



# PCQ Review

Presbyterian Church of Queensland  
2021 Review and Strategic Priorities

## Contents

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Introduction .....	2
Commissioning of the PCQ Review and Terms of Reference .....	3
The Context of the 2021 PCQ Review .....	3
Review Design and Consultation Process .....	6
Key Themes.....	8
Introduction to the Strategic Framework .....	10
Strategic Priority 1: Clarify Purpose and Vision.....	10
Strategic Priority 2: Enable Healthy Fruitful Churches.....	11
Strategic Priority 3: Support Spiritual Leadership .....	15
Strategic Priority 4: Renew Presbyteries .....	18
Strategic Priority 5: Evaluate Committees .....	22
Enabler 1: Training Leaders.....	25
Enabler 2: Cultivating Transparency and Accountability .....	27
Enabler 3: Engaging Members, especially Women .....	29
Enabler 4: Restructuring Administrative Services .....	32
Enabler 5: Redeveloping the PCQ Code.....	33
Recommendations .....	36

### **Dedication and Prayer**

*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen*

(Letter to the Ephesians 3:20-21)

## Introduction

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A Review of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland (PCQ) was commissioned by the state Assembly in September 2020. The consultation process was intentionally broad and open, designed to enable extensive listening and conversation. The objective of the review was to generate from the reflections and insights gathered, a strategic framework for denominational vitality and health into the future.

In commissioning the Review, Assembly implemented a recommendation arising from a Think Tank established by the Commission of Assembly in July 2020 with the purpose of formulating a process to determine a strategy for the future health of the denomination.

In 2020 the concurrent crises of the COVID19 pandemic, and the financial implications of the PresCare losses, were the immediate context of the Think Tank and have subsequently been the context of the Review itself throughout 2021. In commissioning the Review there was recognition that crises offer an important opportunity for reassessment, evaluation, reaffirmation, and recommitment. In this sense, the opportunity was seen as God-given.

In line with the Recommendation, Assembly appointed an independent facilitator, Tim Dyer of the Johnmark Extension, known to several PCQ staff and ministers for his work in consultation training and development within Christian churches and organisations. In consultation with the facilitator, the Commission of Assembly appointed a Review Working Group to guide the consultation process, led by the facilitator, and comprised of elders and ministers, men and women from various areas of PCQ and with experience and skills appropriate to the task.

Appointees to the review working group included:

Katie Allan, David Bailey, Kylie Evans, Bruce McClenahan, Andrew Neilson, David Thurston, Kathy Thurston (Executive support and administration) and Russell Williams.

The Review Working Group would like to express their appreciation to all throughout PCQ who contributed to the Review process through participating in comment and focus groups, completing surveys, writing submissions, and expressing their reflections via social media and in face to face and zoom interviews. Many spent considerable time reflecting on their contributions and submissions. Input to the process has been significant and comprises many hundreds of pages of data.

This report is offered by the Review group as the outcome of the consultation process. In the Report, the current context of PCQ is outlined. The design and process of the consultation are briefly described. The report summarises key themes that emerged in the consultation and from these, identifies strategic priorities and enablers. Together these provide a recommended framework for the vitality and the health of PCQ over the next five years.

The consultation process was conducted with conscious dependence on God and with prayer for wisdom around process and clarity in the outcomes as the denomination collectively discerned future directions and priorities. It is offered to PCQ prayerfully for the discernment of Assembly.

The PCQ Review Working Group  
July 2021

## Commissioning of the PCQ Review and Terms of Reference

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The scope of the Review approved by Assembly in September 2020, was shaped by a series of recommendations from the 'Think Tank' of ministers that met in July, at the invitation of the then Commission of Assembly. These recommendations were subsequently adopted by the September 2020 Assembly, specifically instructing:

1. PCQ engage an external facilitator to guide us through a process to review our denomination.
2. The review canvass and include input from across all stakeholders in the denomination.
3. In terms of scope, the review address: PCQ's mission, values, culture, and identity; and PCQ's structure, code and processes.
4. The review conclusions and recommendations be provided to the 2021 PCQ Assembly.

The major responsibilities of the Working Group were outlined as:

1. to design the processes for conducting such a wide-ranging denominational review;
2. to facilitate a series of consultative forums in all PCQ Presbyteries, to ensure all stakeholders are able to provide input into the PCQ Review;
3. to draft preliminary conclusions in report form; and
4. to suggest recommendations for the Commission of Assembly to present to the 2021 PCQ Annual Assembly, including a series of strategic priorities for the denomination over the next 5 years.

## The Context of the 2021 PCQ Review

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*PCQ is currently in a unique position to review itself; with a transition in process from senior leaders to younger leaders, new financial challenges, and the impact of Covid 19<sup>1</sup>.*

There are times when a confluence of issues and events presents us with an opportune moment for review and fresh commitments to action. Such is this time for the Presbyterian denomination in Queensland. There are issues on multiple fronts that present both a challenge and opportunity in our immediate future.

As Presbyterians we have a deep theological commitment to the sovereignty of the Triune God and human responsibility. We are called to live out these theological commitments in this present moment, trusting that our Lord can use this time to renew and correct us and to be responsible under his loving rule to move forward without despair, holding onto and affirming our heritage and courageously addressing challenges that will bring life to future gospel generations.

As the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century dawned, few imagined the challenges that would unfold for churches, individuals and organisations as all adapt to the reality of a global pandemic and its consequent social restrictions. At the same time, PCQ faces a financial crisis, which as it continues to unfold through 2021, sees the denomination currently in receivership. The PresCare crisis prompts a deep sense of the need to reflect on the functional health of our denomination. It is now forty-four years since Union and over the last few years there has been a significant transition from the baby-

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<sup>1</sup> The Commission of Assembly 2020

boomer generation that has provided leadership, to a younger generation of leaders. Finally, our culture and society has moved from affirming a broad Christian consensus to being broadly secular.

This Review was initiated as the second of these events was in the early stages of unfolding and realisation of its full extent was still unknown. While the Review clearly has a scope beyond these recent events, each continue in their own way, to shape and challenge the process and content of the review. Similarly, they continue to shape churches, Presbyteries and the State Assembly of PCQ. While these most recent events are foremost in the minds of many, the implications of each of these for the review are outlined below.

