, being financially dependent on them, would be answerable to them. It was against this system that the Scottish church had long protested and, in due course, it was this problem that precipitated the Disruption.

Being sensitive to these issues of dependency, the PCEA and Free Presbyterian Church of Victoria, at their formation, declined for their ministers to be funded by the State. While the Free Church of Scotland replaced State funding with its own common Sustentation Fund, it appears that, due to institutional smallness and the significant distances between congregations, these Australian churches could not establish a common sustentation fund here.

**Principle 6 – A minister's income should be supplemented appropriate to the condition of his own congregation** – Galatians 6:6 *“Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches.”* The principle identifies a direct personal obligation of an individual to his own minister, to share the benefits that he enjoys. On this basis a twofold approach, of a common fund supplemented by individual benefits, underpinned the Free Church Sustentation scheme established at the Disruption.<sup>1</sup> A national Sustentation Fund ensured that there would be a basic income for every minister in the country and, additionally, congregations were encouraged, on the basis of Galatians 6:6, to add benefits to their minister as they were able. In poor rural areas congregants would bring produce to the manse, or the men may work the minister's glebe on his behalf so that he would have the benefit of it. In wealthier city areas, congregants contributed to a local Congregational Fund to supplement their own minister's income, ensuring that he did not live among them as one significantly poorer than they were.

### **Application to PCEA**

#### **Reasons to consider establishment of a common Sustentation Fund:**

1. A common sustentation fund has biblical warrant as the ordinary mechanism for ministerial support and a practical outworking of the principle of collegiality among ministers.
2. Modern communications and banking have removed the logistical difficulties that may have mitigated against the operation of a common sustentation fund in the PCEA in earlier times.
3. Increasing regulations and reporting obligations for tax, employment, superannuation, and immigration, place significant burden on local treasurers expected to administer payroll at a congregational level.
4. It is more practical for one or two people to operate payroll for a common sustentation fund than to require treasurers in every congregation to attain the knowledge to do so.
5. The PCEA has already endorsed the principle of central sustentation by operating a hybrid system in which superannuation and long service leave, both statutory elements of employment, are administered centrally.

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<sup>1</sup> “If this [central Sustentation Fund] had been all, however, it is obvious that an equal dividend would have been the most unequal of all arrangements – the expense of maintaining the social position of a minister in certain localities being so much greater than in others. Along with the Sustentation Fund, therefore, there was conjoined another – the Congregational Fund – to enable the people in each parish, by collections or otherwise, to supplement the income of their own pastor according to their ability. By means of this two-fold arrangement, scope was given for appealing to the most powerful motives, for in contributing to the General Sustentation Fund, men would be acting from the pure and high principle of looking not on their own things but on the things of others – the generous feeling that they were standing side by side with their poorer brethren, in providing the ordinances of the Gospel throughout the most remote localities in the land. On the other hand, in contributing to the Congregational Fund, men were acting under the motive to which the Apostle appeals – “Let him who is taught in the word communicate to him that teacheth,” &c. The home feeling of affectionate personal regard for their own pastor, - the satisfaction of ministering in carnal things to him who was ministering to them in things spiritual – would thus have free scope, and so these two funds were intended to act as combined forces, each strengthening the other in building up the Church, and fostering the interests of congregations in every separate locality.” (Rev Thomas Brown, *Annals of the Disruption of 1843*, p293)

6. Current tax rules for Ministers of Religion in Australia mean that congregations can continue to add local benefits for their minister via Non-Cash Benefits, in application of the principle of Galatians 6:6, without any burdensome tax or reporting.
7. There are significant advantages to the church for immigration purposes if visa sponsorship and associated “employment contract” are at a presbytery or denominational level rather than congregational.

**Additional considerations:**

1. If Synod were to agree in principle then detailed proposals for a common fund may be developed in consultation with treasurers and serving ministers of the church, for consideration at next Synod.
2. The ATO sets no limit on Non-Cash Benefits but Synod has imposed its own limit of 40% of minimum stipend. This appears to be arbitrary and unnecessary from both a biblical perspective and a tax/legal perspective. It is suggested that this be reviewed.

**Panel on Divorce, Separation and Remarriage MAJORITY REPORT  
by T M Reeve and I J Miller**

*22.2.13.7. Synod resolves to establish a panel, under the oversight of the Law & Advisory Committee, charged with preparing a statement for the PCEA Handbook to provide clear scriptural guidance on Divorce, Separation and Remarriage, and to bring proposed legislation to Synod 2024.*

*25.8.1. 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.*

Work on preparing the first draft of this statement commenced in 2022 but was not completed until November 2024. It was carried out by the two elders on the Law & Advisory Committee appointed to the panel, Mr T Reeve (then convener) and Mr I Miller. In 2025 and early 2026 further work was done by all the members of the panel which included Rev. J Forbes and Rev. J Klazinga.

Due to significant disagreement by Rev. J Forbes, he, as current Convener of the Law & Advisory Committee, recommended that the panel work be discontinued and that the panel be dissolved by Synod 2026. We protested this proposal believing it was not in accord with the stated resolutions of Synod (above).

The statement attached here is the fruit of our labours, including several helpful improvements by Rev. J Forbes in 2026. The parts objected to by him are retained in this draft document. The main sticking point is our divergent view on the correct interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:39, especially the three words ‘*in the Lord.*’ We maintain that these words mean that a believing widow (and indeed all believers) should only marry another Christian, a fellow believer also on the road to heaven. We intend to present the arguments for this important traditional, simple interpretation of that Scripture at the forthcoming meeting of Synod.

**Deliverance**

Synod resolves to approve the progress report of the panel on Divorce, Separation and Remarriage, and recommends that the draft Statement be sent to presbyteries for their comments. It further instructs presbyteries to report back to the panel by 31<sup>st</sup> October 2026, and that legislation be prepared for Synod 2027.

**22.2.13.7.** Synod resolves to establish a panel, under the oversight of the Law & Advisory Committee, charged with preparing a statement for the PCEA Handbook to provide clear scriptural guidance on Divorce, Separation and Remarriage, and to bring proposed legislation to Synod 2024.

**25.8.1.** 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.

## **PCEA STATEMENT ON DIVORCE, SEPARATION AND REMARRIAGE**

### **Introduction**

Marriage was provided for man at the beginning of time, on the sixth day of creation. The Triune God, whose eternal existence was one of perfect love and harmony between the three Persons, designed man to live in loving fellowship. God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness” Genesis 1:26. Man was created first, then separately came the addition of Woman created out of his side, with the mandate to them both to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and to subdue it.

Man was ordained as the head, using his authority in the marriage relationship with love. The wife enjoyed the protection and perfect affection of her husband, willingly submitting to him as her head. She was to have pure joy in bearing and nurturing children, who in turn were to love, honour and obey their parents as they grew in stature and knowledge. Such was God’s wonderful design for marriage in the earthly paradise at the beginning of the world. Marriage is termed a ‘creation ordinance’ and was ordained for all mankind.

The original purpose of marriage was blighted by the Fall of man as outlined in Genesis chapter 3. By the disobedience of Adam and Eve came the entrance of sin into the world. The creation was cursed and God pronounced judgment on all mankind, including the relationship between the man and his wife. Work, good order in the family, and childbearing, all became areas of difficulty, with discord and suffering. Nevertheless, the Lord in his goodness kept marriage as an ordinance of blessing (Proverbs 18:22), and gave guidelines for its maintenance and improvement in a broken, sinful, and groaning world in which we now live.

The Lord Jesus not only reaffirmed the validity of the “one flesh” of the marriage relationship (Matthew 19:4-6), but through his apostle he also reinforced the inviolability of the marriage bond by characterising it as an earthly type of the relationship between Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:25).

### **Purposes of Marriage**

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) in Chapter 24, section 2, summarises the purposes which God designed in marriage:

1. *Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife*; [a covenant of companionship]
2. *For the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue* [procreation]
3. *And of (the increase) of the church with an holy seed*; [training children in the faith]
4. *And for the prevention of uncleanness* [Marriage was provided to be a legitimate place of rest and enjoyment of deep natural desires, the only proper context for physical intimacy (Proverbs 5:15-20, 1 Corinthians 7:9).]

**Marriage** can be defined as “a voluntary union for life of one man and one woman to the exclusions of all others.” All valid marriages have the sanction of the Lord’s creation ordinance, whether conducted in a church or not, or whether the parties are believers or unbelievers. Jesus declared, “What therefore God has joined together let not man put asunder.” Matthew 19:6.

**Divorce** is defined as the break-down of the marriage relationship between husband and wife which leads to a public permanent dissolving of the bond.

**Separation** is the state of living apart which involves no legal dissolution of the marriage bond. It can become a 'limbo' state where one or more parties attempt reconciliation which is often achieved. This state may become a permanent separation.

### **Australian Law**

The differences between Scriptural standards and current Australian law should be clearly grasped by office-bearers and members of our churches. That is a key reason for the PCEA Synod preparing this statement.

The Federal Government legislates on matters of marriage and divorce. It is important to understand this law, while keeping in mind that Christians are subject to a higher authority. Where there is a divergence, Christians must take the stance of the apostles - "We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29). At the end of the day, we must all give an account of ourselves to God, so our thinking on this subject must be governed by the fear of God and His word.

The Australian Federal Government, under its **Marriage Act 1961** (as amended from time to time) legislates concerning marriage. It is binding on all states and territories regarding all persons domiciled in Australia, regardless of where the marriage took place. Up until the 2017 amendment, the definition used under the Australian Federal Government Marriage Act, was that marriage was the union of one man and one woman. Since that year, the Government has sanctioned homosexual marriage which the Bible condemns and prohibits. However, there are many other things which the Bible prohibits including adultery, fornication, and lustful thoughts (Matthew 5:27, 28; 1 Corinthians 6: 9-11). All of these sins impinge on marriage and stable family life.

The **Family Law Act 1975** brought in divorce on a no-fault basis (previously there were 14 grounds which had to be established at law), allowing the single ground of irretrievable breakdown, established by separation and living apart for a period of twelve months. As well as legislation on divorce, the Act also deals with parenting arrangements, interests of the children, financial maintenance, family violence and division of property and finances and etc. It also covers *de facto* partners. There were 15 parts to the legislation, including the creation of the Family Court of Australia. Needless to say, the current easy divorce laws represent a huge departure from Biblical standards, which has greatly affected the cohesion of Australian society.

Please refer to PCEA Synod Acts and Decisions on marriage, listed in the Appendix.

## **DIVORCE**

**1.1** The term is first mentioned in the books of Moses in relation to suitable wives for priests (Leviticus 21:14), daughters in the care of priests (Leviticus 22:13) and in the matter of vows of a divorced woman (Numbers 30:9). However, it is in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 that an allowed cause for divorce is given under the Mosaic law.

*"When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favour in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house... (verse 1).*

**1.2** The LORD's view on divorce is strongly presented by the last of the Old Testament prophets, Malachi in 2:14-16: *"The LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously: Yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant. 15. But did he not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks a godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. 16. For the LORD God of Israel says that he hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously."*

**1.3** It is clear from the teaching of Jesus in the gospels that the Mosaic law was interpreted very loosely by the Jews of his time. The leaders asked the question, 'was it right to put away one's wife for any reason?' Our Lord clarifies the OT teaching in two ways:

a. He emphasises the original bond of marriage as a permanent relationship – ‘What God has joined together let not man put asunder’ (Matthew 19:1-10; Mark 10:1-10). Jesus entered a strong protest about divorce, backing up what was spoken through Malachi.

b. Jesus gave one allowable reason for divorce – that of adultery of a spouse (Matthew 5:31,32, 19:9). The Greek word is *porneia* which means illicit sexual intercourse of any kind.

Note: In cases of adultery, divorce is not inevitable. It is possible and may be preferable to exercise forgiveness and to seek reconciliation, as shown in the drama of the prophet Hosea and his wife Gomer (Hosea chapters 1-3).

**1.4** Scripture also permits divorce in the case of wilful desertion by one spouse of the other (1 Corinthians 7:15). Such divorce typically arises when the Christian husband or wife is deserted by their unbelieving spouse. This abandonment in effect, makes the marriage empty in name, void of reality and places the deserted spouse in an unenviable position, vulnerable to fractured family relationships, financial loss as well as reputational loss.

**1.5** The Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 24 ‘Of Marriage and Divorce’, section 6, provides a clear outline of scriptural teaching regarding divorce.

*Although the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments, unduly to put asunder those whom God hath joined together in marriage; yet nothing but adultery, or such wilful desertion as can no way be remedied by the Church or civil magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage; wherein a public and orderly course of proceeding is to be observed; and the persons concerned in it, not left to their own wills and discretion in their own case.*

**1.6** With both adultery or desertion, the aggrieved party has the right to seek divorce from the offending spouse. The local Session may be required to make a determination about both the offending party and the aggrieved party. Having obtained a divorce, the innocent party will become in status as a single person again.<sup>2</sup> Such a person is no longer “bound” and is free to remarry (1 Corinthians 7:15). For Christians however, remarriage must only be “in the Lord,” (1 Corinthians 7:3, 2 Cor 6:14), WCF 24.3.<sup>3</sup>

**1.7** If a person is divorced prior to salvation, God’s gracious forgiveness through Christ removes the guilt and stain of the sins of their pre-Christian past and makes them new creatures in Christ. However, “grey” areas creep in at this point when professing Christians divorce and seek to be remarried. Sometimes they may have a secular wedding, then as a married couple join another church where they may be little known or unknown.

**1.8** Some professing Christians have sought to justify separation and divorce on grounds such as abuse (emotional and/or physical), incompatibility, a sentence of long-term imprisonment for a criminal offence, chronic illness, the physical incapacity of a spouse or the spouse accessing pornography. Whilst such circumstances are significant stressors, the believer’s path must be that of faithful obedience to the Lord in the way of self-denial, bearing of reproach, and suffering for the glory of God (Acts 14:22). In keeping with Christ’s teaching in Mark 10:11,12 and Luke 16:18, the remarriage of believers is not scripturally permitted when the divorce has been used as a means of simply changing partners since such intent makes the divorce adulterous.

**1.9** Members of Session must deal in a balanced manner, with compassion, justice, mercy, and humility, always with reference to God’s righteous standards, with each case of separation, divorce, or remarriage, not losing sight of God’s inexhaustible capacity to forgive sin and to restore broken lives. A proactive approach to strengthening marriages through pastoral preaching and teaching, regular visitation, pre-marital counselling, is considered a priority (Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:2).

**1.10** Divorce is a devastating experience, especially for the innocent spouse and their children, whether young or adult. It commonly leaves its victims broken and scarred. There will be grief and possibly ongoing mental difficulties.

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<sup>2</sup> When children are involved, it is not as simple as just becoming single again. In such cases the legal and practical complexities are ongoing and these have a major effect on any future marriage.

<sup>3</sup> Christians should not marry ‘idolaters’ of any description. John Calvin famously wrote “the human heart is a perpetual idol factory” (*hominis ingenium perpetuam, ut ita loquar, esse idolorum fabricam*) [Institutes I.11.8]

The congregation has a special opportunity and responsibility to minister love and compassion to divorced brethren and their families through kind support, and inclusion into the life of the fellowship, helping to provide favourable conditions for their healing and restoration (Matthew 25:40, Mark 12:31, 1 Corinthians 13:4, Philippians 2:4, Galatians 6:10).

## SEPARATION

### 2.1 Australian Family Law ACT 1975 - Sect 49

#### Meaning of separation

*(1) The parties to a marriage may be held to have separated notwithstanding that the cohabitation was brought to an end by the action or conduct of one only of the parties. (2) The parties to a marriage may be held to have separated and to have lived separately and apart notwithstanding that they have continued to reside in the same residence or that either party has rendered some household services to the other.*

**2.2** Separation of marriage partners has always been a sad fact of the human condition as shown by Judges 19:1-3 (where reconciliation takes place). For couples contemplating separation which may lead to divorce, the apostle Paul speaks against doing this hastily and without efforts to reconcile the relationship, even if one partner is yet unconverted. He is not advocating marrying an unbeliever as shown by 1 Corinthians 7:39, but is dealing with cases where someone has become a believer subsequent to their marriage.

1 Corinthians 7:10-16: *“Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.*

*But to the rest I, not the Lord say: If any brother has a wife who is not a believer, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her.*

*And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him.*

*For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.*

*But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart: a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?”*

**2.3** Abstinence from physical relations for a short, agreed time can be seen in the Scriptures for various reasons. OT examples are when the LORD through Moses directs the Israelites to prepare for the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:10-15); and abstinence is implied when the priests were on duty (1 Samuel 21:4,5) and soldiers at war (2 Samuel 11:11). In the NT, we have direction on this in 1 Corinthians 7:5: *“Do not deprive [defraud] one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you.”*

**2.4** Separation may become necessary in cases of severe or chronic domestic abuse, when the abused spouse (and children) become spiritually, emotionally, and physically exhausted. A period of living apart may be necessary for their safety and recovery. In such cases the individual should seek wise counsel and ensure that their pastor or elder is informed about their actions.

**2.5** Abigail is an example of a godly woman who served the Lord well whilst living with a harsh, ungodly husband. In all her difficulties she no doubt prayed to the Lord who delivered her in his own time (1 Samuel chapter 25). Enduring marriage difficulties and harshness which cannot be mended is sadly the calling of some Christians. The church should seek to support such members as best they can, but not be advising them to separate (as is the manner of some), unless there is danger to their own person or to their children.

