

Matters of Interest from the 2019 GAV Commission of Assembly

The Commission of Assembly which met on Tuesday 7th of May will be remembered by those who were there as a gathering of ministers and elders of the church which wrestled with many difficult issues with mutual kindness and respect.

- **Appointment of Moderator-Designate for the 2019 General Assembly**

This was not a difficult matter, for Elder Colin Morrow, the only nominee, is well-qualified for the position, having served many years in the church in a variety of roles. At present he is the part-time Home Missionary at Mildura and part time PIM patrol worker in the Mungo Patrol (NSW – Southern and NW Victoria). We wish Colin and Alison richest blessings as they prepare to serve God in this new role and during his term as Moderator of the General Assembly.

- **New PCV Theological College Library Appeal**

The College library, which is quickly running out of space, is a vital resource of the church and the wider community. A new library is needed, and it will be a valuable legacy for the support of gospel ministry and advancing study that will strengthen the PCV and the wider church. The Commission approved the preparation of suitable literature, a video explaining the need for a new library, and appropriate meetings/events with the aim of gaining the support of the whole church for the proposed new College library, and the calling for pledges from people and congregations towards the cost of the building to be called for when the building works commence.

- **Legal Costs – administration of the Scots Church Properties Trust**

After protracted differences between the Trusts Corporation and the Trustees of the Scots Church Properties Trust and unsuccessful mediation the 2011 General Assembly consented to the Trusts Corporation applying to the Supreme Court for declarations to determine the correct interpretation of relevant aspects of the Trust Deed and to ensure the due and proper administration of the trusts contained in that Trust Deed (some of the proceeds of which support the work of Home Mission and Church Extension in the PCV).

The court decision (which is on the public record) is beyond the scope of this report – but the action has left the PCV with costs which have been funded in the first instance from General Assembly funds. However, these funds support the administration of the General Assembly, and therefore they must be reimbursed – and the proposal brought by the Board of Investment and Finance that this reimbursement (\$2.27M) be from income from the Scots Church Properties Trust (thus reducing the income of the Ministry Development and Church Planting Committees) was rejected by the Commission, which asked the BIF to bring a further report and proposals to the General Assembly in October. Some interim steps were taken to deal with the matter, including adding \$100,000 to the 2019/20 GMP for the funding of the General Assembly. Clearly this is a difficult matter; please pray for wisdom for the BIF and the Lord's provision for this need.

- **PCV – Joining the National Redress Scheme**

The National Redress Scheme was established by the Australian Government in response to recommendations by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Again, anything like an adequate description of the Scheme is beyond this report – but the Commission resolved to 'Request the Clerk to forward a copy of the report explaining the impact of the National Redress Scheme to every congregation in the Presbyterian Church of Victoria to enable the whole church to understand and embrace the responsibility before God of addressing the sexual sin that has caused such extensive damage to the witness of the gospel'.

Information about the Scheme is available on line. The website says that the Scheme:

- acknowledges that many children were sexually abused in Australian institutions
- recognises the suffering they endured because of this abuse
- holds institutions accountable for this abuse, and
- helps people who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse gain access to counselling and psychological services, a direct personal response, and a redress-payment.

Participation in the Scheme is voluntary, but there is pressure from Government and community expectations on institutions to join. The 2018 General Assembly committed the PCV in principle to joining the Scheme; the Commission affirmed the intention of the PCV to join the National Redress Scheme and set in place the steps required to complete the process.

Without attempting to explain the matter in detail, the PCV will join as a 'participating group' consisting of the PCV, each of its congregations, the Trusts Corporation, Kirkbrae, the Theological College, PWMU, PYV and any other relevant association of the PCV, with each congregation and organisation being required to agree to join 'the participating group'.

Of interest to a report like this is the fact that to join the Scheme an institution like the PCV must demonstrate its capacity to pay by setting aside a sum sufficient to cover its possible estimated redress liability; for the PCV this is \$1.6M. The Commission accepted the Board of Investment and Finance's proposal that this liability be funded by applying sums from unallocated Sites Reserve accounts held in the names of various congregations.

This fails to spread the burden equally across the whole church – but it is better than the only course open to most other denominations, that of selling property. It is to be hoped that after the Scheme has finished some way of finalising the matter with an equitable distribution of the cost across the whole church will be found. In the meantime, we can all be grateful to the Lord for his material blessings upon our church and the wise financial management of its resources.

- **Maintenance of the ministry matters**

The Commission:

- declared that as from 1 July 2019:
 - a. The minimum remuneration for minister be \$56,508.00.
 - b. The minimum stipend component of minimum remuneration be \$36,984.00.
 - c. The maximum non-cash benefit component of minimum remuneration be \$19,524.00.
 - d. The sustentation qualifying stipend be \$28,434.00 per annum, with the maximum sustentation grant available to a charge be \$8,550.00.
 - e. The additional amount for travel over 6,000kms of the distance agreed between the minister and his charge as his annual distance of travel on church-related matters be 50 cents per kilometre.
 - f. The rate of charge contribution to the PCV Superannuation Fund be maintained at 15% of actual remuneration (\$8,484.00) for the year commencing 1 July 2019.
 - g. Supply preaching fees for the year commencing 1 July 2019 increase by 1.8%, namely: \$146 for one service;
\$168 for two services;
\$201 for three services, using the same sermon on the same day;
\$264 for two services or more, with separate sermons;
and the travel reimbursement for supply preachers be 50 cents per kilometre.
- set the Long Service Leave levy for the financial year 2019-20 at \$350 per charge per minister, to be paid by every charge and any General Assembly committee that is responsible for the employment of any church worker who is entitled to receive long service leave under the Maintenance of the Ministry Committee regulations.
- reminded charges to adhere to the guidelines set down by the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission (ACNC) and in particular, to ensure that they have completed and lodged the required Annual Information Statement (AIS) to the ACNC, to preserve the tax exemption status of the minister's non-cash benefits (NCBs).

- **Finally ...**

The Commission:

- set the percentage ratio of the SCPT distribution between the Ministry Development Committee and Church Planting Committee respectively as agreed between the committees.
- approved that \$550,000 from the Aspendale Church's Sites Reserve funds be applied to its manse proposal.
- approved a final grant of \$85,000 to the Presbyterian Church of South Australia from funds set aside in 2017.

Let us praise the Lord, who blesses his people with peace!

Peter Phillips
Deputy Clerk