### **The impact of COVID19 on churches, ministers and leaders**

The restrictions on public gatherings and social contact arising from the requirement to observe social distancing during COVID19 outbreaks through 2020 and now 2021 continue to have a significant impact on the Christian church throughout Australia. Most denominations are reporting rates of re-engagement between 70% and 80% of pre-COVID19 attendance and participation<sup>2</sup>. Two age cohorts are re-engaging more slowly than others. These are, the elderly, from concern about the health implications of potentially contracting COVID19, and young adults, who appear to have accelerated a movement toward less regular attendance and less committed participation in local congregational activities. The impact on rural and regional churches overall appears less than on large urban churches where restrictions tend to be experienced more intensely.

The impact of COVID19 on ministers and church leaders has also been significant. Many are experiencing high levels of fatigue and burnout because of changing workload, lack of normal support processes, pressures of maintaining church communities, being unable to take regular leave, and being isolated from extended family members.

As reflections about church health, vitality and the wellbeing of ministers and elders were significant aspects of the review, the data gathered and presented here needs to be interpreted in the light of the ongoing impact of COVID19.

### **The PresCare Crisis of 2020-2021**

The second significant context for this Review is the ongoing impact of PresCare, the arm of PCQ acting as a commercial aged care provider, and the denomination's decision to move out of the industry. In March 2020, it became clear that PCQ should no longer continue to function in the "business" of aged care, and action was taken to sell off this arm of the denomination's work. It was as this task proceeded, that the Think Tank was formed that proposed the Review. However, it was as the Review proceeded, that the seriousness of PresCare's debts become known - ultimately leading to the PCQ voluntarily entering a court-initiated receivership. The impact has already been devastatingly felt across the denomination, and the implications are still in the process of unfolding.

The Review team was not tasked with the responsibility to investigate or reflect on how this situation has come about. Early on, the LPO's and Commission of Assembly saw the need for parties with financial and legal expertise to be commissioned with a forensic investigation and this has been initiated. Consequently, questions and responses directly addressing how and why the PresCare events occurred were excluded from this Review. This demarcation was made clear to participants in all phases of the Review process.

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<sup>2</sup> Source: Anecdotal information from the Baptist Churches of NSW and Anglican Diocese of Melbourne

Again, feedback given to the Review needs to be reflected on in light of these events. Some of the frustrations, issues identified, and even anger expressed at times, expose, or are at least strongly shaped by individuals' responses to the PresCare crisis.

While the demarcation is important, it is pointed out in several submissions to the review that many of the observations made are not simply reflective of the PresCare crisis but are indicative of longer-term cultural issues that PCQ does need to address. It is observed that many of these issues are related to the agenda of the Review. Observations around these cultural issues have been included in the Review findings.

### **Changes in the social standing of churches**

It has been a consistent observation from commentators and social analysts across the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, that there has been a notable decline in numbers, finances and the viability of denominational bodies in general within our nation and that this is in part the result of a shift in public perception of the Christian church.

The landmark Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, documented years of abuse and internal collusion to keep it covered up within respected church organisations. These revelations have eroded public trust in the institutional church and placed the church in a defensive posture around issues like child safety and the supervision of clergy.

The endorsement of Same Sex Marriage and the current social acceptance of gender fluidity, both place the traditional teaching of the church at odds with contemporary society. Religion is commonly caricatured in the media as largely irrelevant, out of step, and even potentially dangerous for a modern secular society. Legislation in other states, like the 2020 Victorian Prohibition of LGBT Change or Suppression Practices, indicate a potential trend which could significantly raise the stakes for Christian churches, leaders and pastoral ministries should legislation of this nature extend to other states and generalise to other areas of pastoral ministry or individuals.

Together these shifts place increasing pressure on both churches and Christian leaders. The costliness of serving in Christian leadership is increasing. Theological education and ongoing theological reflection enabling thoughtful engagement with society, insightful preaching and wise pastoral practice is increasing in importance. While increasing levels of support and training are required for ministers and leaders, in several denominations social pressure appears to be a contributing factor to fewer people choosing to train for full time pastoral ministry<sup>3</sup>.

### **An increasingly complex regulatory environment for churches**

The level of organisational administration required to manage the affairs of even a small church has significantly changed in terms of compliance with Federal and State government legislation. Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) regulations, Privacy laws, Employment provisions, Harassment and Bullying regulations, and Child Safe frameworks all create the need for accurate up to date information and processes to be available to churches, staff teams and Committees of Management.

### **Demographic changes impacting Queensland and Australia**

Mark McCrindle indicates that in the next 10 years Australia will become younger and older at the same time. This 'younger' trend has reportedly however abruptly stopped with last year recording Australia's lowest birth rate<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.eternitynews.com.au/education-2019/fewer-full-timers-heading-to-ministry/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://mccrindle.com.au/insights/blog/top-ten-trends-for-2021/>

Although unlikely to continue, a baby-boom through most of the 2010 decade is creating challenges for education and work with children across the nation. Queensland is above the national average in the percentage of children in all cohorts under the age of 20. Youth, family, and ministry with children will remain important in churches for at least the next decade.

At the same time a significantly large number of healthy financially secure retirees will continue to be active in society seeking meaningful involvement and connections. Engagement with healthy retirees and seniors will be a key element of church life in the next decade.

As the tail end of the baby boom generation retire, this will include a sizeable, experienced group of business, education and health leaders including many ministers. There will be a significant need for young, adaptable, fast-learning leaders to step up to the challenge. This will bring training, equipping, mentoring, and coaching to the forefront of many workplaces including pastoral ministry in the church.

Finally, the cultural mix in Australia is set to increase substantially in diversity. Although temporarily at a halt, immigration itself and the higher-than-average birth rate among new Australians will mean that the nation will become increasingly culturally diverse and globally interconnected. While this reality is not as evident in regional Australia as it is in metropolitan Sydney and Melbourne, it will impact the future of all churches.

Widespread use of mobile technology coupled with internet-based connectivity means that individuals now communicate, connect and network with each other quite differently than they did even 5 years ago. The term 'COVID19 Accelerator' has been used to describe the significant increase in the use of these technologies through the current pandemic. Connectivity means that traditional barriers like geographical distance play a less significant role, while new barriers need to be navigated like maintaining access to constantly changing technology and services, as well as adapting to the subtle differences of online communication and meeting processes.