**2.6** When Christians separate for non-Biblical reasons, the church leadership should provide scriptural guidance, perhaps asking the couple to work through their difficulties with a good counselling service

preferably conducted by a Christian organisation. The church has a duty to seek to remedy the relationship, because the civil magistrate (Federal Government) has largely abdicated this role in Australia.

The position of the PCEA is that “*the persons concerned [are]... not left to their own wills and discretion in their own case.*” WCF 24.6. The FCS report (1988) emphasises that ‘ministers and office-bearers should do everything in their power to effect a reconciliation between the parties concerned before a divorce action proceeds.’

**2.7** Where the deserting party hardens their stance and will not contemplate any course of joint reconciliation, yet does not wish a divorce, they need to be counselled as to the unscriptural nature of such a position. If this attitude persists, it then becomes a case of desertion.

## REMARRIAGE

**3.1** Marriage is good, and remarriage of younger Christian **widows** is encouraged by the apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 5:14. But the question here is about **divorcees**, can they remarry? The answer is yes - if they have been divorced for either of the two reasons allowed by Scripture.

**3.2** The status of those who request PCEA ministers to officiate at their marriage has to be ascertained and, in faithfulness to God, the minister must investigate the relevant relationship history of each of the applicants. It is necessary to remember that marriage is public and divorce is public. Therefore, it is in the public interest that the general facts are known, even though applicants may wish to keep their details hidden.

**3.3** In other cases, a previously divorced couple may wish to become communicant members. Again, investigation is prudent to ascertain whether one or both were divorced on Scripturally allowable grounds. It is best to ask the husband and wife to provide this information directly and this works well when a good relationship has been established with the pastor or an elder with whom they feel comfortable.

**3.4** General principles for church leaders with a few helpful scenarios are given here. For those seeking marriage or remarriage each case will be different and sometimes very complex. Yet the church should not shrink from giving Biblical counsel to bring all marriages into line with God’s way and to have his blessing on them. The minister should refuse to conduct marriages which are not in accord with God’s word.

**3.5** If applicants from outside the congregation seek a church wedding, and have not been married previously, though they cohabit in a “common law” or *de facto* marriage relationship, counsel should be provided by the minister seeking to lead them to repentance. But whether or not they make this step at the time, the minister is free to conduct the marriage and to pray for God’s blessing on their union.

**3.6** If the applicants, or one of them, is a member or adherent of the congregation and the couple are living in a de-facto relationship, then the minister must make sure that both have truly repented and thus will be marrying “in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:39) before proceeding with their marriage.

**3.7** Church discipline is designed to reclaim those who are tempted to err or have fallen into serious sin. If exercised correctly it will bring blessings upon individuals, families, and churches. We have a biblical example of this working out in the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians chapter 5 & 2 Corinthians 2:1-8; 7:6-16). On the other hand, it can be a lonely and difficult duty for office-bearers as they remain faithful to the standards of Christ in their counsel and actions.

## REMARRIAGE OF WIDOWS

1 Timothy 5:1-16 is the main Scripture passage dealing with this topic.

General Note: Throughout the Scriptures the widow and the fatherless are presented as being under the special care of the Lord. Likewise, God's people are to show compassion and to provide practical care for widows and their children in their affliction and vulnerable position.

Exodus 22:22-24; Deuteronomy 10:18, 24:17, 27:19; 1 Kings 17:8-24; Job 29:12,13; Psalm 10:14; Psalm 68:5; Psalm 94:1-6; Psalm 146:9; Proverbs 15:25; Isaiah 1:17, 23; Jeremiah 7:3-7; Lamentations 5:1-3; Ezekiel 22:7; Hosea 14:3; Zechariah 7:9,10; Malachi 3:5; Luke 7:12,13; James 1:27.

See also Luke 14:12-14, 21:1-4; Psalm 41:1-3; Proverbs 19:17, 28:27.

a. Marriage is honourable and good, a creation ordinance instituted by God in paradise. Genesis 2:18,24; Proverbs 18:22; Hebrews 13:4.

b. In their sorrow and grief, godly widows should become more prayerful, crying out to God himself for relief. 1 Timothy 5:5.

c. Widows are to show piety and to live a blameless life. 1 Timothy 5: 4,7. Such behaviour should be the fruit of their affliction (not self-pitying), and is pleasing to the Lord. The focus of young widows should be godly living in their families, even though their husbands have been taken in death. Titus 2:4,5. Seeking their own pleasure is condemned. 1 Timothy 5:6.

d. Specific instruction is given by Paul that younger widows should remarry and willingly take up family responsibilities. 1 Timothy 5:14.

Such action and attitude, under the care of a good husband, will help prevent them from going astray in fleshly and ungodly ways, casting off faith in God and being led by the devil. 1 Timothy 5:11-15.

e. Only a Christian man should be considered for her remarriage. 1 Corinthians 7:39 (note also: it is her choice); 2 Corinthians 6:14. See also Romans 7:2,3. She should admire him for his spiritual qualities.

f. It is necessary to have a time of mourning, remaining single, to deal with grief. 2 Samuel 11:26,27. Following the death of a husband, marrying too soon can make for a difficult relationship with the new spouse.

### **ADVICE BY PRESBYTERY**

Difficult cases are to be referred to presbytery for advice as stipulated in the PCEA *Handbook of Practice and Procedure* 7.26.

It is recommended that each presbytery provide suitable training for all its members so they have a sufficient level of knowledge and competence.

It is also recommended that each presbytery prepares a list of competent counsellors for individuals to attend, as well as organisations which can conduct marriage enrichment courses in its jurisdiction, maybe at a congregational level. Regular courses can be a less embarrassing way for couples to seek help at an earlier stage in their difficulties.

### **FURTHER READING**

ADAMS, Jay E (1980) *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Zondervan) 99 pp.

ADAMS, Jay E (1973) *The Christian Counselor's Manual* (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Baker Book House) 476 pp.

BOETTNER, Lorraine (1960) *Divorce* (U.S.A. Self-published) 38 pp.

FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND (1988) *Marriage and Divorce* (Edinburgh; A Report of the Study Panel of the Free Church of Scotland) 54 pp.

MURRAY, John (1961) *Divorce* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company) 122 pp.

## **APPENDIX**

### **List of PCEA Synod Acts and Decisions relating to Marriage (to be completed)**

#### **QUESTIONS FOR CHURCH STUDY GROUPS (led by a Minister or Elder)**

a. Does Scripture permit one or all of separation, divorce, and remarriage if:

1) regular disagreement, tension and disharmony typify the marital relationship?

2) one of the spouses abandons the faith and seeks to pursue lifestyle aspects characteristic of unbelievers, whilst remaining married?

3) there is a pattern of ongoing coercive control and domination by one spouse of the life of the other?

4) there is a pattern of domestic abuse (such as disrespectful, harsh, and cruel comments or even violent physical behaviour)?

5) a spouse is regularly accessing pornography?

b. What God-honouring Biblical course of action should be pursued in each of the above five cases?

**PANEL ON DIVORCE, SEPARATION AND REMARRIAGE**  
**(J Forbes – Minority Report)**

**Members:** *J Klazinga (withdrew), J Forbes, T Reeve, I Miller*

**Remit of Panel**

(Minutes 22.2.13.7) *Synod resolves to establish a panel, under the oversight of the Law & Advisory Committee, charged with preparing a statement for the PCEA Handbook to provide clear scriptural guidance on Divorce, Separation and Remarriage, and to bring proposed legislation to Synod 2024.*

(Minutes 25.8.1) *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.*

**Report of Progress**

The panel established in 2022 was originally intended as a 2-year project to prepare guidance for the Handbook. Mr Reeve, convener at that time, planned that he and Mr Ian Miller would prepare the initial draft to be reviewed by the ministers of the panel in due course. Due to circumstances a document was not available for review until two and a half years later in November 2024. It was evident that it would not be suitable for the Handbook, being too long (7 pages) and non-procedural in nature. Mr Reeve was keen to have extended guidance available for church members so the remit of the panel was clarified and expanded at Synod 2025.

To date no work has been carried out in fulfilment of the original remit. Health issues for certain panel members has hindered progress. From January 2026 the panel met online a number of times to work through and review the extended guidance produced by T Reeve and I Miller. Mr Klazinga, present for part of the first meeting, indicated that he did not think the project was feasible or an appropriate investment of time. He subsequently excused himself to prioritise other pressing duties. His assessment appears to be fair as, despite significant time invested by the remaining panel members, progress has been difficult and unanimity of opinion has not been reached, though a number of theological and exegetical inaccuracies in the original draft were corrected.

It is evident that this is a difficult area of pastoral theology and particular care is required to ensure that statements made are legally and theologically accurate, and pastorally appropriate. It is also necessary that it be unifying within the parameters of our agreed Standards otherwise it will not be supported by ministers and elders in their congregations. A similar project by a much better equipped panel of the Free Church of Scotland took many years of work to accomplish the objective. It is evident that our panel is not currently equipped for its task and that it is inexpedient to continue the project at this time. It is recommended that it be dissolved and that the L&A committee be tasked to bring forward relevant concise procedural guidance for the Handbook.

**DELIVERANCE**

1. Synod recognises the work invested by the Panel on Divorce, Separation and Remarriage and notes that unanimity has not been attained and that it does not appear expedient to continue the project at this time. Synod dissolves the Panel and instructs the L&A committee to propose relevant, concise, procedural guidance for the Handbook.

## TRAINING OF MINISTRY COMMITTEE

**Members:** Members: DJ Kerridge (Convener 2013); R Tso; G Hamilton; I Miller

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

A review of the part of chapter four (Sections 4.46-49) dealing with the reception and training of students was intended as a joint investigation with the Law and Advisory committee from 2025. Our committee must report that no progress has been made in this, but it is generally recognised that there is need for a better delineation of processes. Each case is unique and therefore legislation beyond a standard form may not be possible.

As decided at last Synod, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed with Reformed Theological College (Melbourne) in 2025 formalising the addition of the college to our Synod-approved list. As part of the mutually-beneficial arrangement that now exists, we can seek scholarships for our students, receive regular reports on student progress, and have agreed to the general clear and transparent interchange of information. For an example of how this will work, we will supply the College with this report and an invitation may be issued to a representative of the College to attend our Synods. The Committee has also received an invitation from RTC for a member of the PCEA to sit on the RTC Board.

The Committee received a candidacy application in July 2025 from Northern Presbytery on behalf of Mr Micah Klazinga. The application was considered by the Committee and two interviews conducted with the prospective candidate (7th August and 21<sup>st</sup> October, 2025). Reports were forwarded to Northern Presbytery regarding the outcomes of these interviews. In October, the presbytery considered these together and agreed with the final recommendations of the Committee and paused the application process at this time. In the meantime, Mr Klazinga had withdrawn his candidacy in February 2026 and moved to Geelong. We understand that he intends to commence studies at RTC as a private student and “reapply at a future time if appropriate”.

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 note the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding with the Reformed Theological College, Melbourne (RTC) which has established them as a Synod-approved College under Act 16 (1983 as amended), and that the RTC be so listed in the Handbook at Section 4.49A “Training”.
2. That we would fervently pray for the provision of candidates for the ministry from within our ranks, help from sister churches, and men ready for office-bearing in our congregations.

## YOUTH AND FELLOWSHIP COMMITTEE

**Members:** Stewart Carswell (Convener 2016), Mandy Kerridge, John Forbes and Matthew Schmidt

### Youth Camp

The youth camp ran over the Easter long weekend at Maclean. The camp is for 14- to 25-year-olds with about 20 campers from Tasmania, Brisbane, Northern Rivers, and Hastings in attendance. Jim Klazinga spoke on the Trinity, which was very well received by everyone there.

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

The committee will need to consider alternative venues in the coming years and asks Synod to prayer for the committee.

## **Family Camp**

The Family Camp in September was held at Camp Elim, Forster approximately 2 hours north of Newcastle. Camp Elim offers differing accommodation including camping, caravans and cabins. The committee subsidise and cap the cost of the camp for individuals and families, as we feel the spiritual growth and relationships between congregations is very much blessed by camp attendance.

The 2025 camp was on the theme of God's Gift of Family with Robin Tso leading the studies. There were up to 83 attendees, including day visitors, which was very encouraging.

## **Essay**

The 2025 essay theme was "The miracles of Christ" and the question: The feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle of our Lord Jesus found in all four gospels. Describe what happened and explain what this teaches us about our Lord Jesus and his kingdom?

There were 2 senior and 3 intermediate submissions. Book vouchers were awarded to all participants; \$30 for seniors, \$25 for intermediate, and \$20 juniors.

## **Birthday Card Greetings**

Nic and Amelia O'Dell continue sending birthday card greetings to the children of the church. We encourage congregations to update the list of children under 12 years to [yfc@pcea.org.au](mailto:yfc@pcea.org.au)

## **Search Work**

Mrs Irene Steel continues the Search Work, which the committee is very thankful for. She does it diligently and without fanfare.

## **PROPOSED DELIVERANCES:**

1. Synod encourages the committee to proceed with the organisation of the family and youth camps in 2026 and pray that these will result in spiritual growth and building godly relationships.
2. Synod pray for those involved in teaching Sunday-school and youth classes and for the children and youth in the Church.
3. Synod thank Irene Steel and Nic and Amelia O'Dell for the scripture search work and birthday card greeting and uphold them in prayer.
4. Synod thank John and Judy Greensill for the use of their property for the youth camp, and the Northern Rivers congregation for their generosity, and for wisdom as the committee consider future options.

## **MISSIONS COMMITTEE**

**Members:** D.K. Muldoon (convener 2017), J. Greensill, J.D. Klazinga, I. Hamilton, Mark Hamilton, Zach Dotson

The MC met in three online meetings during the year. 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.

The year has been busy with members of our church visiting different mission fields. Dennis and Elizabeth Muldoon visited South Africa, after ministry with MERF in Kenya. Synod 2025 gave funding for this visit, 'to assess and encourage the ministry of Dumisani Theological Institute and Bible School'. A report on their stay of one week in King Williams Town is included. David Kerridge visited the mission work of FCC in Sri Lanka for two weeks in November and his report is included. Sadly, for him and his daughter, and for our church, David was not permitted to enter India.

Rev Samit and Bro Pradeep brought greetings and reports to our Synod 2025. They visited a number of PCEA congregations before and after Synod; they also visited Blaxland CRCA church. It was after Synod 2025 that, in answer to questioning, they gave details of a backlog in the payment of teachers' salaries at the Mission School in India. Some teachers had not received their full salary for over two years- so dedicated! The total amount came to approx. \$83,000. On receiving this information, some churches responded with significant donations. At a meeting on June 23, the MC decided to inform all

the churches and to contribute to this genuine need with a donation of \$15,000 from the budgeted surplus of \$44,834 in mission funds. It was planned for David Kerridge to visit the Mission school in Chhapara and bring back a report, but he was unable to do this. A Mission School Report was brought to the Synod of the PFCCI in November 2025 and this was forwarded to the PCEA-MC with thanks. They decided to close the Mission school in Lakhnadon and are working to address the remaining salary backlog. Hindi medium schools are not profitable, unlike English medium schools, but the school board wishes to keep the Hindi medium section operating because it serves the lower socio-economic sections of the community. A copy of the salary backlog that we received, and the PFCCI report following our donations, is available to all commissioners.

Rev Jim Klazinga told the MC that he wishes to resign but would continue to prepare and distribute the PCEA Missions Prayer Notes. The MC agreed to ask Rev David Lachman to join the MC and he agreed, subject to Synod approval.

## **MISSION FIELD REPORTS**

- a. Australian Indigenous Ministries**
- b. Dumisani Theological Institute**
- c. Dr Dickson, India**
- d. Central India**
- e. International Mission to Jewish people**
- f. MERF**
- g. Sri Lanka**

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

Throughout 2025, Australian Indigenous Ministries (AIM) continued its work of supporting Aboriginal churches and communities across Australia, combining gospel ministry with practical care while navigating significant leadership and resourcing challenges.

#### Church Support and Community Engagement

AIM churches remained active in worship, teaching, and outreach despite ongoing infrastructure issues. Several church buildings and mission houses required urgent maintenance due to termite damage, structural deterioration, asbestos concerns, and security issues. Repairs in Katherine were supported by volunteer Chris Solan, whose work also helped engage local community members. In Woorabinda, practical assistance from partnering churches strengthened relationships and opened pathways for further youth outreach.

#### Leadership and Workforce Developments

The year saw notable leadership transitions. Yane Damanik concluded her role as AIM Mission Coordinator after many years of service, having played a key role in shaping AIM's vision with a strong focus on biblical discipleship and Indigenous leadership development. Later in the year, AIM Chairman Peter Dixon stepped back due to health concerns, increasing responsibilities for remaining Council members.

AIM welcomed Dr Jude Long to the Council, bringing extensive experience in Indigenous education and theological training. Retired workers, including Raymond and Thelma Dixon and Cliff Letcher, explored renewed opportunities for teaching and support in local churches.

#### Bible Ministry and Teaching

A significant milestone was the completion of the Barkly Version of Genesis. Richard and Sue Davies, with Debbie Simpson recording the text, helped make Scripture more accessible through audio and written formats, supporting believers engaging with God's Word in their second language.