Echoes of each of these contextual factors were heard in different places in the consultation process. Some of them inform specific observations made and others help provide insight into why particular findings emerged. These are highlighted where appropriate. The context is taken into consideration in the recommendations offered within the Strategic Framework.

## Review Design and Consultation Process

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Once appointed, the Review Working Group met on several occasions to design the consultation process for facilitation in the first part of 2021.

### **Four papers reflecting on key questions raised in the review**

From the Scope and Terms of Reference for the Review, five 'key questions' were generated by the Review Working Group and several leading PCQ thinkers were asked to prepare papers as discussion starters for the Review Process. These papers were distributed via the PCQ website and via a PCQ restricted Facebook site established specifically for the Review where discussion of them and engagement with the ideas presented was encouraged.

Papers were received and distributed from:

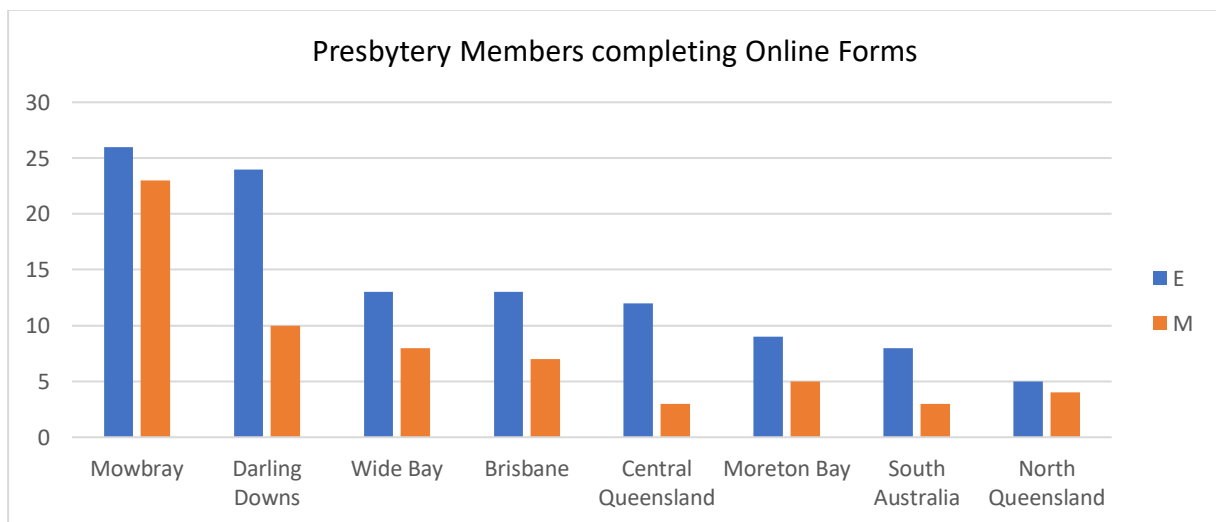
Mark Baddeley  
 Robyn Bain  
 Andrew Richardson and  
 David Thurston

A summary of these papers and the responses to them is included in the report. Eight well-crafted responses to these papers were received via email. The review team acknowledges those who prepared and responded to the papers. Some made their responses available via Facebook others submitted them directly to the Review.

**Eight onsite Presbytery consultations**

In order to foster listening, engagement and collective discernment, facilitated conversations were conducted within each Presbytery by members of the Review Group. In each location, these occurred over three ninety-minute sessions and were framed by questions relating to the functioning of Session, the functioning of Presbytery, interactions with committees, church offices and Assembly. There were opportunities to collect both hard polling data and soft comment group discussion data. Importantly, in terms of process, participants had the chance to engage with each other to ‘see’ where each other ‘stood’ on various issues and to listen to each other in group discussion. Anecdotal reports from participants indicated that the process itself had opened up pathways for Presbyteries to work on areas that arose in the consultation prior to the findings of the report being released.

Complementing the face-to-face facilitated consultations, all members of Presbyteries, including those unable to be present on the day, were invited to submit their responses to 35 questions online via a google form link. 173 participants completed the online form which provided a significant amount of data. Most completed this prior to the live consultation and were able to bring their considered responses to the live session. These were encouraged to reflect further on what they had learned through the live consultation and update their responses. A small number followed this up and did so. Others completed the google form on returning home following the live session.



a) Figure: Elders (E) and Ministers (M) from each Presbytery completing the online forms.

**Committee Consultations by Zoom**

Executive members of six Assembly committees were invited to complete an online google form. Zoom sessions were scheduled with committees that were able to meet with members of the Review Working Group. Consultation sessions of 90 mins to 2 hours were conducted with the Committee for Ministry Resourcing (CMR), Committee for Training for the Ministry (CTM), Gospel in Society Today (GiST), Outreach and Nurture (O&N), the Queensland Theological College Board (QTC) and the Finance and Administration Board (FAB). 36 responses were received from committee members to the online form representing these committees.



### Interviews (by zoom) with Church Office staff and Letters Patent Officers (LPOs)

The review team conducted eleven zoom interviews with Church Office staff, Committee appointed staff and with LPOs. These were between 30 and 60 minutes long and notes or recordings of these were made available to the team for their analysis and reflection.

### Specialised Ministry Workers Online Survey

Invitations were extended to specialised ministry workers to complete an online google form and responses were received from fifteen. These were analysed and contributed to the findings relevant to each question.

### Facebook

Through-out the Review Process, a social media discussion on Facebook was monitored and moderated. The posts and comments were shaped by the distribution of papers and the posting of the Review questions. This proved an important contribution to the process and several significant submissions came in via the Facebook portal. The Review Working Group were conscious that there was not a formal process for every individual within PCQ to contribute to the review and Facebook was the closest tool to an open process that the team had access to.

Over 400 different users signed up to the Facebook page and some became quite active with posts and comments. 60% of users were male and 40% female. An age and gender distribution based on the month of May 2021 is presented below.

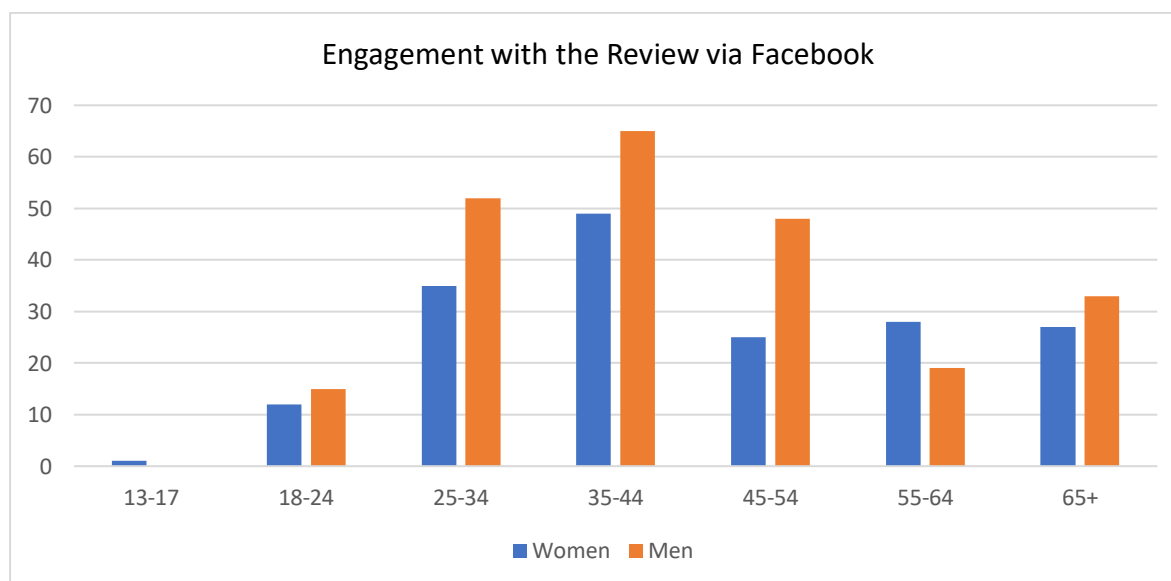


Figure: engagement with the Review's Facebook page for May 2021

### Report Drafting

During June and July 2021, this report was drafted and reviewed prior to its distribution to Assembly delegates and presentation to Assembly scheduled for July 26, 2021.

## Key Themes

Following is a summary of the key themes that emerged from all data collected through the consultation process. Many of these themes will be explored in greater detail later in the report and most form part of the recommended Strategic Framework for the future of PCQ.

- 1. Presbyterianism affirmed**

Within PCQ there is a strong commitment to the essential distinctives of the Presbyterian denomination and a desire to see these affirmed and their expression renewed in churches, Presbyteries and Assembly.
- 2. Theological formation and QTC**

QTC is highly valued within PCQ and its presence is an important contributor to the quality of ordained Ministers, theological reflection across PCQ, preaching and gospel ministry within churches.
- 3. Leadership training and development**

Ongoing training and equipping at all levels of leadership in the church, including the laity, Session, Pastoral and Specialised Ministry, Presbytery, Committees and Assembly, is critical to the future health of PCQ. There is a need for a range of programs to be developed in response to the changing environment in which the Christian church now operates.
- 4. Healthy cultures**

There is a strong commitment within PCQ to describe in clear, but general terms, the indicators of a healthy church, healthy leadership, and a healthy Presbytery while acknowledging that different expressions of church, leadership and Presbytery, depending on size and location, may all be healthy.
- 5. Accountability**

Accountability continues to be a highly valued within PCQ. There is renewed commitment to maintaining a formative and positive culture of accountability with workable tools available to Sessions, Presbyteries and Assembly.
- 6. Renewed spiritual leadership**

The leadership pressures facing both Elders and Ministers are increasing, creating needs for improved support, spiritual renewal, and resourcing. Peer networking and mentoring are increasingly important.
- 7. Oversight and governance**

Reflection on the task of spiritual oversight and the responsibilities of the governance of churches, people and financial resources has been important. There is awareness of the need to further develop insights and capabilities to enable faithful oversight and good governance.
- 8. A voice and roles created for women**

There is a willingness and commitment on the part of most in PCQ to engage reflection on ways within an affirmed complementarian framework that give women a regular voice within the courts of the church and to create roles in which they can exercise their training, gifts and skills in ministry.
- 9. The PCQ Code**

In order to be an accessible and useable source of regulation and guidance to Sessions, Presbyteries, Committees and the Assembly of PCQ into the future, a significant revision at least, and preferably a redevelopment, of the Code is required.
- 10. Clarity of purpose**

There is awareness within Sessions, Presbyteries and Committees that vision, clarity of purpose, focus and strategic priorities are needed to streamline and manage the increasingly complex ministries, activities, and business of the church.
- 11. Communication and transparency**

Clear open communication between all courts of the church and to local congregations is essential to the maintenance of the high trust and cooperation Presbyterianism is based upon. There is widespread acknowledgement that a lack of open communication has been an issue within PCQ.
- 12. Administrative services provided by church offices**

The efficient facilitation of payroll and employment services, management of PresSafe, availability of financial advice and process support in relation to the Code are all highly valued by ministers, churches and Presbyteries.

### 13. Deacons

There is interest in recognising diaconal ministry within local churches, clarifying the roles and enabling spiritual leadership through the exercise of this ministry.

## Introduction to the Strategic Framework

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In the ten sections that follow, a recommended Strategic Framework is outlined.

The term 'Strategic Priority' is assigned to five developmental actions applied to core elements of the PCQ that were identified as needing attention over the next five years. The term 'Enabler' is assigned to a further five actions which are not core elements or ends in themselves but are critical to enabling the priority elements to become vital and healthy.

The descriptions and comments under each Priority and Enabler are summaries of the information, submissions and reflections given to the Review.

Quotes are not attributed to directly individuals as permission was not gained to identify individuals' personal viewpoints when they wrote papers, posted comments, submitted forms and completed surveys. Where used, quotes are indicative of overall themes heard within the Review process.

At the end of each Priority and Enabler, list of 'Potential Outcomes' is documented. These are developed from proposals, recommendations, and pathways provided by participants and should be viewed only as an agenda for discussion and reflection by relevant stakeholders. They should not be read as either binding commitments or an exhaustive list of outcomes in relation to the particular Priority or Enabler.