#### Care, Challenges, and Ongoing Needs

Health challenges affected several AIM leaders, including Max Conlon, Henry Louie, and Fay Chambers, highlighting the need for prayer and support. AIM also faced declining workforce numbers alongside growing ministry demands and rising maintenance costs.

## Looking Ahead

AIM remains committed to supporting Aboriginal churches through prayer, partnerships, and leadership development. The need for workers, financial support, and sustained prayer continues as AIM seeks to faithfully serve Indigenous communities with the gospel.

## **2. Dumisani Theological Institute and Bible School (Dennis)**

### Die Gereformeerde Kerke in South Africa (GKSA)

On 16 September 2025 we flew from Nairobi, Kenya, to Johannesburg, South Africa, a flight of just over 4 hrs. We were met by Rev Anton Dednam a minister in the GKSA, a reformed, psalm singing (not exclusively), and Afrikaans speaking church, with a few English-speaking congregations. South Africa has many languages, but English is the official language. Anton took us to his home in Waverley a suburb of Pretoria. On the way we passed his church in Rietvlei; we came back the day after on our way back to Johannesburg. Anton and his wife, Eneke, kindly hosted us for three days. How did we know Anton? We met him in India two years previously at the synod of the Presbyterian Free church of Central India and kept in touch. His church has sent a missionary to India.

I knew very little about this ‘sister’ church and was keen to learn more, which I did with the help of Anton. He took us to visit a church school which his children attend; the school principal had relatives in the Free Reformed Church in Perth. Anton took us with his family to a wildlife park to see zebra,



deer, and rhino. In the evening Anton had a board meeting at the nearby tertiary college, so in his absence we enjoyed a *Braai* (BBQ) with his family and church friends. The Afrikaans community is large and influential in the nation. We learnt something of their history through a visit to Voortrekker monument and a museum, the people who, after conflict with the Zulus and other tribes, settled the land.

Afrikaans speaking churches are large and numerous. There are some 378 GKSA churches, and Anton’s church has over 300 members, with a small English-speaking congregation. The Free Reformed Church is another, but related, group. These churches have a background in the reformed church in the Netherlands and as such hold the three forms of unity. They were exclusive psalmody churches but now have hymns based on Scripture (I was not present of the Lord’s Day to experience worship). They have organs in their churches. The GKSA set up what has become the Northwest University in Potchefstroom, but the theological faculty is no longer under their control. They withdrew from this institution in 2023. They formed the Reformed Theological Academy, but this is not accredited; most training is online. They are challenged with regard to a place for theological training. Mukhanyo Theological College in Cape Town is a possibility. All this has implications for Dumisani in the Eastern Cape which had accreditation with NW University.

The GKSA church has supported the work of Dumisani from the beginning. We met three board members, two of whom were from the GKSA church in East London. It was encouraging to see reformed church leaders taking active leadership in Dumisani and encouraging the principal. One member, Tinus, graciously accommodated us in his guesthouse for four days. The GKSA is a member of the ICRC and has sister church relations with the CRCA and Free Reformed Churches here in Australia, as well as the RCNZ. I suggest the PCEA develop closer

relations with the GKSA, initially by inviting them to send a representative to our Synod. They may have a limited budget but that does not preclude us issuing an invitation.

### Dumisani Theological Institute and Bible School

Growing up in the PCEA, I heard about mission work in South Africa, mainly through Dr J.C. Andrews from Wauchope, a medical missionary to South Africa and later my minister in Taree for some years. I was thankful when Synod 2025 agreed to support my visit to Dumisani while I was in Africa. We visited the home of Dr Andrews and the clinic from which he operated. His medical mission work pre-dated Dumisani, which was established in 1978. The PCEA has supported Dumisani in conjunction with the Free Church of Scotland since the start. We were shown the library that Peter and Lindy Gadsby set up in 1996 with financial help from the St Georges congregation. Prof Allan Harman later sent over 1000 books for the library, and visited twice as a guest lecturer.

Dumisani was established after four groups met in 1978: the GKSA in East London, another GKSA church, the Free Church in SA and the Free Church of Scotland. It moved from Dimbaza to its current location in King Williams town in 1985 (see 'Voices of Thanksgiving' by Jack and Nancy Whytock). It began with an old Anglican church (now the library) and has expanded onto two neighbouring blocks. Accommodation for students is still limited



making it difficult for full-time students to attend. The day we left Sharon, the registrar, told of two young men from Port Elizabeth wanting to come but, 'Where would they stay?' she asked. A house next to this old church, which has been offered to Dumisani for just over \$A100,000, would alleviate the problem of accommodation. We prayed that the Lord would provide this for the college.

A total of 53 students were enrolled at Dumisani doing certificate, diploma and BTh courses. The latter study through Mukhanyo in Cape Town.

Dumisani offers ten bursaries for full-time students.

The students were on leave when we arrived; Wilbert

Chipenyu, the principal, graciously stayed back to assist us. He also called some day-students to come and meet us. These were mature-age students, including a number of women, from a range of churches including Pentecostal churches. They came looking for Bible teaching which Dumisani was pleased to give. Some had accepted women leadership in the church because they did not know what the Bible teaches.

Wilbert, the principal, is a member of the GKSA in East London. Ike Magdla, the vice principal, is a minister in the Free Church in SA; other teaching is from visiting men. On the Lord's Day, Wilbert took us to a Free Church a short distance from a town called Alice. This town is historic as the home of Presbyterian mission work in the Eastern Cape; a college set up by missionaries is now the Fort Hare University. The church was a simple building without electricity or running water - just pit toilets! Yet the women provided lunch for everyone after the service. I met the eight elders before stepping into the pulpit to preach. Ike translated into the Xhosa language; this was one of seven churches under his ministry. The women were all dressed in a blue and white uniform. They sang the psalms



heartily and joined in the Lord's Supper by coming forward one by one to the table. Two children were baptised. But there was noticeable lack of younger men.

We enjoyed a couple of days in East London before flying back to Johannesburg, and then home to Sydney, a 12-hr flight. All buildings in this city, as well as in King Willams town, are surrounded by high walls with electrified wire on the top. Security is big business! These cities showed signs of decay, since the end of Apartheid I presume. But we never felt unsafe as we moved about in the day. We knew the Lord was watching over us as folk back home prayed for us each day.

### **3. Dr Dickson, India (Dennis)**

'VETNET offers praise and grateful thanks to the Faithful One for His blessing on all our initiatives in 2025. We experienced His strength in all our weaknesses. We were able to complete 10 Caregivers Training and 14 free Vet camps in various remote villages across three North Indian states. More than 700 farmers brought 900 animals which were attended to with veterinary skills of experts and young graduates from Sikkim, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala. Around 250 animal owners and Animal Care Volunteers were offered basic skills to care for their animals in need. God opened the doors in these places to demonstrate His love in action. We worked with mission organizations both recognised and yet to be recognised. It is endearing and humbling to see God using VETNET to bridge the gap between communities and the local cross-cultural worker. The local cross-cultural workers can continue their specific work with acceptance even amidst the prevailing threats and uncertainties throughout the country. We could encourage such cross-cultural workers and professionals, especially medical missionaries, with the written Word of God.

We had the First VETNET Regional Conference at Selesih Veterinary College in Aizawl, Mizoram. Nearly 90 Vet students, staff and Vet volunteers from the Northeastern states attended. It is an answer to persistent prayer. By God's grace we organised the 7th National Conference of VETNET Josh'25 in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. 80 participants attended. We had representatives from 6 states and 8 Vet. Schools. From the keynote address to the call for dedication, each session had its specific and special impact as they were focused on sustaining our personal relationship with the Saviour and sustaining professional practice for animal care and social reforms. As the first result of JOSH 25's impact, Veterinary students from 5 institutions (2 in Kerala, 2 in Tamil Nadu and 1 in Uttar Pradesh) organised Christmas Outreach programme in December. Around 700 students heard the gospel. We appreciate prayer for revival among veterinary students and more volunteering from the students and young graduates, practicing and retired Veterinarians in this cross-cultural service. We also seek prayer for the faithfulness and good health of the core group of VETNET.

Dickson's wife, Griselda, could minister to the Pastors' wives on leadership, leading singing in their churches and fellowships, women's Fellowships on group Bible study, Mothers' Prayer Group, and a Church Christmas Programme. She assisted VETNET in leading the commitment session of Josh'25 and in the Tamil translation of 'A Handbook on Animal Health' authored by Dr. Peter Quesenberry. We praise the Lord for saving Dickson from an almost fatal Urosepsis on 22.9.25, immediately after Josh 25. We praise the Lord for Prashansa's successful completion of her PhD Written exam. We praise the Lord for the health of Griselda and a satisfying report from the oncologist after 10 years of cancer treatment. We also praise the Lord for Prarthana, Phil and their two daughters and their passion for Third Culture Kids. We are grateful to PCEA for prayers, counsel and financial assistance.

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

Our former missionaries who served in Central India would rejoice that the PFCCI was formed as a result of their labours & God's grace to carry on the work of Gospel ministry. The church has conducted its second synod as an independent denomination & though working in the midst of many challenges, has been expanding to serve more areas. A recent encouragement has been the grandson of the late Rev Prakash Kumar becoming a student for the ministry. Vipin is well into his theological studies at PTS Dehradun with excellent results.

The women of the PFCCI have groups involved in special ministry to very needy people in their communities & are able to help in many ways. This includes medical clinics.

The congregation in Chhapara continues to have a very big witness & input through the Christian Mission school, which has a very good reputation, by providing an excellent education for students. Operating a private school is a financial challenge.

Recent reports of the Lakhnadon Christian Hospital, which is re-establishing after being closed, are more positive now. There are now good staff & three doctors running the facilities.

Even though the PFCCI is an independent denomination, I'm sure they appreciate our ongoing support & encouragement.

## **5. International Mission to Jewish People (Zach)**

The International Mission to Jewish People continued its work this past year among Jewish communities in Melbourne and Sydney. In last year's report, it was noted that missionaries on the ground were worried about increasing antisemitism. Sadly, with the events of Bondi in December 2025, the fears have become greater, and there is a need to pray for safety in our own nation as well as for there to be no further bloodshed.

In support of the International Mission to Jewish People, we need to pray for their missionaries, Mark and Rahel Landrum, in Sydney, particularly that they would be able to spread the Gospel among a Jewish community that is feeling increasingly under attack. There is also missionary, Daniel Zeunert, in Melbourne who continues to conduct outreach among the Jewish Community there.

Difficulty in spreading the Gospel among the Jewish people is increasing due to antisemitism. The missionaries are the ones who feel this, and they also feel the burden of sharing the Messiah with their people. So may we, as the PCEA, continue to pray and work with them to see many Jews come to Christ.

## **6. Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF) (Zach)**

The Work of the Middle East Reformed Fellowship continued in the year 2025, and God was very gracious. MERF, to bring the good news of Christ to the Muslim world, has 4 key areas of effort: 1. Evangelistic Outreach, 2. Church Extension, 3. Biblical Training, 4. Diaconal Aid. All of these areas are crafted and designed to help the church and believers in the Middle East prosper.

Much of the Evangelistic Outreach is done through mass media, whether that be Arabic and Farsi radio broadcasts or increasingly through the internet. The means of mass media provide a way for the message of Jesus to penetrate even closed countries. Among the nations where the Mass Media work is proving encouraging, Iran is one. Many Iranians are finding ways to access MERFs' teaching, and it is benefiting their souls.

In the field of church extension, MERF partners with existing churches to equip church planters/pastors for the work. This work occurs in North Africa through an online team that conducts one-on-one ministry and discipleship. This is vital for churches as they develop and expand. When it comes to Church extension, MERF provides the framework and tools to help local churches succeed in outreach and church planting.

The area of Biblical training is one in which MERF excels. Training courses are offered online and at several centres throughout the Middle East and the Islamic Realm. Among these centres is Loki in Kenya, where Dr Muldoon taught in August and early September. Other training programs are hosted at the MERF headquarters in Cypress and in Indonesia. In Indonesia, vital work is being done to train pastors and Sunday School teachers, and so far, it seems to be helping churches further their ministry in their local communities.

Diaconal Aid is the last area of concentration for MERF, but it involves aiding local churches and believers to improve their lives for the sake of the Gospel. Dr Muldoon was involved in this work by planting crops and surveying the gardens of the training centre at Loki. Further, after significant flooding on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, MERF's diaconal aid stepped up to assist.

The work of MERF is vital for the Gospel to reach the Muslim world, and we in the PCEA are proud to partner with them in their endeavours.

## 7. Sri Lanka (David)

In November 2025, the Clerk, accompanied by his daughter, was able to visit Sri Lanka on behalf of the Missions Committee. The intention was to investigate the work of the Free Church Continuing Mission established at Vavuniya and report back to Synod 2026 with an evaluation.



After an initial few days of orientation to Sri Lanka, in part guided by Jesudas and Kavidara, two members of the church and students from the mission's Melville Theological Institute, we arrived at Vavuniya, the administrative centre of the eponymous district in the Northern province of Sri Lanka. The Tamil-speaking north is a predominantly rural area. During the trip we were able to visit each of the centres described below and the Clerk spent a week lecturing at the Melville Theological Institute. Rev. Shanmugam N V Partheepan is the sole minister of the Free Church Continuing Mission work – the “Reformed Protestant Mission” as it is known. The work is centred in Vavuniya, with two other centres in surrounding districts. One at Kilinochchi (in Kilinochchi district), 80kms north of Vavuniya, and another at Puthukkudiyiruppu (Mullaitivu district), approx. 73kms north-east of Vavuniya (mercifully abbreviated for foreigners to “PTK”). There is a very productive farm on about 4 acres located at PTK that has been started by the mission. It grows peanuts, bananas, king coconuts and eggplants (brinjals) to feed church members, with the surplus sold locally. There are plans to introduce goats to sell for meat. There is also a pre-school (“Knox Christian Preschool”) run from the hall at the back of the church. Another Preschool has been established in Vavuniya as an outreach in the centre of a very poor area of predominantly Hindu day-labourers and their families.

The Melville Theological Institute is a college taught with online lectures and intensive face-to-face sessions from visiting lecturers from Scotland, the US and Australia (Rev. Tim McGlynn) to train men for ministry, office-bearing and church planting in Sri Lanka. Students complete a 24-month course in Biblical Studies, based on the FCC curriculum. Topics covered include OT introduction and preaching Christ from the Old Testament; New Testament Survey; Systematic Theology; Historical Studies; Hermeneutics and Homiletics; Practical Theology; and Church Principles. During our short time, we had 8-10 students, ranging in age from mid-20s to late middle age, all at varying levels of achievement. All are required to deliver sermons to the class, and each is assessed by their fellow students.

The work is thriving and growing with hopes of expansion to Trincomalee, a city approximately 90kms to the east. However, humanly speaking, it depends on the tireless work of Rev. Partheepan himself. Men are being trained up, and there is hope that a couple at least will be ready soon to support Partheepan in the work. Fundamentally, the work belongs to the FCC, and there is some financial support from Christian NGO's in the Netherlands. Notwithstanding, it would be good if we could add our support, in whatever way the Synod determines, to build up a Reformed presence in Sri Lanka.



## **PROPOSED DELIVERANCES**

- 1.** The Synod gives thanks to the Lord for the opportunity and privilege to be involved in the work of missions at home and abroad, both in giving, in praying, and being directly involved during this past year.
- 2.** Synod thanks congregations and individuals that gave generously towards removing over half of the salary backlog of the PFCCI Mission Higher Secondary School Chhapara, India.
- 3.** Synod approves the donation of \$15,000 towards removing the backlog in teachers' salaries at the PFCCI Mission Higher Secondary School Chhapara, India.
- 4.** Synod give thanks to Rev David Kerridge and Rev Dr Dennis Muldoon for visiting and reporting on mission centres in Sri Lanka and South Africa respectively on behalf of Synod.
- 5.** 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.
- 6.** Synod adopt the Missions Committee Budget 2026/27 and expresses its general agreement with the estimates for this period.