## Strategic Priority 1: Clarify Purpose and Vision

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*There would be great benefit for PCQ if we could develop a shared vision. It would give us a more meaningful basis for decision-making, resourcing, and accountability<sup>5</sup>.*

- a) The need to clearly articulate vision and purpose at every level of church life arose first in several of the discussion papers and was consistently repeated throughout the consultation process. Clarity of vision and purpose were seen as critical for the future.
- b) While a specific analysis of the PresCare situation was beyond the scope of this Review, it was frequently observed in more general terms that lack of a shared vision and articulated purpose for PCQ has made it difficult to assess the activities the denomination should be involved in.
- c) Submissions to the Review called for a shared vision across PCQ to be developed, articulated and then applied within decision making processes across the church. There is little question that the mission and vision of the church in Biblical, theological and confessional terms is implicitly understood and widely embraced. What became clear in this Review is the need to explicitly articulate the vision in terms that provide organisational clarity and focus for the activities, gatherings and processes of the denomination.
- d) In normal times at both Presbytery and Assembly gatherings, the amount and weight of business and administration, detailed reporting and collective processing of items required by current agendas left little or no time for prayerful collective discernment of strategically important questions. The preoccupation with administration and process was interpreted as the result of a lack of clarity around the ultimate purposes of Presbytery and Assembly and a consequent inability to make necessary changes.

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<sup>5</sup> From the papers commissioned and distributed as part of the Review.



*A basic tendency, common to Presbyterianism, to act conservatively and to be process focused: where following the code is an end in itself and where there is little in the way of an articulated strategic vision that is being aimed at, things are just being maintained<sup>6</sup>.*

- e) Several committees have recently moved to clarify their purposes and articulate these in purpose statements, allowing this to inform both the process of their meetings and the content of their agendas. A suggested recommendation was that every Assembly committee submit a clear purpose statement to Assembly for approval and that the operations of the committee be reviewed annually on the basis of that purpose<sup>7</sup>.
- f) The need for clarity of purpose was articulated also at the local church level. A consistent observation was made within the Presbytery consultations, that the increasing complexities of providing spiritual oversight was raising the need for clarity around the purpose and role of Eldership and the functioning of Session. In particular, the tension between the pastoral elements of 'shepherding the flock' and the elements of 'governing the church' continue to grow as churches become increasingly regulated.
- g) Alongside clarity of purpose for Session, churches seeking to revitalise need to recapture a clarity of vision which enables the processes of change.
- h) The need for clarity of purpose echoed throughout the consultation process. Specialised ministry workers (SMWs) identified a clear position description as their primary need. Elders similarly reflected that clarity of responsibilities and expectations around their role was critical for their sense of serving the purpose for which they were ordained.

### Potential Outcomes

1. The articulation of a statement of shared Vision and Purpose for PCQ.
2. Assembly endorsed Statements of Purpose developed by each committee.
3. An articulated Vision developed by each Presbytery relevant to their own circumstances.
4. Local churches with clarified Vision; articulated, developed and owned in a local context.



*Our key strategic priority as a denomination should be to develop a shared vision of what a spiritually mature Presbyterian Church and leader (Ministers, elders, and other ministry staff) looks like in 21st century Queensland and to use this shared vision to assess, hold accountable and provide resources and encouragement for all our churches and leaders<sup>8</sup>.*

## Strategic Priority 2: Enable Healthy Fruitful Churches

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*The current challenges present us with a unique opportunity to again attempt the task of developing a shared vision of healthy ministry that is both sufficiently detailed to be meaningful, but sufficiently broad to allow the breadth of gifts and cultures necessary for supporting spiritually mature churches across our State<sup>9</sup>.*

- a) The construct of systemic health was inherent in the framing of the Review process from the beginning. Several of the discussion papers and the responses to them clearly placed the issue

<sup>6</sup> From the Presbytery comments submitted online

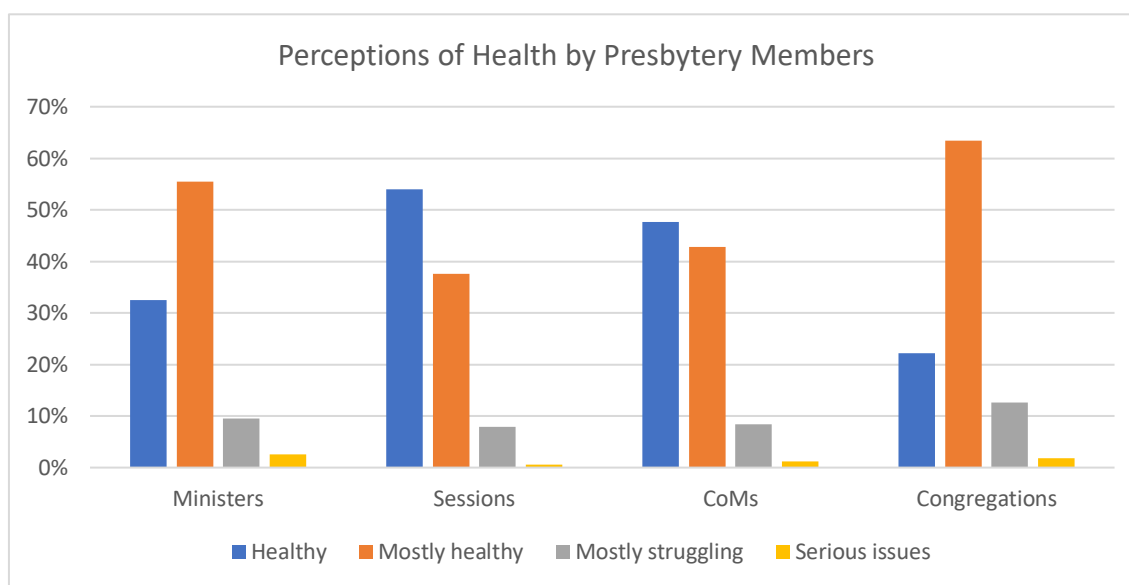
<sup>7</sup> From the Committee Consultations conducted via Zoom

<sup>8</sup> From an emailed submission.