<b>Missions Budget 2026</b>								
<b>General Funds</b>	<b>Budget 2025</b>		<b>Actual</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>Budget 2026</b>		<b>Estimate 2027</b>	
Balance 1 Jan		<b>38534</b>		38534		<b>39674</b>		40474
Income: Investments	<b>13000</b>		18493		<b>15000</b>		15000	
Giving Miss General	<b>2500</b>		7083		<b>5000</b>		5000	
<b>Income</b>	<b>15500</b>	<b>54034</b>	25576	64110	<b>20000</b>	<b>59674</b>	20000	60474
<b>Expenditure</b>								
IMJP	<b>2000</b>		2000		<b>4000</b>		5000	
Visiting Miss espenses	<b>2000</b>		1360		<b>2000</b>		2000	
Dumisani Theo, Institute & B	<b>3000</b>		3000		<b>6000</b>		7000	
Admin: Postage, bank fee	<b>200</b>		326		<b>200</b>		300	
PFCCI-presbytery	<b>2000</b>		2000		<b>4000</b>		5000	
PFCCI school backpay			15000					
DTI travel subsidy			750					
RPM Sri Lanka					<b>3000</b>		4000	
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>9200</b>	<b>9200</b>	24436	24436	<b>19200</b>	<b>19200</b>	23300	23300
<b>Closing Balance</b>		<b>44834</b>		39674		<b>40474</b>		37174

<b>Missions Relief Fund</b>								
<b>2026</b>								
<b>MRF Working Account</b>	<b>Budget 2025</b>		<b>Actual 2025</b>		<b>Budget 2026</b>		<b>Estimate 2027</b>	
Balance 1 Jan		<b>10917</b>		4173		<b>3477</b>		2377
Income Investments	<b>5000</b>		5364		<b>5000</b>		5000	
Other (Donation congs)								
Transfer from Equities Ac			0					
Income	<b>5000</b>	<b>15917</b>	5364	9537	<b>5000</b>	<b>8477</b>	5000	7377
Expenditure								
Lakhnadon Christian Hospital	<b>2000</b>		2000		<b>2000</b>		2000	
Chhapara Mission School								
Education, diaconal aid PFCCI	<b>4000</b>		4000		<b>4000</b>		4000	
Fees and Charges	<b>100</b>		60		<b>100</b>		100	
Total Expenditure	<b>6100</b>	<b>6100</b>	6060	6060	<b>6100</b>	<b>6100</b>	6100	6100
Closing Balance		<b>9817</b>		3477		<b>2377</b>		1277
<b>Equities Account</b>	<b>Budget 2025</b>		<b>Actual 2025</b>		<b>Budget 2026</b>		<b>Estimate 2027</b>	
Balance 1 Jan		<b>130087</b>		141926		<b>146089</b>		151089
Income Revaluation of shares & Managed Funds	<b>5000</b>		4163		<b>5000</b>		5000	
Income (Gain on sale M/Fund)	<b>0</b>				<b>0</b>		0	
Total	<b>5000</b>	<b>135087</b>	4163	146089	<b>5000</b>	<b>151089</b>	5000	156089
Expenditure								
Transfer to McSwan Working Account	<b>0</b>		0		<b>0</b>		0	
Revaluation	<b>0</b>		0		<b>0</b>		0	
Total	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	0	0	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	0	0
Closing Balance 31 Dec		<b>135087</b>		146089		<b>151089</b>		156089
Total Funds Held McSwan Missions Relief Fund		<b>135087</b>		146089		<b>151089</b>		156089
Net Movement from previous year		<b>0</b>						

## INTER-CHURCH RELATIONS COMMITTEE

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

In this past year, the Committee has communicated by email and met on several occasions, including a significant joint meeting with representatives of the Australian Free Church on 29 January 2026 and with the Reformation Presbyterian Church on 14 March 2026.

### **1. The International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC)**

The 11th General Meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches will be held, the Lord willing, in South Korea from 15–21 October 2026. The Committee has approved the following delegates:

- Rev. Jim Klazinga
- Rev. Robin Tso

A proposed deliverance regarding representation is included below.

### **2. Churches with Whom We Have Fraternal Relations**

#### **2.1 Free Church of Scotland (FCS). 1954 and 2005.**

The Committee has been engaged in correspondence with the Free Church of Scotland regarding their proposals to discontinue the application of the 1952 Act anent Federal Relations. The draft proposals, as communicated through the Free Church Ecumenical Relations Committee, would bring the former Federal Relations formally to an end and place the PCEA on the same footing as other churches with whom the Free Church has relations. The Committee has responded seeking that the terms of relationship would make provision for the calling of ministers between our churches.

The Free Church has indicated that it is unable to send a delegate to our Synod this year, due to the proximity of our dates to their own General Assembly. However, the Committee has noted that Rev. Calum Iain MacLeod (Ferintiosh) will be visiting Australia in September 2026 in connection with the Presbyterian Church of Australia's General Assembly of Australia, and the Free Church have suggested that our Interchurch Relations Committee coordinate a meeting with Mr MacLeod while he is in Australia. The Committee proposes that the Convener and another member of the Committee attend the PCA General Assembly of Australia in order to meet with Rev. MacLeod on that occasion.

The Committee awaits a response from the Free Church regarding the proposed revision to the Federal Relations arrangements and will report further developments to Synod.

#### **2.2 Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) (FCC). 2018.**

Following the decision of Synod 2025 to send Rev. David Kerridge to visit the work of the Free Church (Continuing) in Sri Lanka, contact was established with Rev. S. Partheepan, who was subsequently appointed by the FCC Synod as its delegate to the PCEA Synod.

We are delighted to welcome Rev. Partheepan to our Synod this year. He is in Australia until 1 June 2026, during which time he will preach in a number of our congregations and be visiting the various congregations. The Committee has arranged his itinerary and assisted with his visa application. We are grateful to all the congregations and ministers who are hosting him during his visit.

#### **2.3 Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ). 2002.**

We are delighted to welcome Rev. Aaron Warner from the RCNZ as a visiting delegate to our Synod.

#### **2.4 The Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC). 2007.**

The Committee considered whether to send a delegate to the OPC General Assembly (3–9 June 2026, Beaver Falls, PA) and concluded that, given limited strategic necessity at this time, no delegate would be sent. The Convener will send formal greetings on behalf of the PCEA.

#### **2.5 The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland (RPCI). 2006.**

An invitation to our Synod was sent to the RPCI.

#### **2.6 The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA). 2008.**

An invitation to our Synod was sent to the RPCNA.

#### **2.7 The Presbyterian Free Church in Central India (PFCCI). 2010.**

Following the decision of Synod 2025 that the corresponding and reporting of the PFCCI be dealt with under the Interchurch Relations Committee, the Committee now has responsibility for this relationship. Hospital, school work, and diaconal aid to the PFCCI remain with the Missions Committee.

#### **2.8 The Southern Presbyterian Church (SPC). 2014.**

We are delighted to welcome Elder Derek De Jong from the Southern Presbyterian Church as a visiting delegate to our Synod.

#### **2.9 The Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA). 2014.**

We are delighted to welcome Rev. Lourens Nel from the CRCA as a visiting delegate to our Synod.

#### **2.10 The United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA). 2015.**

The Committee notes with gratitude that in 2023 the URCNA formally notified the PCEA that, following a decision at Synod Niagara 2022 and subsequent ratification by their consistories, the URCNA had moved the relationship forward to Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase II). This welcome development reflects the fruit of correspondence and visits extending back to 2015, including Rev. Jim Klazinga's fraternal visit to Synod Niagara in 2022. The Committee welcomed this progression of our relationship at the time and continues to value the bond with our brothers in North America.

The Committee has received a formal invitation from the Secretary of CECCA to send a fraternal delegate to the URCNA Synod 2026, to be held in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, from 8–12 June 2026. The Committee has not yet had the opportunity to consider this invitation formally; however, as with the OPC General Assembly, it is anticipated that no delegate will be sent on this occasion. The Convener will send formal greetings on behalf of the PCEA.

#### **2.11 Reformed Presbyterian Church of Australia.**

We are delighted to welcome Rev. Graeme Hart from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Australia as a visiting delegate to our Synod.

### **3. World Reformed Fellowship (WRF)**

The WRF General Meeting is scheduled for 28–30 October 2026 in Seoul, Korea. The Committee has noted concerns regarding the diversity of denominational positions within the WRF, including the acceptance of women's ordination in some member churches, and the limited benefit from membership to date.

As the PCEA remains a member church of the WRF, and as Rev. Klazinga will already be in Korea for the ICRC, the Committee resolved to send him as an official delegate to the WRF General Meeting. He will report back to enable the Committee to advise Synod on whether the PCEA should continue its affiliation.

## **4. Other Churches with Whom We Have Contact**

### **4.1 The Australian Free Church (AFC).**

The following is the Committee's report on its discussions with the Australian Free Church. It is presented to Synod for its consideration and direction.

#### **4.1.1 Introduction**

The Interchurch Relations Committee met with representatives of the Australian Free Church (AFC) on 29 January 2026 to continue discussions concerning their desire for closer relations and possible union with the PCEA. The Committee subsequently met on 5 February 2026 to review the meeting and consider the feasibility of any further movement toward union.

#### **4.1.2 Summary of Discussion**

A significant portion of the meeting concerned the AFC's expressed preference for the exclusive public use of the Authorised Version (AV). AFC representatives expressed a desire to retain the liberty to use the AV in all ministerial contexts, and indicated that ministers would decline invitations to preach where they would be required to read from another translation.

The Committee emphasised that within the PCEA:

- Individual congregations may choose to use the AV as their pulpit Bible.
- The AV is already one of the translations permitted for public worship within the denomination.
- The concern is not the use of the AV itself, but the implications of restricting ministers exclusively to the AV in all visiting or presbytery-related ministry.

**Note:** Some members observed that the question of exclusive AV use is, for the AFC, connected with convictions about Scripture and the Confession; however, AFC representatives expressed a desire not to revisit past disputes, preferring to move forward constructively. The discussion therefore focused on the present feasibility of integration. The Committee notes that these underlying theological and historical concerns have not been set aside, and may warrant further consideration by Synod.

#### **4.1.3 Clarifications from the AFC**

AFC representatives further clarified that:

- They recognise that other translations do convey the Word of God insofar as they faithfully translate the original languages.
- Their objection is not to private use of other translations, but to being compelled in conscience to read or preach publicly from translations they regard as inferior or problematic.
- They believe that the liberty granted within the PCEA for ministers to use modern translations should equally protect their own liberty to use the AV without restriction or disadvantage.

The Committee appreciated these clarifications. However, it also notes that translation versions within the PCEA are approved on the basis of their own merits, and that the language of "liberty" and "conscience" does not accurately reflect the basis on which versions are authorised for public worship in the PCEA.

#### **4.1.4 Integration Concerns**

##### **Visiting Ministry and Supply**

AFC ministers indicated they would decline invitations to preach if expected to read from a non-AV translation. This would have direct consequences for:

- visiting ministry
- pulpit supply
- interim moderatorships
- presbytery and congregational support during vacancies or difficulties

For a denomination of our size, these functions are essential.

### **Congregational Impact**

The Committee noted that differing expectations regarding public Scripture reading could:

- cause confusion or unsettle congregations;
- undermine confidence in the translation ordinarily used;
- create practical asymmetry, in that PCEA ministers could freely serve in AFC congregations, while AFC ministers might face difficulties serving in congregations accustomed to other translations.

The Committee acknowledges that in practice many PCEA congregations would likely accommodate a visiting minister's preference. However, such accommodation cannot be guaranteed or formalised as a right, and a denomination cannot function well on the basis that one group's preferences must always be deferred to as a matter of conscience.

### **Mutuality and Symmetry**

True ecclesiastical unity requires a willingness to accommodate one another in shared ministry. The difficulty posed by the AFC's position is not simply about translation preference, but about its framing as a matter of individual conscience and right. This creates a structural problem: ministers within a united denomination must be able to function across all its congregations and courts without placing conditions on that service.

#### **4.1.5 Committee Assessment**

At its meeting of 5 February 2026, the Committee unanimously concluded:

- The AV is already permitted within the PCEA; therefore, translation choice itself is not the barrier.
- The AFC's insistence on framing AV use as a matter of conscience and right in all public ministry contexts creates challenging practical obstacles to integration.
- Underlying doctrinal and historical questions, while not fully canvassed in the January meeting, remain unresolved and relevant to any determination regarding union.
- These obstacles prevent ministers from functioning freely and reciprocally across the congregations and courts of a united denomination.
- Further committee-level discussions are unlikely to resolve these structural issues.

The Committee therefore believes that union with the AFC is not feasible at this time, and that any future movement would require clear resolution of both the practical and doctrinal matters that remain outstanding.

#### **4.2 Reformation Presbyterian Church, Australian Presbytery (RPCAP).**

Following initial correspondence received in August 2025, in which the RPCAP expressed a desire to open lines of communication with the PCEA, the Committee arranged an online meeting with RPCAP representatives on Saturday, 14 March 2026.

The RPCAP is a small Presbyterian body holding to the Westminster Standards, the Regulative Principle of Worship, and exclusive psalmody. It has congregations and preaching stations in Rockhampton, the Gold Coast, and Western Australia, and includes ministers serving in North America. The meeting was a cordial introductory occasion and the Committee anticipates reporting further in due course.

#### **4.3 Presbyterian Church of Australia — General Assembly of Australia (PCA GAA).**

The Committee has received an informal invitation from Rev. Kamal Weerakoon, Convener of the PCA's Relations With Other Churches Committee, for the PCEA to send representatives to the PCA's General Assembly of Australia, to be held at Scots Church Wynyard, Sydney, from 7–11 September 2026. A formal invitation from the PCA Assembly Clerk is anticipated in due course.

As noted above (Section 2.1), the Free Church of Scotland's representative Rev. Calum Iain MacLeod will also be in attendance at the PCA GAA. The Committee proposes that Rev. Robin Tso and Rev. George Ball attend as representatives of the PCEA, both to represent the PCEA at the GAA and to meet with Rev. MacLeod on that occasion.

#### **4.4 Other Bodies**

The Committee continues to maintain informal contact with a number of other churches and church bodies. Matters of note will be reported verbally at Synod as appropriate.

### **PROPOSED DELIVERANCES**

The Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia:

#### **General**

1. Gives thanks to God for the churches with whom we have formal fraternal relations and for those with whom we have contact, and resolves to pray for the Lord's blessing upon their work and witness.

#### **Australian Free Church**

2. Resolves that the PCEA will not pursue union with the Australian Free Church at this time, given that key areas of difference in doctrine and practice have not yet been resolved.
3. Directs the Inter-church Relations Committee to communicate this decision to the AFC with appropriate courtesy.
4. Notes that the underlying theological concerns raised in the course of these discussions may be aired further, if the Synod sees fit.

#### **Free Church of Scotland**

5. Notes the draft proposals from the Free Church of Scotland to change its relationship with the PCEA. Synod confirms its desire that this would include provision for Free Church presbyteries to process calls from PCEA congregations to Free Church ministers, and notes that the Committee has communicated with the Free Church to this end.

#### **ICRC Delegation**

6. Approves Rev. Jim Klazinga as a delegate to the 11th General Meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (South Korea, 15–21 October 2026), and agrees to pay his return economy airfare and other associated travel expenses.
7. Approves Rev. Robin Tso as a second delegate to the said meeting, and agrees to pay his return economy airfare and other associated travel expenses.

#### **World Reformed Fellowship**

8. Approves Rev. Jim Klazinga as the official PCEA delegate to the WRF General Meeting (28–30 October 2026, Seoul), noting that no additional travel expenses are anticipated given his attendance at the ICRC, and directs him to report back to the Committee on whether continued PCEA affiliation is beneficial.

#### **PCA General Assembly of Australia**

9. Approves Rev. Robin Tso and Rev. George Ball attending the Presbyterian Church of Australia's General Assembly of Australia (Scots Church Wynyard, Sydney, 7–11 September 2026) as fraternal representatives of the PCEA.

**INTER CHURCH RELATIONS  
SUPPLEMENTARY (MINORITY) REPORT**

J Forbes

This supplementary (minority) report is submitted to ensure that Synod has all relevant information as it considers future relations with the Australian Free Church (AFC).

**Background and Origin of AFC**

The AFC was formed by Rev. Eric Turnbull in 1979 following his removal as a PCEA minister. A libel by the Southern Presbytery had been referred to Synod and it was found that his teaching did not accord with WCF 1.8 in that he taught that a translation of Holy Scripture has been made that is without mistake or error. His position is best stated in his own words as found in his complaint to Synod. Regarding WCF 1.5 he stated:

*How are you going to be moved and induced to faith in “the entire perfection thereof”, when you haven’t got a single perfect manuscript or a single perfect translation? What kind of frivolous double talk is it to say you believe the Confession which teaches the entire perfection of the present scriptures when you believe there are inaccuracies and errors in both the manuscripts and the translations. You have left the Confession.*

Mr Turnbull evidently mistook the phrase *entire perfection* in the context of WCF 1.5 to be a reference to *inerrancy* of every detail rather than *completeness* of the whole. He claimed that those who did not hold his position did not hold to the Confession, stating:

*Indeed allegiance to the Confession requires faith in a present fully inspired Bible. Anyone who does not hold to the present purity of the Bible he and his people have, does not hold to the Confession.*

Regarding a pure and inerrant English translation he wrote:

*It must be there!! If the Confession is true, it’s a present Word; an accessible Word; and are we not to put it in the vulgar tongue of the people, and having done that, (Section 10), doesn’t it become the supreme judge in whose sentence we are to rest.*

The claim that an English translation of Scripture could become “the supreme judge” for religious controversies was deemed by the Southern Presbytery in its libel to be the same error maintained by the Roman Catholic Church when it asserted an unquestionable authority for the Latin Vulgate. That led to the prohibition, even violent suppression, of legitimate translation work. WCF 1.8 was formulated in direct opposition to this error. It requires that Scripture be translated into the common language, but clearly states that all controversies of religion are ultimately to be resolved by appeal to the Old Testament in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek, not by appeal to a translation.

**Discussions with Southern Presbytery - 2010**

Mr Turnbull was sole minister of the Australian Free Church until Messrs J Nelson and J Cunningham were ordained as ministers in 2002 and a presbytery was formed. Both men were, at the time of their ordination, under discipline by the PCEA Southern Presbytery dating from June 1980 and March 1988 respectively. In 2010 the AFC made an approach to the PCEA Southern Presbytery seeking a more harmonious future relationship. The approach was commendable. Their letter stated:

*Presbytery resolve to write to the Southern Presbytery of the PCEA to send greetings and to express our desire to promote harmony between our two churches.*

*We acknowledge that the circumstances that led to our parting from the PCEA were accompanied with intense feelings which led us to take actions and express ourselves in ways not consistent with brotherly kindness and peace.*

*We recognise that seeking the unity and peace of the body of Christ is our solemn Christian duty and it is in the spirit of reconciliation that we take this opportunity to express our apologies for any hurt or distress that our behaviour may have caused.*

*We also wish to express our gratitude to Dr Ward for the encouragements he has given to us to expect a sympathetic reception for such an expression of regret.*

*If Presbytery would like to meet to discuss this further we are more than willing to do so.*

Arrangement was duly made for Messrs Turnbull, Nelson and Cunningham to meet with the Southern Presbytery on 20 February 2010. The minutes record that both Mr Nelson and Mr Cunningham

expressed apology and regret for their past actions within the PCEA. Their apologies were accepted and, on this basis, the discipline against each of them was declared to have been served and was removed. There was no discussion about the doctrinal matters that led to the division and no change to the judgment relating to Mr Turnbull.

### **Approach for incorporation into the Free Church (Continuing)**

During 2020 and 2021 the AFC sought incorporation into the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing). This was ultimately declined due to the Federal Relationship with the PCEA and the consequent inappropriateness of the FCC having its own Australian presbytery or congregations. They advised the AFC to approach the PCEA instead to discuss union. At that time the AFC wrote to the FCC Ecumenical Relations Committee with the following comments:

*Regarding the issues discussed we need to explain that the doctrinal issues that led to our departure from the PCEA still exist and we would find approaching them with a view to re integration would require us to abandon the things for which we have stood since prior to our departure from them in 1979. If we were to have reconciliation with them they would need to abandon their finding against Rev Turnbull that his, and consequently our views, are inconsistent with subscription to the WCF.*

The relevance of this communication is that it shows that the AFC understood that the key obstacle to union with the PCEA was doctrinal rather than merely practical. Nevertheless, they followed the advice of the FCC and opened communications with the PCEA in 2022.

### **Recent Discussions – 2022-2026**

The PCEA Inter Church Relations Committee warmly welcomed the approach of the AFC and initial discussions were helpful and cordial. At the outset it seemed evident to all that the doctrinal issues behind the discipline case of 1979 would have to be discussed and, if necessary, formally revisited by the PCEA. This is evident from the minutes of the original meeting where the following question was raised and answered:

*11. Should the PCEA Synod revisit the discipline against Rev. Eric Turnbull?*

*Mr Winzer indicated his view that Mr Turnbull's position had been misunderstood and misrepresented. The fact that there is still a disciplinary finding in Synod records against Mr Turnbull's position may, in effect, outlaw the views held by himself and others in AFC. He would ask that the disciplinary action against Mr Turnbull be re-looked at and perhaps the church reaffirm chapter 1 of the Westminster Confession as had happened in 1979. He considers that the matter could have been settled at that time by the reaffirmation of that chapter of the Confession but academic views caused confusion and have continued to plague the church since then. He wondered if perhaps now, after 40 years, we could come back and look at that objectively."*

Due to various circumstances, subsequent meetings for discussion were not as frequent as may have been hoped. It is unfortunate also that discussions were not as helpful or fruitful as hoped. After the initial meeting the AFC showed great reluctance to discuss the doctrinal questions or provide detail to substantiate their claim that Mr Turnbull had been misunderstood and wrongly treated by the PCEA. It also seemed difficult for committee members to get clear answers about what the AFC really believe. For example, the claim on one hand that the commitment to the KJV is a mere preference but on the other hand that it is a matter of conscience. It does not seem that both can hold true as there is a significant difference, both practically and theologically, between conscience and preference.

At the most recent meeting in January 2026, the AFC made clear their unwillingness to discuss any matters relating to the 1979 division, thus leaving all the key doctrinal issues unresolved and unresolvable. They also made it clear that they do not want to talk further with the inter-church committee but want Synod to make a decision so that they can, if desired, resume their former application for incorporation into the Free Church (Continuing).

A further note about the practicalities of integration seems appropriate. It is fully expected that, if integration occurred, the AFC men would be graciously accommodated by others in their strong preference for the KJV. This alone must not be allowed to be a bar to union. The difficulty arises when the language of *rights* is introduced and a personal preference is demanded as a matter of liberty

and constitutional right. Our Standards and practice have never given such a right, nor would it tend to be harmonious or workable.

## DELIVERANCE

1. Synod notes the wish of the Australian Free Church to discontinue discussions at this time when doctrinal difference have not yet been adequately aired or resolved. Synod thanks the Australian Free Church for the opportunity to discuss with them over the past four years, and records its regret that a way has not yet been found to heal the division between our churches.

## PRESBYTERY REPORTS

### NORTHERN PRESBYTERY REPORT

**Moderator:** Rev. Jim Klazinga **Clerk:** Mr Stewart Carswell

	Elder/ Deacon	Communicants				Typical Attendance of different persons each Lord's Day		Church Community by Age								Baptisms	Sunday School classes/ pupils	Youth Midweek Participan ts
		2024	+	-	2025	2024	2025	<4	4-11	12-18	19-30	31-45	46-64	65+	Total			
Brisbane	2/3	49				30		4	0	0	13	5	11	10	43		0	9
Northern Rivers	3/2	31	3		34	35	30	1	3	7	2	3	3	24	43		2/9	
Hastings	2/1	38	2	5	35	65	50	2	10	8	6	6	10	15	57	5	1	

### 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.

A congregational lunch is also held on the fifth Sunday.

The ordinance of the Lord's Supper was held three times in 2025.

A time of psalmody is held monthly after the evening service of the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the month. Sunday School is conducted each Lord's Day after morning tea in the Wauchope church.

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 2025.

#### People:

There were five baptisms during the year.

Two new communicant members were added by profession of faith.

One of our members died during 2025 – Nola Tibbs – her funeral was conducted at Anna Bay with many in attendance.

#### Finance and Property:

Upgrades to the church hall were completed in December 2025 to modify the layout to provide a separate meeting room, storeroom and to install a new kitchen. A new multi-function room was completed at the rear of the manse providing an excellent addition to functionality and value to the property.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> October 2025, our minister accepted a call to be the minister of Geelong congregation. A copy of a statement of Ministerial Service is included below.

We humbly acknowledge the Lord's kindness in sustaining the life and fellowship of the Hastings River congregation over the past year and look to Him as we continue as a vacant congregation.

#### **Statement of Ministerial Service of Rev. John Forbes**

John was ordained on 1 August 2008 as minister of Bonar Bridge and Lairg Free Church of Scotland. In 2018 he accepted a call to the Hastings River PCEA congregation in Wauchope and served as minister from 24 November 2018 until the 7 January 2026 when he was inducted to the Geelong congregation after accepting a call to be their minister.

He came to the Hastings with his wife, Mary, and their five children, Katherine, James, Donald, Elsa, and Kenneth. The three eldest children became members upon profession of faith during their time at the Hastings. John, along with Mary and the children were much loved and appreciated by the congregation and many blessings were witnessed and experienced during his ministry.

Many new families attended and some are still with the congregation today. Professions of faith were witnessed, many baptisms occurred and a good sense of fellowship was enjoyed.

The books of the Bible and series that John preached on included Matthew, 1 & 2 Samuel, Daniel, Revelation, Nehemiah, Job, Ruth, Jonah, Joel, Romans and Hebrews.

## **Northern Rivers**

### Services and activities:

Services were conducted in Maclean, both morning and evening, throughout 2025. 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.

The Annual PCEA Youth Camp took place on the Easter long weekend in 2025. The speaker was the Rev. Jim Klazinga, who spoke on the subject of the Trinity. The Camp forms a high point in the life of the congregation each year. We are ever thankful to the Lord for John and Judy Greensill's hospitality in this ministry.

### People:

Attendance has fluctuated throughout 2025. We gained two new members by profession of faith who had been married in the church in 2024. Another member, the minister's eldest daughter, joined by profession of faith.

### Finance and Property:

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 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.

Major reroofing and replacement of verandahs was required on five of the seven units. The sale of the Lismore manse provided the funds to commence works, which are expected to be complete by March 2026.

## **Brisbane Congregation**

We give thanks to God for His continuing to work out his gracious purposes in and through our congregation during 2025.

### Worship Services:

Services were held most Sundays at our Emma Street building at 10 am and 5 pm. We cancelled one Sunday's services because of cyclone Alfred.

While Pastor Klazinga led most of the services, we have been blessed by a significant number of guest preachers who have led our worship (in addition to elder Stewart Carswell leading reading services) when the pastor has been on leave, away for church business, having an exchange, ill, or just having a service off because of visiting preachers (32 services in total).

The Lord's Supper was celebrated six times.

The congregation continued to be blessed by the consistent presence of visitors at our worship services, some of whom attended regularly.

The livestreaming of services continued, for use by those unable to attend the services in person. We also continued to accommodate three senior ladies joining in worship via their phones.

### Membership:

Disjunction certificates were issued to Ben and Claire Klazinga. Their family joined a CRCA congregation close to their home.

Lilah Rose Smith was born to Stephen and Jessie on 29 October.

Peter John Klazinga, son of Micah and Lauren, was born on 15 September and was baptized on 26 October.

Isaac and Eloise Klazinga were married in Hobart on 6 December. Eloise became a member of the congregation by disjunction certificate.

No members of the congregation died in 2025, though we did note the passing of Dr. W.J. McClean, one of the founding elders of 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 2025.

Deacons' Court:

The Deacons' Court was made up of the pastor, the two other elders, and the three deacons. Keith Schmidt served as clerk, while Stewart Carswell served as treasurer, and Micah Klazinga served as assistant treasurer.

Thanks to the generous giving of our members, our contributions continue to be good. Our income was about \$600 a week greater than our expenses.

We continue to maintain a Diaconate Fund. The money in the fund remains available to help members and others who find themselves confronted with a financial emergency.

Offerings were occasionally collected for the Maintenance Fund. Also, on the six Sundays when the Lord's Supper was administered, extra collections for denominational funds were collected.

Education and Fellowship:

Our Sunday morning pre-service psalm singing class met during the school terms.

The Sunday School still had no regular students.

Lunch continues to be held every Sunday at the church.

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 occasionally led a class after the morning service, focussing on the Heidelberg Catechism. Near the end of the year, Pastor Klazinga and Elder Carswell led a new member's class for one young man who would become a member of the congregation in early 2026.

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.

The Annual Family Camp usually held in December at Lennox Head in NSW had to be cancelled in 2025.

## CENTRAL PRESBYTERY REPORT

**Moderator:** Rev Dr Dennis Muldoon    **Clerk:** Mr Ian J Miller

	Elders/Deacons	Communicants				Typical Attendance of different persons each Lord's Day		Church Community by Age								Baptisms	Sunday School classes/pupils	Youth Mid-week Participants
		2024	+	-	2025	2024	2025	<4	4-11	12-18	19-30	31-45	46-64	65+	Total			
Manning	5/5	35		1	34		32/18	2							47		0	
Hunter	1/5	50	4		54		55/45	12		2					59		3	
St George's	2/3	30	3		33		50/30			[9]					41		0	
Hawkesbury Nepean	2/2	38		1	37					[12]					41		3	

The Central Presbytery held two Ordinary Meetings during 2025.

Following are the congregational reports submitted on 10 March 2026 when, *inter alia*, congregational reports were presented at the Ordinary Meeting.

Rev Trevor Leggott, Elder presented the **Manning Report on 2025**.

In March 2025 Trevor had been appointed by Presbytery as Interim Moderator for the congregation. We have continued with our Session in good heart with elders now Clive Alley, Young Lee, Neil Robinson, and Peter Smith. In March 2025 we were pleased to have

Mark Hamilton ordained and inducted as a new deacon. Mark subsequently took on the role of treasurer in March, and relieved Peter Smith after his years of service in that role. The elders have been meeting every two months during the vacancy.

We continue the search for a new pastor. Just in the last week we received notice of two men from the Reformed Church of NZ, having completed studies and being available for a call, through our sister church relationship. Trevor has made an initial approach. Since the vacancy commenced in January 2024, we have been thankful to the Lord that we have been able to maintain a constant supply of preachers for our morning and evening service. We have been particularly thankful for the regular supply provided by Nobin Shunmugan, Ken Dawson and Peter Gadsby. This along with good help from our elders: Trevor, Neil and Young. With others giving occasional help, as we have been able to arrange, we have had 56 services led by others and 48 led by our local elders. Our services by telephone continue, as well as on-line live services, now with an updated internet. We continue our regular communion services on the months with a 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday.

Wednesday morning Bible study at the church hall continues to be well supported. The Thursday evening at Tinonee had to be moved to Taree after the Bight Bridge in Wingham was destroyed in the terrible flood of May 2025. The Thursday night study is being reassessed due to the travelling times needed to attend. The prayer meeting before the morning service continues with a small number attending.

Our weekly average attendance averages at about 50 for services on the Lord's Day, with a number of frail and 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. Membership at January 2026 was 34 members and 13 adherents including 2 children.

The elders look to maintain contact and visit members as we are able, and we are also aware of the pastoral care and concern of members of the congregation in what is a team effort, particularly whilst we don't have a pastor.

The Deacons are: The elders plus Paul Dyson, Mark Hamilton, Marshall Reed, Alistair Weber, and David Wilson, and they meet every second month. The Deacons seek to maintain church property and help with any needs that arise amongst those in our fellowship. We are also very aware and appreciative that there has been a lot of help and assistance given by different members of the congregation.

We are very thankful that the giving of the congregation has been maintained during the vacancy with many now giving by direct deposit. Minor property repairs, ground maintenance and mowing keeps our property in good repair. We have been able to give support to the wider work of mission, with funding for Reine with Compassion, Manuelli at Samburu, the Samburu mission, the FCCI with funds for school teachers, and Henry Louie with the purchase of a car.

Elder Rev Young Lee continues his full-time role as Religious Instruction Teacher in local primary schools, now in his tenth year.

Our Taree Mission Society continues its good work, a work that was commenced over 90 years ago. A garage sale of second-hand goods every second month provides funds for the support of a number of mission agencies.

We continue in good heart as we look to the Lord to provide for our needs into the future.

Mr. Neil Robinson Clerk of Session

**Members** (2024) 35 (2025) 34  
**Infants** (2024) 2 (2025) 2

**Adherents** (2024) 11 (2025) 13  
**Young People** (2024) 0 (2025) 0

**Average Attendance:** Morning Worship 32 Evening Worship 18

**Sunday School Classes:** Nil Elders: 5 Deacons:5

**Safe Church Training:** All office bearers are up to date with Safe Church Training

Mr. Ian Miller, Elder presented the **Hunter Report on 2025**.

As a **vacant congregation** we have been thankful to our gracious God for the pulpit supply provided by a number of men, including the Interim Moderator Rev Dr Dennis Muldoon, Rev Dr Nobin Shunmugan, Rev Don Burgess, Mr Andrew Bajema, and local office bearers: Mr David Barnes, Mr John Fluit and Mr Ian Miller.

Our **vacancy committee** (Mr David Barnes, Mr John Fluit, Mr Nic O'Dell assisted by Mr Ian Miller) investigated possible Ministers amongst Reformed Churches and Training Institutions with no success to date in finding the man of God's choosing. A waiting upon the Lord in prayer and searching continues.

During 2025 Mr Bajema satisfactorily led the mid-week online Bible studies and Mr Miller led the prayer component of the meetings. Mr Bajema also assisted with the visitation of our aged and sick folk.

Gratitude is extended to our faithful and dedicated **Sunday School** teachers: Mrs Anna Fluit, Mr Amy Oringo, Mrs Amelia Oringo and Mr Geoff King (Psalmody training). Greatly appreciated has been the presenting by Mr Geoff King, Mrs Amy Ball and Mrs Amelia O'Dell.

Regular fellowship luncheons and dinners were a blessed time enhancing mutual Christian love and cohesion.

The **Session, and Deacons Court** (Mr David Barnes, Ken George, Mr John Fluit, Mr Richard Alley and Mr Ian King) operated harmoniously and effectively in helping to accommodate the needs of the flock. Other brethren, most notably Mrs Christina and Mr Deon Parker, Mr Geoff King and Mr Oliver King have capably assisted the Deacons with cleaning and significant improvements to the Cardiff Hall rear retaining wall. Other projects are planned for completion in 2026.

It was with joy that the Session examined Mr Adam Fuller, Mr Ian Allen, Mr Oliver King, Mrs Christina and Mr Deon Parker, and Rev George and Mrs Rhoda Ball and admitted them to **communicant membership**.

During 2025 the congregation prayerfully and financially supported a variety of **missions** including the Samburu Mission in Kenya, the Mitamisyi Orphanage in Kenya, AIM, MERF, and the International Mission to Jewish People (IMJP). We were informed and challenged by the presentations of Mark and Rahel Landrum (IMJP) and Rev Don Burgess (Mitamisyi Orphanage).

**Mr Alex Steel** concluded his service of this congregation with his resignation as 'Assessor Elder' after a period of over 13 years. His God-given wisdom and financial expertise have benefitted the Session, the Deacons, and the congregation generally. Though tinged with

sadness that our interaction with Mr Steel will henceforth be less frequent, we rejoice with him that he was counted worthy of service of Christ and His Church in this part of the vineyard.

Our gratitude is expressed to Rev Muldoon for his diligent and faithful service as Interim Moderator of the Congregation during 2025.