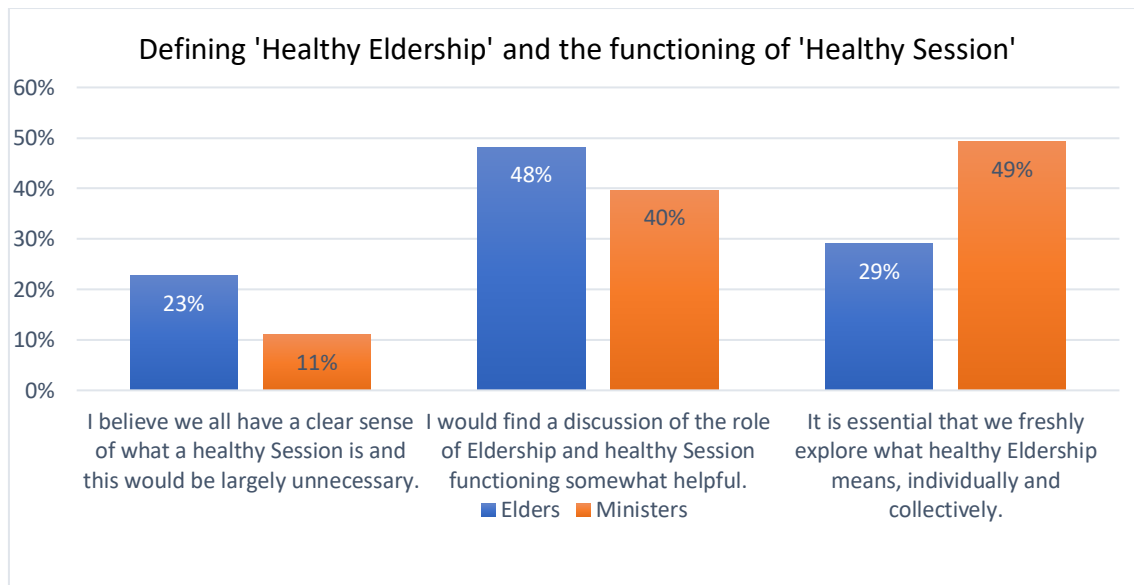
<sup>9</sup> From paper prepared for the Review

of the health of local churches within PCQ high on the Review agenda and a range of questions explored the issues of church health.

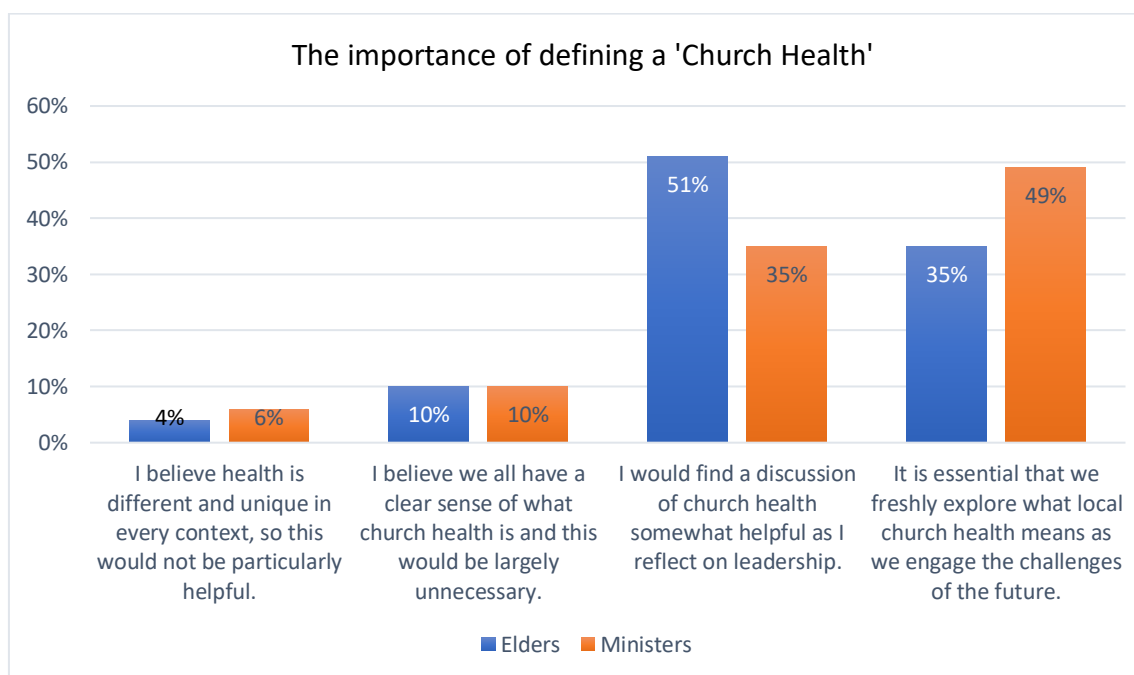
- b) The figure below outlines the perceptions 173 Presbytery members had of the relative health of their Ministers, Sessions, Committees of Management (CoM), and Congregations. The vast majority of each of these entities are perceived as 'healthy' or 'mostly healthy'. Sessions and CoMs are overall assessed as 'healthy'; Ministers, Congregations and Presbyteries are overall perceived as 'mostly healthy'.



- c) Figure: Comparative perceptions of the health of local ministries from the Presbytery consultations
- d) Both Ministers and Elders assessed 'Congregations' (above) as the least healthy overall among the comparative ratings given to Ministers, Sessions, Committees of Management and Congregations. In drilling down on this data, Ministers tended to score congregational health significantly lower than Elders.
- e) Elders and Ministers had slightly contrasting views on the relative value of discussing and defining what is meant by a 'healthy Session' and 'healthy Eldership' as indicated in the figure below. Ministers are significantly more likely to want to freshly explore the meaning of a 'healthy Session'.



f) Figure: Reflections on the value of defining healthy eldership and session functioning by Presbytery members.



g) Figure: Reflections on the importance of defining a healthy local church by Presbytery members

h) The overall value of clearly defining the characteristics and culture of healthy churches was expressed strongly throughout the review. When asked about exploring the meaning of local church health 84% of all Elders and Ministers saw this as either helpful or essential. 49% of Ministers and 67% of specialised ministry workers marked this as essential. In discussion around this issue there was broad recognition of the importance of defining both healthy leadership and healthy local churches, of providing means of evaluating and reflecting on health, and of identifying clear pathways for addressing ill-health or dysfunction.

i) Suggested characteristics of local church health

While it was beyond the purpose of the Review to offer a definition of a healthy Presbyterian church, the following aspects of local church health were commonly highlighted for consideration should such a definition be developed as a result of the Review:

- Maintaining a clear focus on gospel centred preaching.
- Anchoring the church in sound theology and Biblical teaching.
- Engaging in gospel mission and evangelism.
- Being a people of prayer, listening to God, and developing prayerful concern.
- Growing as faithful disciples, allowing life to be shaped by obedience to Biblical principles, dealing with personal sin and gently leading each other toward repentance, forgiveness and spiritual maturity.
- Having a loving concern for the wellbeing of one another expressed in pastoral and practical care.
- Equipping and engaging all members in serving on the basis of their gifts.
- Encouraging and supporting those with leadership skills to serve the church.

j) As reflected in the polling question above, the expression of these and other elements of health and the church practices which support them will differ significantly between churches in different locations and of different sizes. Accepting natural differences of expression was not seen to invalidate the advantages of defining a list of characteristics of church health that most felt would enable more effective local church ministry.