We are encouraged by Phil 4:19 *And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus*, as 2026 unfolds in service of our Lord.

Mr Ian J Miller  
Clerk of Session

<b>Members:</b>	50 (2024)	54 (2025)	<b>Adherents:</b>	12 (2024)	5 (2025)
<b>Infants/children:</b>	12 (2024)	12 (2025)	<b>young people:</b>	3 (2024)	2 (2025)
<b>Average attendance at Morning worship:</b>	55		<b>Evening worship:</b>	45	
<b>Sunday school classes:</b>	3	<b>students:</b> 1 (infants)	1 (primary)	1 (adults)	
<b>Elders:</b>	1		<b>Deacons:</b>	5	

**Safe Church Training:** e.g. 4 Adults -Refresher training completed. 1 adult completed Triennial Training in 2025. Triennial training of 6 adults due in 2026.

**Minister's Leave entitlements used during 2025: Nil (vacant congregation)**

Rev Robin Tso presented the **St Georges Report on 2025**.

2025 has been a time of settling in for the minister Rev Robin Tso following his induction at the end of August last year. It has also been a time for the congregation to “get to know” their new minister and his family. He has likewise visited most of the members of the congregation once – some more often - as required in his role of “pastoring the flock”.

His ministry has been appreciated by the congregation with seven people being added to the communicant membership since his induction and one removed because of death. Current membership stands at 33. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was held twice during 2025.

A matter of encouragement to the congregation is the number of visitors attending the Lord's Day morning services. Many come from overseas. These totalled approximately 250 during the past six months. The church's web site is the main source assisting them in finding a place of Reformed/Presbyterian worship to attend when staying in the city CBD.

A regular Wednesday Prayer Meeting is held in the church with occasional mission presentations. These included the *Reformed Protestant Mission (Sri Lanka)*, *Trinitarian Bible Society*, *International Mission to Jewish People* and *Middle East Reformed Fellowship*.

The restoration and repair work of the church steeple and replacement of the roof which recommenced in February 2025 has continued throughout the year with approximately 50% of the work now completed with the current estimated completion date being June 2026.

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

Mr Alex Steel

<b>Communicant Members:</b>	30 (2024)	33 (2025)	<b>Adherents:</b>	11 (2024)	8 (2025)
<b>Children &amp; Youth:</b>	9				
<b>Lord's day attendance</b>	am 40 -50			pm 20 – 30 .	

**Wednesday:** 12 – 15

**Sabbath School Classes:** Nil

**Elders :**2

**Deacons :**3

WWCC : All Office Bearers up to date.

**Safe Church Training:** No Teachers/helpers due for 2026 Refresher training - All up to date for Triennial training 2025

**Minister's Holiday Leave :**all taken for 2025.

Rev Dr Dennis Muldoon presented the **Hawkesbury Nepean Report on 2025.**

The year 2025 has been busy at Mt Druitt, and blessed with baptisms, and a wedding. We had two funerals, the first that of an elderly lady whose husband has since become a member. The second was that of a young man, Dylan Gale, husband of Haylee and father of Levi. He had recently become a member by profession of faith. On 24 August he was killed in a road accident while on his way home from church. This was a particularly difficult time for his family, and for the whole church, especially as the minister was overseas at the time. He and his wife were visiting Kenya and South Africa. We are thankful that elder Tom Reeve was well enough to be able to assist the family and church at this time, along with Rev Arthur Adams who conducted the funeral. We thank Donald McIntosh for his assistance and our other assessor elder, Ian Miller.

The young couple who got married at the end of May became members after the husband was baptized. Their five children were baptized on 2 November. Tom Hallett was ordained and inducted as an elder in the congregation on 18 January 2026.

In May we enjoyed the visit of Indian brothers, Samit and Pradeep. In July Rev. Tim Burden from MERF visited us. We hosted a meeting with a speaker from Creation Ministries International in early December, the week before our annual prize giving service.

Each Lord's Day we have two services, one at 11.00am and the second online or by phone at 5.00pm. On the first Sunday of every month, however, we enjoy lunch together as a congregation and then our second service is held straight after lunch at 1.30pm. Before the morning worship, and while a Tongan Language Fellowship is held, we conduct a Sunday School with two classes, and a Bible class for high school students and above. We have an online Bible study and prayer on Fridays. The minister continues conducting a service in Abel Tasman Nursing Home in Chester Hill every week. As interim Moderator of the Hunter congregation, the minister was sometimes away.

The church grounds are beautifully maintained by the men in our church, and we thank them for this work. Different families clean the church on a monthly roster. The manse is rented by Christian family who maintain the property well. Donated air conditioners were installed in the church hall and manse.

It has been a joy to welcome new families into the congregation. We give all thanks and praise to the Lord who blesses us so richly. 'Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly, above all we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever, Amen' (Eph 3:20,21).

Rev Dr Dennis Muldoon

**Members:** 38 (2024) 37 (2025)      **Adherents:** 3 (2024) 4 (2025)  
**Children:** 8      **Children/Youth:** 12  
**Sunday school classes:** 2,      **Adult Bible classes:** 1  
**Elders:** 2 plus 2 assessors      **Deacons:** 2  
**Minister leave taken in 2025:** 19 days.  
**Safe Church Training:** 7 completed Triennial training at the church facilities in 2024.

## SOUTHERN PRESBYTERY REPORT

**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								Baptisms	Sunday School classes/pupils			Youth midweek partn.
										Total attendance if everyone present who worships at least once a month plus the housebound but not including visitors passing through.												
			2024	+	-	2025	Deaths	2024	2025	<4	4-11	12-18	19-30	31-45	45-64	65+	Total					
Geelong	1	0	9	0	3	6	1	10	10	0	0	0	0	0	3	11	14	0	0	0	0	
Melbourne	0	0	18	9	1	26	1	35	30	4	1	2	10	8	10	10	45	2	0	0	0	
Ulverstone	1	1	23	0	2	21	0	25	25	2	4	3	0	7	4	6	26	1	0	0	5	
Southern Pres	2	1	50	9	6	53	2	70	65	6	5	5	10	15	17	27	85	3	0	0	5	

### Geelong Congregation Report

The congregation are thankful to the Lord for sustaining the work and witness of Geelong PCEA and for giving signs of His gracious care and abundant goodness.

In the long vacancy since 2013 services were reduced to just one each Lord's Day. We are thankful for the men who willingly assisted and preached God's word during that time and for those who faithfully attended worship. The membership of the congregation was reduced to just 7 people during 2025 owing to one death and the issuing of two disjunction certificates. The regular weekly attendance was 9 people, with others joining us occasionally.

With the reorganisation of the Southern Presbytery, funds were made available for Geelong to sustain a full-time minister for 3 years, and for necessary repairs and improvements to the church and manse. The congregation was able to issue a unanimous call to Rev. John Forbes, who accepted, and the induction took place on 7 January 2026. A midweek meeting for Bible study and prayer has begun and is well attended. It is anticipated that an afternoon service will begin soon. There have been encouragements with additional families now worshipping with us regularly, including Micah and Lauren Klazinga and children, who have moved from Brisbane to Geelong to be closer to Micah's Melbourne work and for him to begin part-time academic studies at the Reformed Theological College.

We remain very conscious of our weaknesses in the path ahead and look to the Lord for strength. We have known times in which we have sown in tears, but He has encouraged our hearts, and we look forward, prayerfully, to a joyful time of reaping. We readily declare the words of Psalm 126:3, "The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad."

### Melbourne Congregation Report

This year has brought significant changes to our churches in Melbourne. After the events of the previous several years, the Knox Congregation was renamed the Melbourne Congregation and Carrum Downs and Narre Warren were amalgamated into it. It was agreed to sell the Wantirna church building and manse, closing a chapter in the history of our church in Melbourne. We no longer have any congregations within the city but instead are limited to the outer suburbs.

Being amalgamated into a single charge meant for a significant adjustment for the people in Narre Warren and Carrum Downs, as both were used to having their own minister and Narre Warren had its own local session. Yet the people in the newly combined congregation understood the need for this change, as both were in a fragile state and neither were able to support a minister on their own. Over the course of the year Rev. George Ball, as interim moderator, with much help from his wife Rhoda, tirelessly laboured in the charge. There was extensive maintenance work on the

properties. Morning worship was held in both locations throughout the year. George ran a youth meeting in Carrum Downs during the week for much of the year, while the fortnightly ladies Bible study continued in Narre Warren. A number joined the congregation and there was a steady flow of visitors.

At the end of 2024 Mr. Tom Reeve, who had ably served as an assessor, providing much wisdom during a challenging period, stepped down due to his health, and Rev. Robin Tso was appointed in his place. In mid-June the session issued an invitation to Rev. David Lachman, minister in the Southern Presbyterian Church in Hobart, to come serve as full-time residential supply with a view to a call. He accepted the invitation in mid-August and arrived at the beginning of October. After he was accepted by the Synod as a minister eligible for a call, the congregation issued him a Call in December, which he accepted.

During the transition, George and Rhoda remained in Melbourne until the end of October and facilitated the purchase of a new manse situated between the two church buildings. Dr. Donald Ramsay, serving as an interim elder (as well as clerk to Session and Deacon's court and treasurer), put in many hours of work arranging the sale of the Wantirna church building and manse and the purchase of a new manse. Construction on the long planned Optus tower was begun at the end of the year and, Lord willing, will be completed soon.

The congregation has ended the year in a very different situation than it began. While both congregations are still fragile, we go into a new year looking to the Lord with renewed hope. It is our prayer that the Lord, having closed one chapter in the church's history in Melbourne, will take pity on his church, strengthen, rebuild and bless his people.

### **Ulverstone Congregation Report:**

**Services:** Worship Services in Ulverstone are held twice every Sabbath at 10:30 am and 4 pm, except the first Sabbath of the month, when a congregational luncheon is held and an afternoon service is held at 2 pm instead of 4 pm. The Lord's Supper was celebrated 3 times during 2025. In 2025, there was preaching through the Gospel of Mark in the morning and the doctrines of the Westminster Shorter Catechism in the evening. This series concluded at the beginning of Autumn, and now there is an exposition through 1 and 2 Samuel in the evening. Services are streamed on Facebook and Sermonaudio.com.

**Membership:** In 2025, 2 members resigned, and no new members were added to the communicants' roll. Louisa Inkje Dotson was baptised on 21 October 2025 and added to the baptismal roll. Aside from these changes, the congregation has remained the same.

**Session:** Our session is comprised locally of Rev. Z. Dotson as moderator. Mr M. Pilgrim as local elder, and two additional elders provided by the Presbytery: Dr Donald Ramsay and Rev. George Ball. Mr Pilgrim serves as the congregational safe church officer and as our representative elder to Presbytery. We hope the Lord will raise up additional local elders for our congregation.

**Deacons Court:** With Synod's aid, the Deacons Court purchased a new manse in 2025. We are thankful for the Synod's willingness to aid us in financing. We purchased the spacious 19 Nell Crescent property in Ulverstone. It has proved to be a well-suited manse for the Dotsons. In 2025, a new Kitchen was installed, along with new flooring, before the Dotsons moved in. The garage is being turned into a study for Rev. Dotson, but that will hopefully be completed in the autumn of 2026. Longstanding Deacon Robert Hingston also has had a recovery of health and has now returned to active service on the court.

**Education/ Congregational Activities:** We have a midweek meeting every Thursday at 7:30 pm during the school year. We are working through the Epistle of 1 Timothy at present and concluded the year at the end of chapter 2. The section of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 was studied in great detail to the great profit of those in attendance. We also continued to hold our car rally in 2025, marking the 30th consecutive event. We have a fellowship luncheon once a month, which provides an opportunity for great fellowship and congregational unity.

## CHURCH AND NATION AND PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE

**Members:** G.D. Ball (Convener 2017), J. Klazinga (Banner), I. Miller, M. Pilgrim, D. Kerridge (Archive)

### **1. The NSW Conversion Practices Ban Act 2024.**

This Act came into effect in April 2025. In May 2025, over 2,100 signatories, including some of our own ministers and members, signed an open letter to the Premier of NSW urging his government to rescind or amend the Act, citing the threat to religious liberty.

The letter stated: *‘We are . . . deeply distressed to find that the Conversion Practices Ban Act of 2024, which came into effect on the 4th of April 2025, impinges on fundamental practices of our faith. The legislation, along with the accompanying media and Frequently Asked Questions document, makes it clear that our duty as ministers of proclaiming the Lordship of Jesus Christ and obedience to his commands is now regarded as criminal behaviour. Christian parents will be criminalised for giving advice to their children concerning their sexual desires or gender identity. Christians will be criminalised for praying with individuals seeking to live in a way that is according to their conscience and the Bible . . . Should these laws remain in place, we will have no option but to continue to exercise orthodox Christian ministry and discipleship, including counselling and praying with individuals concerning the Christian view of sex, marriage, and gender.’*

The Sydney Anglican Synod on 17 September 2025 passed a motion in response to the NSW Conversion Practices Ban Act 2024. The resolution stated that the Synod, *‘encourages Christians to be unafraid to proclaim the truth of God’s word in matters relating to sexuality, marriage, identity and gender, and to provide prayer for those who seek to live a godly life in obedience to God’s word and aligned with God’s purposes, notwithstanding that they may be subject to a complaint under the Conversion Practices Ban Act for doing so.’*

The NSW PCA Assembly on the 26th of September 2025 resolved to adopt the Sydney Anglican resolution.

We also commend the statement. The principles stated have relevance not only in NSW – but in other states too.

### **2. Hate Speech Legislation. Jan. 2026.**

Neil Foster, Associate Professor of Law in Newcastle assesses the impact of the recent Hate Speech Legislation. He writes, “After the dreadful terrorist incident at Bondi on December 14, 2025, where 15 people from the Jewish community were murdered, the Federal government introduced new ‘hate speech’ laws at the national level . . . it seems that the recently enacted changes will have little impact on religious freedom in Australia, except where religion is offered as a reason to justify calls for violence against others . . . Most religious groups do not incite hate against folk from specific racial groups. In Christianity, the New Testament makes it clear that God accepts people from every nationality or tongue, and there is no longer any ethnic aspect to faith - see for example, Acts 10: 34-35, Galatians 3:28, and Revelation 7:9. Where there are religious groups that incite hatred or violence against others due to their racial identity, these laws will indeed penalise such actions . . . For the moment these laws generally seem wisely limited to respond to the dangers facing members of the community following the Bondi incident”

### **3. Review of Covid Restrictions.**

We are not offering to conduct a review of how state restrictions adversely affected church life during the covid pandemic – but such a review could be useful – in an effort to avoid a repeat of the contention and divisiveness experienced in the past.

#### 4. Love One Another.

G.K. Chesterton famously wrote, *'The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried'*.

This is true – not least with regard to Jesus new command. **'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another'** (John 13: 34-35).

John Benton writes, "The sacrificial affection which Christ displayed for us, must also be evident among Christians and therefore especially in the church.

The apostle John takes up this command in the most astonishing way. In 1 John 4:12 he writes: **'No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.'** He is saying something breathtaking. The living God can be 'seen' today in a church where God's people love one another. If we love one another, **'God abides in us.'**

In many ways, this is the forgotten strategy of the church. Programmes and plans have their place. But they will not take us very far in today's hardened secular society. People need to encounter the living God. And John says they will do so in a church where the members love each another. Of course, there must be Bible truth, and prayer, and holiness, and much more. But when Christians love one another as Christ has loved us (1 Corinthians 13:1-8a) it has an effect out of all proportion to what we might imagine, because God is there.

A church should have three dimensions to its activity which we can label IOU. Inwardly, Outwardly, Upwardly. Inwardly there is fellowship. Outwardly there is witness. Upwardly there is worship. All three are necessary and all three are transformed as we love each other.

##### ***Inwardly – Fellowship.***

According to John, when the members of a church love one another **'God's love is perfected (*made complete*) in us.'** God's love which originates in Himself (1 John 4: 7-8) and was manifest in His Son (1 John 4: 9-10), is completed in His people – comes to full fruition in a practical and tangible way among us. When that Christian gives money to a needy brother or sister, God's love is fulfilled practically. When that lonely Christian feels the warmth of the love of the church, God's love is displayed. If we don't love one another, we are depriving each other of the full version of God's love. When we do love one another, we enjoy God's love more fully.

##### ***Outwardly – Witness.***

Our society is secular. It is enslaved by personal pleasure (hedonism), personal choice (consumerism), and personal opinion (relativism). There is nothing worth living for, or dying for, except pleasing yourself. This is a hard nut to crack. But it is vulnerable to true Christian love, because in a church which loves one another a secular visitor will not just hear an argument about God, he or she will meet God (1 John 4:12).

The spiritual destitution, moral disintegration, and social isolation that characterise secular society makes it obvious that secularism leads nowhere but to destruction. But people can't see it. However, an encounter with the living God will open their eyes.

##### ***Upwardly – Worship.***

You can go to some churches which have great music and all the latest worship songs with wonderful musicians and yet it just feels like a concert. Something is missing. You can go to other churches which stick to the old worship styles . . . but it feels like an evangelical ritual. What is missing in both cases? It is the felt presence of God. We may use the language of awe and reverence (Rev. 5:12-14), but unless we encounter God it is all mere words (Mark 7:6). We need God to touch our hearts, and John has promised that when we truly love one another, God Himself will be present in the church."

So, we should think practically about how to love one another as Jesus loved us.

## 5. Private Daily Devotions.

The busyness of modern lifestyles, the demands of daily employment, the deceptive call of the 'urgent' demanding prompt attention, the demanding responsibilities of parenting, and caring for others (the sick, aged and disabled), all tend to limit the time or ability for the sustained private daily study of Scripture and prayer.

Many Christians restrict themselves to one of the many 'Daily Devotionals' in booklet or e-copy, or e-text form. Such devotionals may be helpful but are no substitute for the serious Bible reader.

Busyness in doing "good" may be the enemy of doing the "best". Legitimate things may not be the best if they distract from, or replace, Bible study and prayer.

E. M. Bounds (1835-1913) provides food for thought in 'The Power of Prayer'. *'Short devotions are the bane of deep piety . . . they deplete spiritual vigour, arrest spiritual progress, sap spiritual foundations . . . They are the prolific source of backsliding, the sure indication of superficial piety: they blight, blot, rot the seed and impoverish the soil (of the soul)'*. Bounds prescribes much time seeking God in the Scriptures and in prayer as essential for spiritual growth, faithful living, and effectual prayer. God especially blesses those who persevere in constancy, earnestness, and persistence (Luke 18:4-8, 22:44, James 5:16).

Preachers may labour long to refine their sermon content, its structure and delivery, yet without time spent in private devotions little may be achieved of enduring significance for the Kingdom of God. Henry Martyn once lamented that *"want of private devotional reading and shortness of prayer through incessant sermon-making had produced much strangeness between God and my soul"*. A warning surely to ministers, elders, Sunday school teachers, and youth leaders.

William Wilberforce, one of the most significant figures in British politics, an MP in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, dedicated 45 years of his life to the abolition of slavery and many other worthy causes. In the midst of busyness and following a failure in Parliament, he once admitted, *"I must secure more time for private devotions. The shortening of devotions starves my soul; it grows lean and faint . . . and so God let me stumble."*

There are many Biblical examples which demonstrate the necessity of spending time seeking God's mercy and grace, whether for ourselves or others.

Jacob's victory of faith could not have been gained without that all-night wrestling with the Angel of the Lord (Gen 32:24-31).

The Lord had regard for Moses' prayer (Num 11:2, 21:7, Ps 78:3). This illustrates just how much one person praying can influence the course of history.

Daniel, in Babylon, refusing to obey the king's ban, prayed irrespective of the consequences. He *"kneeled upon his knees three times a day"* (Daniel 6:10). He prayed as he had done before. David's morning, noon, and night prayers were doubtless extended on many occasions (Ps 55:17).

Christ spent many nights in prayer. He had His habitual places to pray. Many seasons of prayer epitomized His life (Mt 11:26, 26:36-44, Lk 23:34, Heb 5:7).

The apostles were determined not to be distracted by the squabbles of a growing church. They desired to devote themselves to prayer (Acts 6:4).

Paul prayed day and night (morning and evening) for the progress of the gospel, and for the protection of the fledgling congregations from sin and false teaching (Eph 1:15-20, 3:14-21, Phil 1:3-11). While we don't know how long he spent, indications are that he spent considerable time.

John Welch (John Knox's son-in-law, 1570-1622) thought a day was somewhat misspent if he did not spend eight to ten hours in prayer. He kept a woollen plaid to wrap around himself when he arose to pray at night. His wife would sometimes complain when she found him lying on the floor weeping, pleading with God. He would reply: *"O woman, I have the souls of three thousand to answer for, and I know not how it is with many of them!"*

In addition to attending public worship, the sacraments and fellowship, private Bible study and prayer are necessary for spiritual growth, faithful living, and for effectively serving Christ and His Church. Believers have graciously been granted a privileged role to play in this age of the Divine plan for the conversion of sinners, their sanctification, and to be light and salt in a fallen world. God has given His special revelation (the Bible) and established prayer as a divine ordinance. Our lives, our families,

congregations, communities, nation, and world will be spiritually blessed as we diligently attend to the means of grace.

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb 11:6).

Should we continue with short, even hurried devotions, if we are capable of doing better?

## PROPOSED DELIVERANCES

1. In response to the NSW Conversion Practices Ban Act 2024, Synod *‘encourages Christians to be unafraid to proclaim the truth of God’s word in matters relating to sexuality, marriage, identity and gender, and to provide prayer for those who seek to live a godly life in obedience to God’s word and aligned with God’s purposes, notwithstanding that they may be subject to a complaint under the Conversion Practices Ban Act for doing so.’*

2. Synod abhors every expression of racism in the church and society. We affirm that in the church, **‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus’** (Gal. 3:28). We also affirm that as a church we welcome and embrace every nationality and colour upon acceptance of our terms of membership.

3. Synod affirms its conviction that the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is the greatest need of the Jew and the Muslim, and endeavours to pray for their conversion, and for the Lord’s blessing upon those who labour among them in the work of the gospel.

4. Synod resolves to consider how we might practically love one another as Jesus loved us – in the Synod, Presbytery, and in the local congregation.

5. Synod reaffirms the importance of serious, personal, systematic Bible study and persistent private and corporate prayer. Synod commends the use of daily devotionals from a reformed perspective as a supplement to, but not a substitute for more serious Bible study.

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 his encouragement for us to pray for one another.

7. Synod agrees to appoint a new convener to succeed Rev. G. Ball.

# PRESBYTERIAN BANNER REPORT

Editor: Rev. Jim Klazinga

## **Distribution:**

There are 93 paid subscriptions for 2026. 87 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 108 subscriptions. Currently, 120 copies are printed each month.

Currently, a low resolution pdf copy of the magazine is sent to 173 email addresses from around the world. 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, four congregations have not paid for their 2026 subscriptions.

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

### Income:

- Subscription Payments - \$3330
- Bank Interest - \$16.31

### Expenses:

- Printing Expenses - \$2293.70
- Mailing – \$1381.95
- Supplies - \$120.38
- Bank fees – \$3.50

Bank Account Balance as of 21 March 2026 - \$2194.42

Estimated Subscription fees outstanding as of 21 March - \$945

Estimated Costs for rest of year - \$3150

Estimated Balance at the end of 2025 - \$0

Since becoming editor in 2020, subscription costs have remained constant at \$30 for bulk subscriptions and \$35 for individual subscriptions. The actual costs were never adequately covered by subscription payments, which has been even more the case with increasing mailing and printing costs. Still, we were able to keep the price low because of some significant anonymous donations that were made to the magazine when I first became editor. However, the reserves made possible by the initial donations are now depleted, and so it appears we will need to significantly increase subscription costs in 2027.

My suggestion would be to set the bulk subscription price at \$45, and the individual subscription price at \$50.

Alternatively, synod might want to consider making a donation of, say, \$4000 to the magazine, which would allow the subscription price to remain low for a few more years.

## **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 endorses the increase in the subscription price suggested in the report.
- 4) Synod expresses thankfulness for the assistance of the Presbyterian Banner liaisons from the congregations.

## ARCHIVIST REPORT

**Archivist:** Rev. David Kerridge

Our Archive is now available through a link from the main PCEA website to [public.pceaarchives.org](http://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. A copy of Rev. J.C. Robinson's *The Reverend Alexander McIntyre – Evangelist* has been digitised and is available at [pcea.org.au/archives](http://pcea.org.au/archives) (not yet linked directly from the public website as content is still being added). Rev. M.C. Ramsay's *Purity of Worship* has been digitised and reset and will be made available on the same site.

The work of accessioning records received from Presbyteries is ongoing, and help is being sought for data entry. Donations of relevant material is always welcome. 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 (Convener 2021), R.Tso, N. O'Dell, B. Saljooghi

The Committee corresponded by email during the year.

### Website

The PCEA website has remained unchanged in basic format for 2025. It requires contributions from congregations to be truly representative of the denomination. We have seen some great work done on congregational websites during the year.

### 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.

### Microsoft 365 Suite

Microsoft's office products through the Microsoft 365 suite are available to PCEA office-bearers via licencing arrangements with Connecting Up. However, Microsoft have introduced a cost to retain the Microsoft Business Premium packages as of this month. 10 licences were being utilised but we have

been able to obtain the Business Basic option at no cost and no loss of essential functionality. Existing users have already been migrated to the new option.

### **Acts of Synod Database**

As mentioned in the Law and Advisory report efforts are continuing to collate and digitise Acts of Synod are listed by year in PDF format at <https://pcea.org.au/resources/pceas-synod/acts-of-synod> . Once we have a representative collection this will be linked from 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 2025 Balance Sheet. Total \$1,284 (under 2024 budget by \$2,516).

Our proposed budget for 2026 is:

#### **Proposed IT Budget**

Website Costs \$1200

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

**TOTAL BUDGET \$3,150**

### **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 2026 be approved and funds provided for the work of this Committee.

## **SUPERANNUATION AND INSURANCE COMMITTEE**

**Members:** R Tso (Convener 2016), Messrs D Ramsay, AH Steel

### **A. SUPERANNUATION**

#### **1.1 Church Contributions to Superannuation**

**Superannuation Levy on congregations (current rates prior to 1 July 2026 – percentage of Minimum Stipend)**

- Self-supporting congregations: 15%
- Self-supporting congregations (with minister aged 75 and over): Superannuation Guarantee Rate (currently at 12%)
- 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 31/12/25 was \$186,451.** This balance accounts for the \$45,000 withdrawn during the year to help establish the new Long Service Leave Fund, as well as the revaluation of invested funds.

**b. The SSF Working Account balance as at 31/12/25 was \$7,206.81.** This balance reflects income generated by the capital account, also less \$45,000 withdrawn to assist in establishing the Long Service Leave Fund.

## 2. Contributions to ministers' Superannuation accounts

### Contribution Rates

- Inducted ministers: 17%
- Inducted ministers (from age 75): Superannuation Guarantee Rate (currently 12%)

## 3. Superannuation Review Default Fund

All but three of our ministers have chosen HESTA *Balanced Growth Fund* as our default fund, for their contributions. This fund has returned growth of 9.17% (last year) and 8.28% over 5 years.

## B. LONG SERVICE LEAVE FUND

Following the Synod's approval in 2025, the centralised Long Service Leave (LSL) fund for ministers has been successfully established to ensure financial stability across congregations.

**Fund Balance:** As of 31/12/25, the Long Service Leave Fund balance stands at **\$90,592**.

**2026 LSL Levy:** In accordance with the 2025 resolution to review the levy annually, the Committee has set the annual LSL Levy for 2026 at **\$1,179** for congregations with an inducted minister (calculated to cover LSL entitlements). To simplify administration for treasurers, this will be billed as a single yearly amount payable in the first quarter of the year.

## C. MINISTER'S HOLIDAY LEAVE RECORD

The Committee has identified that misunderstandings regarding how leave is accrued have led to outstanding holiday pay liabilities for retiring ministers. To rectify this, the Committee has developed a standardised **Minister's Holiday Leave Record Form**.

Leave accrues on a daily basis over a 7-day week (including weekends) and amounts to 35 days per year (five weeks). This blank Excel template will be distributed to all congregations. Deacons' Courts and Sessions are strongly encouraged to use this form to accurately track progressive leave, ensuring ministers take their entitled rest and preventing large, unexpected financial burdens upon retirement or transition. The Record is to be submitted to Presbyteries annually along with other records for examination and attesting.

## D. STRATEGIC RESPONSE TO PAYDAY SUPER LEGISLATION

### 1. The Issue: "Payday Super" Legislation

The Federal Government has legislated the **Treasury Laws Amendment (Payday Superannuation) Act**, effective **1 July 2026**.

- **The New Rule:** Superannuation contributions must be received by the minister's fund within **7 days** of the stipend payment.
- **The Current Situation:** Deacons' Courts pay stipends (on various dates), while the Synod pays Superannuation quarterly.

- **The Consequence:** Because the Synod does not control the exact day a local Treasurer pays a stipend, we cannot guarantee the super arrives within 7 days of that payment. Continuing our current quarterly system after July 2026 will result in non-compliance and ATO penalties.

## 2. Options Considered & Rejected

Before arriving at the recommendation, several approaches were analysed and rejected due to administrative risk or financial burden.

### Option A: Full Centralisation (Synod or Presbyteries pay Stipend & Super)

- **Concept:** All Deacons' Courts remit funds to the Synod, or Presbytery and they run a central payroll for every minister.
- **Why Rejected:** This places an unsustainable administrative burden on the Synod and Presbytery Treasurers to manage payroll for the entire denomination/ each Presbytery.

### Option B: Synchronisation (Fixed Dates)

- **Concept:** We mandate that every congregation **must** pay the stipend on the exact same day (e.g., the 15th), allowing the Synod to pay super centrally on the 18th.
- **Why Rejected:** This is operationally fragile. If one local Treasurer is late or sick, the Synod's central payment becomes non-compliant or inaccurate. It creates a "single point of failure."

### Option C: Decentralisation with Reimbursement (The "Claim Back" Model)

- **Concept:** Local Courts pay the full 17% super contribution immediately, and the Synod reimburses the subsidy portion at the end of the quarter.
- **Why Rejected:** This creates a cash flow crisis for our Aid-Receiving congregations.
- **Scenario:** A congregation paying the 8% levy cannot afford to float the full 17% payment for three months while waiting for Synod reimbursement. It places the financial burden on those least able to bear it.

## 3. The Recommended Solution: "Advance Funding"

To ensure compliance while protecting our poorer congregations, the Committee recommends a Decentralised Payment Model with Advance Funding.

### How it works:

- **Local Responsibility:** The Deacons' Court assume responsibility for paying the full 17% superannuation contribution directly to the ministers' individual super fund at the same time they pay the stipend. This guarantees 100% compliance with the 7-day rule.
- **Synod Subsidy (In Advance):** The Synod utilises the Superannuation Support Fund (SSF) to transfer the subsidy to aid-receiving congregations at the start of the quarter.

### Financial Example (Aid-Receiving Congregation):

- **The Gap:** The Minister's Superannuation contribution is 17%. (\$2,903) The Congregation pays 8%. (\$1,366) The Synod contributes a 9% (\$1,537) subsidy to the congregation.
- **The Mechanism:** On Day 1 of each quarter, the Synod calculates 9% of the quarter's stipend and transfers this amount to the Congregation's bank account.
- **The Result:** The Local Treasurer now has the cash in hand to pay the full 17% super on payday.

**4. Financial Viability** The Committee has reviewed the SSF accounts to ensure we can manage this liquidity shift (paying out at the start of the quarter rather than holding funds until the end).

- **SSF Working Account** (as at 31/12/25): ~\$7,206.
- **SSF Capital Account** (as at 31/12/25): ~\$186,451.

**Analysis:** The Working Account balance (\$7k) is sufficient to “float” the quarterly advances for Aid-Receiving and non-vacant congregations without touching the Capital Account. We are simply moving the cash outflow forward by 90 days.

**5. Risk Management** The only risk in paying in advance is when a vacancy occurs or is filled.

If a congregation receives a subsidy for a full quarter but the minister leaves during the quarter, the unspent subsidy is to be refunded to Synod. If a minister is installed in a congregation, the subsidy for the remaining quarter will be transferred by Synod to the congregation.

**6. Transition Assistance for Treasurers** The Committee acknowledges that shifting the responsibility of superannuation payments to local congregations introduces new complexities, particularly regarding Single Touch Payroll (STP) reporting.

The Committee commits to providing clear, guidance to assist treasurers in setting up automated payroll and STP systems. Congregations are encouraged to reach out to the Committee to request direct help with transitioning to this new Payday Super arrangement.

## PROPOSED DELIVERANCES

1. **Synod receives** the report of the Superannuation & Insurance Committee.
2. **Synod strongly encourages** Deacons’ Courts and Sessions to utilize the provided Minister’s Holiday Leave Record Form to accurately track leave entitlements and prevent unfunded liabilities. Presbyteries are to ensure evidence of ministers’ outstanding holiday leave is included with other records presented for annual examination and attestation.
3. **Synod resolves that** effective **1 July 2026**, all Deacons’ Courts assume responsibility for remitting the full 17% superannuation contribution to the minister’s super fund concurrent with the stipend payment, to ensure compliance with Payday Superannuation legislation.
4. **Synod resolves that** the Superannuation Support Fund remit the requisite subsidy to Aid-Receiving and non-vacant congregations on a **quarterly basis in advance**.
5. **Synod authorises** the Superannuation and Insurance Committee to calculate these advance payments based on the stipend rates at the commencement of the financial year.

## FINANCE COMMITTEE

### (Incorporating General Treasurer’s Report)

**Members:** AH Steel (Convener 1990-2021, reappointed 2024), 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 considering 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 (\$1,310 per week) and basis of review of the minimum stipend be continued.

## 2. Financial Assistance

One request was received for financial assistance for the current Synodical year (2026/2027):

Central Presbytery approved a request from Hawkesbury-Nepean Deacons' Court of up to \$8,000 after receiving pledges totalling \$7,000 from two 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.

## 3. The Capital Assistance Fund

As at 31/12/25 assets totalled \$254,026 which was a decrease of \$183,968 (42%) on 2024. This was the result of receiving interest of \$32,158 and the yet to be drawn balance of \$32,184 of a gift of \$470,000 (\$200,000 from *Capital Assistance Fund* and \$270,000 from *Synod General Funds* to Ulverstone congregation to assist in the purchase of a manse.