*We need a definition of health (which is not just about numbers), and then tools to measure the health of the local church<sup>10</sup>.*



*Local churches need regular health checks<sup>11</sup>.*

- k) Based on a shared understanding of the characteristics of health, it becomes possible to thoughtfully use this as a basis for designing tools and processes of evaluation, review and assessment. Ideally these would enable Sessions to reflect on the health of their own charges. It was suggested that these could also inform a more proactive Presbytery visitation process.
- l) Articulating the characteristics of church health and providing tools for assessment naturally leads to the potential for collecting and sharing resources related to each characteristic. Learnings, reflections and insights into ways PCQ churches and Presbyteries have addressed these areas if collected, organised and shared could be a rich source of encouragement and equipping for churches.

### Potential Outcomes

1. The characteristics of a healthy Presbyterian church agreed, outlined and described at an Assembly, or perhaps Presbytery, level.
2. Training and resources made available relating to each characteristic enabling churches to grow in fruitfulness and maturity.
3. Tools developed for local churches and Presbyteries to review and reflect on the health of churches, including those used in visitation processes.

<sup>10</sup> Comment in a Presbytery consultation.

<sup>11</sup> From a response to one of the papers.

## Strategic Priority 3: Support Spiritual Leadership



*It is impossible to have a healthy church without first having a healthy leadership<sup>12</sup>.*

*'It would be good to see Sessions and COMs supportive of ministers being cared for spiritually<sup>13</sup>.*

- a) The two quotes above illustrate two fundamental principles of leadership which were both clearly present in submissions and comments throughout the Review.
- The first is a recognition that healthy servant leadership is key to the overall health of any group, whether this is a large church or skilled and focused Assembly committee. Systemic health is fostered and developed by healthy leadership.
  - The second complementary principle is that healthy groups understand, appreciate and value the role of leadership. They know the cost to leaders and are willing to support and invest in the growth and development of healthy leadership. They encourage, care for and review their leaders. In the context of a church, they ensure leaders are nurtured and cared for spiritually.

b) **Healthy Spiritual Ministry**

In the current secular context of Australia, providing spiritual leadership to a Christian church is a complex, challenging and demanding role. Burnout in ministry is not infrequent. This leadership task has been made significantly more challenging in the context of COVID19 as constant forced changes, a decrease in active participation, isolation from key support networks like extended family, and increased pastoral needs in congregations all take their energy and vitality toll. Add to this, the current issues PCQ is dealing with, and the consequent uncertainty around the future, and there is something of a perfect storm for many Ministers and Sessions. Because the challenges and issues in the Ministry context are unique, finding sources of support is an additional challenge for many.

Figure: A word map generated from responses to ways in which support for ordained ministers could be developed.



<sup>12</sup> From a submission to the Review

<sup>13</sup> Comment in a Presbytery consultation



- c) The priority of developing leadership skills training for ministers has already been identified and it is the highest rated need of ministers. It is the subject of a separate enabling section later in the report<sup>14</sup>.
- d) Throughout the review process the value of the support, spiritual care and personal spiritual development for ministers through mentoring was articulated. After leadership training, it had the highest response listed among Presbytery members as they reflected on the needs for ordained ministers. Several churches indicated a willingness to fund mentoring for ministers so that the relationship could be more formal, regular and intentional. Presbytery is seen as an important source for mentors.
- In this context, the need for equipping and training mentors is recognised.
  - The requirement arising from the recommendations adopted from RCIRCSA mean that all ministers, in the near future, will need some form of supervision. While they are different in practice, there is potential for some overlap between the processes of mentoring and supervision.
- e) Peer networking with other ministers was highlighted as a source of encouragement and spiritual support. Whether based around shared ministry interests and needs, or around geographic proximity, informal networking is an effective means for both support and for challenge and growth. Attending training courses, conferences and seminars together, and building on natural connections made through Presbytery and Assembly, were valued as means to network with other ministers.
- f) The positive impact of Spiritual Renewal Groups currently being convened and offered to ministers and their wives within PCQ was highlighted to the Review as a key source of growth and spiritual health for those involved. There were several suggestions for this ministry to be extended.



*There should be Spiritual Renewal Groups available and mentoring accessible for everyone<sup>15</sup>.*

- g) Ministers commented that there is a need for Sessions and Presbyteries to initiate a formative review process for them which would provide empowering and constructive feedback including the opportunity to reflect on spiritual health.
- h) **Healthy Spiritual Eldership**  
Similarly to the highest felt need of Ministers, Elders identified leadership training as the critical need for developing healthy spiritual Eldership. The biblical basis of the role of shepherding remains foundational, however the skills and practices required of wisely overseeing a diverse 21st century multi-generational church are increasingly complex. Elders commented that training and clear expectations are needed. Training for effective leadership is the subject of a separate enabling section later in the report<sup>16</sup>.
- i) Elders shared with the Review their sense of responsibility and privilege to serve in this form of leadership. Key to their wellbeing and the development of their ministries within the church, is the issue of how to create and maintain realistic expectations around their leadership involvement. Many elders reported their desire to serve and lead well was in tension with the consid-

<sup>14</sup> See E1 Training for Effective Leadership - Ministers

<sup>15</sup> From a Presbytery Consultation

<sup>16</sup> See E1 Training for Effective Leadership – Training for Elders

erable demands the role places on family life and the personal cost of carrying the weight of spiritual and pastoral responsibility. Ministers rightly manage the expectations of their role as far as possible within their employment expectations. While this is appropriate, the ministry of Elders is voluntary, and their willing service is usually in addition to their normal work hours. The lack of recognition of this reality in the scheduling and length of meetings (i.e. particularly Presbytery and Assembly) in which elders are expected to participate, is a tension for many.