## 4. Budget

For estimates of the major working funds to 31/12/26 – See Appendix "A"

## PROPOSED DELIVERANCES

1. We record our thanks to God for yet another year wherein the Synod has been able to meet all its commitments, make donations to missions and other churches and worthy charitable causes.

2. Adjustment of the Minimum Stipend, Cash and Non-cash components (Excluding Manse, Car and Telephone) for 2026/2027 be made on 1<sup>st</sup> January annually in line with the movement in the *Wage Price Index* as published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. In the event of a negative movement in any review period, no adjustment be made.

3. Financial Assistance of up to \$8,000 for 2026/2027 be granted to Hawkesbury-Nepean Congregation as follows:

- Strictly on a quarterly needs basis.
- Applications be submitted to the General Treasurer on a calendar quarter basis ie. commencing 1<sup>st</sup> January/April/July/October and be accompanied with a Budget for the quarter being applied for.
- Be subject to the availability of funds.

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**GENERAL TREASURER**

**Report to Synod 2026**

## 1. Financial Needs

All the financial needs of the Synod were adequately provided for during 2025 with total funds decreasing by \$366,268 to \$2,017,933. Of this total amount, \$401,951 is held on behalf of congregations from bequests or investments.

Income remained largely unchanged while expenditure decreased due a reduced call on Synod for finance assistance. This resulted in a surplus of \$25,465 compared with a deficit of \$5,143 in 2024.

**2. Synod General Working Funds**

Synod General Working Funds at 31/12/2025 were \$556,493. This was a decrease of \$246,000 on 2024 and resulted from Synod allocating \$270,000 from general funds for the Ulverstone manse, the balance coming from the Capital Assistance Fund.

**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.

**PROPOSED DELIVERANCES**

nil

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SYNOD FINANCE COMMITTEE - APPENDIX "A"

**BUDGET - SYNOD MAJOR WORKING FUNDS  
for twelve months ending 31/12/26**

<b>Working Fund</b>	<b>Balance as at 31/12/2025</b>	<b>Estimated Income</b>	<b>Estimated Givings / Pledges</b>	<b>Estimated Expenditure</b>	<b>Estimated Surplus (Deficit)</b>	<b>Estimated Balance</b>	<b>Estimated Deficit Balance 31/12/2026</b>
Capital Assistance Fund	256,026	15,500	0	30,000	-15,000	241,026	
Financial Assistance	3,290	3,500	7,000	13,000	-2,500	790	
Missions - General	39,675	15,000	5,000	19,200	800	38,875	
Miss Relief (Equities)	146,089	5,000	0	0	5,000	151,089	
Miss Relief (Working)	3,477	5,000	0	6,100	-1,100	2,377	
Training of Ministry	268,882	15,000	10,000	0	25,000	293,882	
Information Technology	0	0	0	1,500	-1,500	-1,500	1,500
Youth & Fellowship	10,998	1,500	600	5,000	-2,900	8,098	
General Funds	520,464	37,500	100	7,000	30,400	550,864	

**Notes:**

Capital Assistance Fund -

A request from Hawkesbury-Nepean Congregation for assistance of up \$30,000 is anticipated.

Estimated deficit in "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 2025.

As NSW conveyancing is now conducted using eConveyancing, the deeds relating to the Trustees of the Synod of Australia have been uplifted from the box and deposited in the PCEA Archive as per instruction from Synod 2025. The deeds relating to Queensland and Letters Patent remain in the Deed Box (see Queensland Trustees Report below).

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

22/05/2025 – Agreement for the Provision of Works Contract (AS4000) – St George’s

Other significant matters requiring Trustee action:

11/05/2025 Boundary adjustment of 3 Hayes Street, Goonellabah and Section 88B form

**Bequests - Nil**

**Review of Results as at 31/12/25**

Diversification

**Specified Capital Funds - 31/12/25**

Actual Amount	Actual %	Asset Class	Strategy Range	Strategy Benchmark
Invested	of total		%	%
229,825	41%	Cash/Term Deposits	10% - 30%	20%
329,206	59%	Equities	70% - 90%	80%
559,031	100%			100%

**Return:**

**Growth –**

Total Trust Funds (Specified Capital Funds) increased by \$14,634 (4.7%) during 2025 against a Target of 3.8% (CPI). “Real value” (keeping up with inflation) was therefore achieved in 2025.

**Income** – Income of \$27,822 represented a return of 5.0% against a target of 4.8% (2025 Average Official Cash Interest Rate of 3.8%, plus 1.0%).

*Investment Strategy Objectives –*

Growth – **Achieved** for 2025 but still behind with CPI added since 1998.

Income - **Achieved** for 2025.

**PROPOSED DELIVERANCE**

Nil

**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. The Queensland Government introduced and mandated eConveyancing from 20<sup>th</sup> February 2023 for most transactions. Notwithstanding authorisation from Synod 2025, advice has not yet been obtained 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.

**PROPOSED DELIVERANCE**

1. That the Synod extend their permission to Trustees to seek legal advice to clarify the current situation regarding eConveyancing in Queensland and report to Synod 2027.

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

**Trustees:** D Ramsay (Secretary), Synod Clerk, R. Tso.

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

**Property Holdings**

The schedule of real property as at 15 January 2026 is attached. This includes the settlement on the sale of the Wantirna church building on that date.

**Bequests**

Nil

**Common Seal Applications**

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

02/06/2025 – Contract for purchase of 19 Nell Crescent, Ulverstone TAS  
26/08/2025 – Contract for sale of 360 Mountain Highway Wantirna VIC  
26/08/2025 – Contract for sale of 358 Mountain Highway Wantirna VIC  
29/10/2025 – Contract for purchase of 3 Hertford Court, Cranbourne North VIC  
18/11/2025 – Lease to Indara of portion of 108 Prospect Hill Road, Narre Warren VIC

**Other significant matters requiring Trustee action:**

03/06/2025 – Add D Ramsay and D Kerridge as Authorities on Ulverstone CommSec account  
13/06/2025 – Add D Ramsay & D Kerridge as Authorities on Synod TVIC CommSec Account, remove old authorities from account  
25/07/2025 – Add D Kerridge as Director on Melbourne Westpac Cash Investment account.  
31/07/2025 – Add D Ramsay & D Kerridge as Directors of Narre Warren Share Trading Account  
27/08/2025-04/03/2026 – Add Trustees as Contacts and Associates to ABN registration, remove old associates and contacts  
05/10/2025-04/03/2026 – Correct name on ABN registration from “Vic” to “Victoria”  
Provide “Know Your Customer” details on all above accounts.

**Deeds**

A manse (19 Nell Crescent, Ulverstone TAS) was purchased on behalf of the Ulverstone congregation on 31/7/2025 and the deed lodged electronically with the Tasmanian Recorder of Titles, who maintains the official Register of Land in Tasmania.

The physical deeds for the Wantirna manse (360 Mountain Highway, Wantirna VIC) and the Wantirna church (358 Mountain Highway, Wantirna VIC) were uplifted from Daniel Butt and Co., Solicitors, Suite 4, Level 1, 1 Stanley St, Maclean NSW and transferred to Jansen Walsh & Grace Lawyers & Conveyancing, Suite 30, Wantirna Mall, 348 Mountain Highway, Wantirna VIC as part of their sale to Ebenezer Bible Presbyterian Church on 8/12/2025 and 15/1/2026 respectively.

A manse (3 Hertford Court, Cranbourne North VIC) was purchased on 8/12/2025 on behalf of the Melbourne congregation and the deed lodged electronically with the Victorian Registrar of Titles, who maintains the official Register of Land in Victoria.

### Investments

Funds held by the Victorian Trust Corporation for Synod at 31/12/2025 totalled \$462,142, representing an increase of 3.8% on 2024 (\$445,319). A total of \$376,214 is held in shares, with share values increasing by 4.77% during 2025, compared with 6.70% the previous year. The overall income from all funds (shares and cash) was \$28,200, corresponding to a 6.3% return on equity, compared with 6.1% the previous year.

### Mobile Tower Lease

A revised development application for a mobile communications tower on the Narre Warren church property was submitted in March 2025 by the Downer Group. The new application, which included a change to the location within the Church allotment and reduced tower height, was approved by the City of Casey Council in late 2025. The Trustees signed a revised lease on behalf of the Melbourne congregation with Indara Digital Infrastructure, who now owns and manages the physical infrastructure for Optus (Singtel Optus Pty Ltd). The construction will be completed in early 2026 and the antenna installed in May 2028.

## SCHEDULE OF REAL PROPERTY AS AT 15/1/2026

CT / Folio	Address	Land	Description & Improvements
<b>Geelong Congregation</b>			
8191/599	12 Coppards Road Newcomb, VIC 3219  Land & house \$228,000 Purchased 1989	4,267 m2	Manse – BV & tile – 280 m2 (built 1968) Double storey 5 BR / 2 BA double garage (detached) renovated interior 2006  Church & hall – BV & metal - 316 m2 15 car spaces and ex- tennis court. Completed 1990 - \$529,000
<b>Melbourne Congregation</b>			
8458/720	10 Bentley Street Wantirna, VIC 3215  Land \$260,000 Purchased 2004	979 m2	Units – BV & tile – 265 m2 total 2 small x 2 BR unit plus single garage 1 large x 2 BR unit plus single garage  Completed 2007 - \$368,538
9542/544	108 Prospect Hill Road Narre Warren, VIC  Land \$75,840 Purchased 1987	1,901 m2	Church – Brick & metal – 267 m2 31 car spaces, air-conditioning added 2001  Completed 1990 - \$226,160
5647/205	8 William Road Carrum Downs, VIC  Land \$415,000 Purchased 2014	1420 m2	Church & hall – 230 m2 BV & metal, 22 car spaces  Complete 2018 - \$483,097

12066/208	22 Frost Street Carrum Downs, VIC  Land & house \$584,000 Purchased 2019	360 m2	Manse – 360 m2 BV & tile, 4 BR/2BA double garage  Completed 2020
10290/987	91 Tiverton Drive Mulgrave, VIC  Land & church \$395,000 Purchase 2009	2,834 m2	Church/ & hall – 273 m2 (built 1972/1997) BV & tile Extended – 407 m2 - 2009 29 car spaces (power line easement) Added hall/kitchen & offices – 2022 Additional car spaces - 2024
10826/560	3 Hertford Court Cranbourne North, VIC  Land & house \$1,180,000 Purchased 2025	612 m2	Manse – 273 m2 double storey (built 2000) B(RE)/timber & tile – 4BR/2BA/1ENS Double garage
<b>Ulverstone Congregation</b>			
3468/087 3587/002	13 Leven Street Ulverstone, TAS  Land \$2,000 Purchased 1977	559 m2	Church - 160m2 – 2 car spaces Brick & metal –  Completed 1977 - \$20,500
31835/44	19 Nell Crescent Ulverstone, TAS  Land & house \$635,000 Purchased 2025	702 m2	Manse – 201 m2 (built 1988) BV & tile – 4BR/2BA Single garage

# CORRESPONDENCE

## Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia

SOUTHERN PRESBYTERY



**Presbytery Clerk**  
Dr Donald Ramsay

14-20 McPherson Road  
Waurn Ponds, VIC 3216  
dramsay@pcea.org.au  
Mobile: 0435 180 664

### OVERTURE

To the Synod of Eastern Australia appointed to meet in Wauchope on Tuesday 5th May 2026, the overture of Southern Presbytery respectfully shows that:

#### WHEREAS

the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia has approved the use of the King James Version, New King James Version, English Standard Version, New American Standard Bible, and New International Version (1984) in public worship, and

#### WHEREAS

the Synod has not allowed the use of the New International Version 2011, and

#### WHEREAS

the New International Version of 1984 is no longer in print, and no congregation is presently using the New American Standard Bible, and

#### WHEREAS

it is desirable that there not be an unnecessary multiplicity of versions in use throughout our church,

#### NOW THEREFORE

the Southern Presbytery respectfully overtures Synod to withdraw its approval for the use of the New International Version and New American Standard Bible in public worship,

or do otherwise as the Synod in its wisdom deems best.

Dr Donald Ramsay  
Clerk of Southern Presbytery

# Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia

## SOUTHERN PRESBYTERY



### Presbytery Clerk

Dr Donald Ramsay

14-20 McPherson Road  
Waurn Ponds, VIC 3216  
dramsay@pcea.org.au  
Mobile: 0435 180 664

### OVERTURE

To the Synod of Eastern Australia appointed to meet in Wauchope on 5 May 2026, the Overture of the Southern Presbytery humbly shows that:

#### WHEREAS

1. At the last ordination in the Southern Presbytery confusion arose regarding the public ordinance of laying on hands, due to a perceived lack of clarity in Handbook 4.72.
2. The Westminster Form of Presbyterian Church Government states, "Every minister of the word is to be ordained by imposition of hands and prayer by those preaching presbyters to whom it doth belong"
3. The previous Practice of this Church, in use until 1992, also makes it clear that the imposition of hands is carried out by the moderator and, "It is the practice for all Ministers present to stand around and lay their hands on his head" (Practice 1964, p33)

#### NOW THEREFORE

The Southern Presbytery requests that Handbook 4.72 be clarified accordingly to read "The person is then ordained to the office of the holy ministry by the imposition of hands, and prayer with fasting, by those preaching presbyters to whom it doth belong.",

or do otherwise as the Synod in its wisdom deems best.

Dr Donald Ramsay  
Clerk of Southern Presbytery

# Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia

## SOUTHERN PRESBYTERY



**Presbytery Clerk**  
Dr Donald Ramsay

14-20 McPherson Road  
Waurn Ponds, VIC 3216  
dramsay@pcea.org.au  
Mobile: 0435 180 664

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### OVERTURE

To the Synod of the Presbytery Church of Eastern Australia appointed to meet in Wauchope on 5 May 2026, the overture of the Southern Presbytery humbly shows that,

#### WHEREAS

1. It was the desire of the Southern Presbytery in restructuring the congregations within its bounds to have funds available to support the ongoing work of ministry in the Southern Presbytery at this critical time,
2. Further to the decision of Synod (Minutes 25.7) the Melbourne deacons' court has agreed that the proceeds from sale of the Wantirna church should be applied to a Southern Presbytery fund to be held and administered by Presbytery for the ongoing support of ministry within Presbytery bounds,
3. The Melbourne Session and congregation have been consulted and have consented to the proposal,

#### NOW THEREFORE

The Southern Presbytery asks Synod to take these matters into consideration and grant permission for the proceeds from sale of the Wantirna church to be applied to a Southern Presbytery fund to be held and administered by Presbytery for the ongoing support of ministry within its bounds,

or do otherwise as the Synod in its wisdom deems best.

Dr Donald Ramsay  
Clerk of Southern Presbytery

## FRATERNAL GREETINGS

# Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland

## Business of Synod Committee



Clerk of Synod  
11<sup>th</sup> April 2026

Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia  
Rev. Robin Tso

Dear Robin,

Thank you for the warm invitation to send a delegate to your Annual meeting of Synod commencing on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2026. Because of the distance, time and expense involved we do not feel able to send a delegate at this time. However, I do want to extend to you our warmest greetings in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and I take this opportunity to update you on the situation within the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland.

In common with many churches, we are facing a shortage of ministers and a decline in many of our congregations. At present we have 39 congregations and 9 of those are without a regular pastor. In addition, there are at least three of our ministers who are about to retire within the next year. On the positive side, at special meetings of our Synod in September 2024 and September 2025 we received one man who had previously served as a minister in the Church of Ireland as a minister of our denomination, and another man from the Free Presbyterian Church as a licentiate of our denomination. In addition, we have five students in training for the ministry at our Theological College – they have just completed their exams at the end of their second year and will now begin a two-month placement before embarking on their final year in the autumn. We are praying that these men will complete the course successfully and be called to serve in different congregations towards the end of 2027. We are also praying that the Lord will provide a good number of students to begin their ministerial training at our Theological College in September 2027.

We continue to support mission work in France where Rev. Andrew Lytle is the missionary Pastor. The group there has been encouraged by the provision of a purpose-built meeting place just beside the manse. Since the opening of the new building there have been a steady stream of visitors at the Sabbath-morning worship and there have been good attendances at some outreach events held in the building.

We continue to support Rev. Isaac Berracol as he labours in Seville, Spain. There have been many challenges in the work there and just when things seem to be moving forward another problem arises. The work in Spain has placed a heavy burden upon those in our Mission Committee who have responsibility for oversight of the work. Pray for wisdom for the Mission Committee and for Isaac as he must manage his time wisely in the face of many demands made upon him.

**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](mailto:rpciclerkofsynod@aol.com)

# Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland

## Business of Synod Committee



In all these endeavours we seek the glory of God, and we pray that you will know God's blessing at your Synod and in all your on-going work for Him. We ask that God would keep us all faithful in the ministry of His Word that the great gospel of Jesus Christ will be proclaimed to the saving of souls.

I also take this opportunity to 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 Ballyclabber RP Church, near Coleraine, County Londonderry. The meetings commence on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> June and run until Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> 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 speak at various times during the Synod meetings. We are happy for delegates to be in attendance for the entire Synod, which is followed by Mission Focus on the Wednesday evening.

We would be delighted to welcome a delegate from the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia but 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.

We value the relationship with your denomination and pray that we can continue to encourage one another in the gospel through these links.

May you know God's blessing as you continue your labours for Him in Australia.

Yours in Christ,

Samuel. G. McCollum (Clerk of Synod)

## 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.