- j) Central to the functioning of spiritual leadership is a healthy working relationship within the Session that embraces mutual support, fellowship, accountability to each other and a constructive partnership with the Minister and staff. Elders are looking for a healthy sense of teamwork, involvement and relationship on their Session.
- k) Within this Review consultation, there is a clear movement away from the expectation that elders will actively serve for life. Over half of all Presbytery members would like to see an appropriate means for elders to be released from the expectation of serving for life. Connected to this was the idea of elders being able to take a Sabbatical break in which they sought refreshment, further training and spiritual renewal. Around one quarter of Presbytery members suggested that appointing elders for specific terms of ministry, followed by a break with the potential for a further term should it be desired and affirmed by the Session, would be healthy for elders and for the Session. The current life term is anecdotally a deterrent for younger men seeking to serve as elders.

*We have inherited life-long eldership for historical reasons rather than theological convictions and it comes with weaknesses.*



*Eldership is too important to our polity, and especially in a possible minister-drought future, to be satisfied with it not-quite working to its best performance. Our strategic needs encourage us to look at the issue of terms again, and see what can be done.*

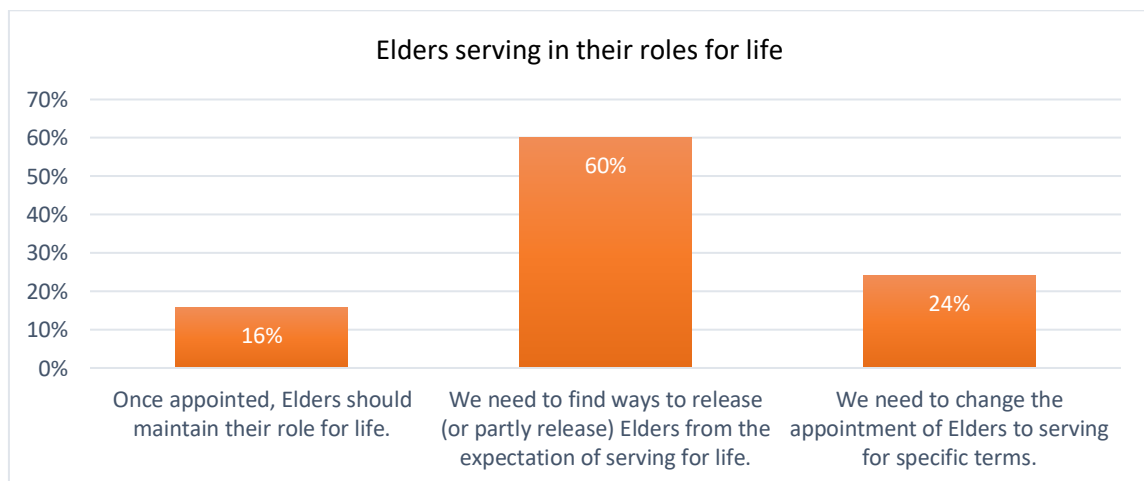


Figure: Responses from Presbyteries to whether elders should serve for life.

- l) The need for developing the ministry of prayer within Session meetings and also encouraging prayer for Session as they lead the church was highlighted.
- m) Establishing annual spiritual retreats for elders which enabled personal and spiritual health was mentioned on several occasions to the Review. These retreats would be designed not only for the Session of a specific church but also potentially shared retreats for Elders across a Presbytery or even more widely across PCQ.

- n) Value was placed on the concept of each Session conducting a regular spiritual review of its functioning. This would include each Elder reviewing their own contribution and the group reviewing their relationships together, their support and working relationship with the Minister and the spiritual health of Session collectively.

### Potential Outcomes

1. A range of mentors, supervisors and coaches, trained and active in the support and the spiritual development Ministers and Elders.
2. Spiritual Renewal Groups provide spiritual nurture and support.
3. Active formal and informal networking of Ministers, Elders and Specialised Ministry Workers.
4. Retreats for Elders allowing networking, spiritual formation and encouragement in ministry.
5. A pathway for Elders to step down from active ministry periodically due to life circumstances or to take Sabbaticals for refreshment and renewal.
6. Elders have specific terms of appointment to active ministry.
7. Formative reviews provide constructive feedback, encouragement and direction to Ministers, Elders and Sessions.

## Strategic Priority 4: Renew Presbyteries

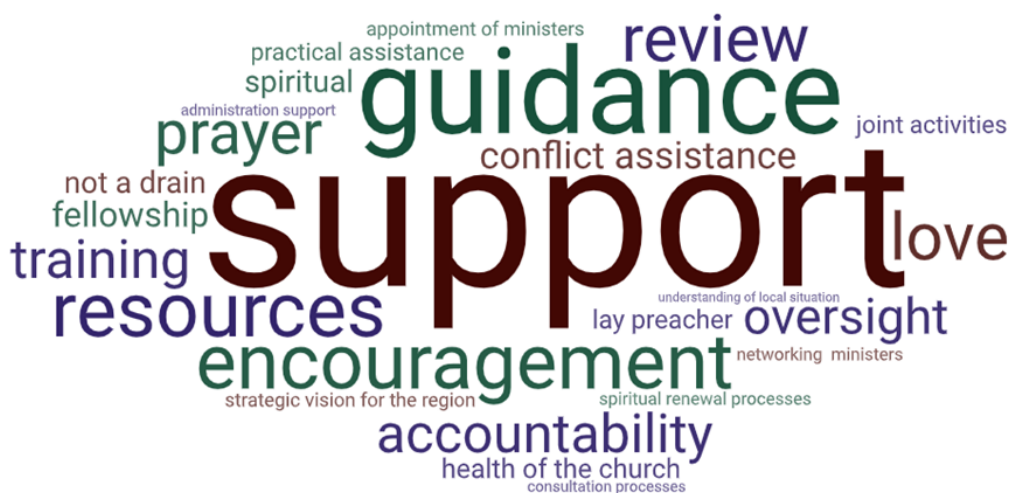
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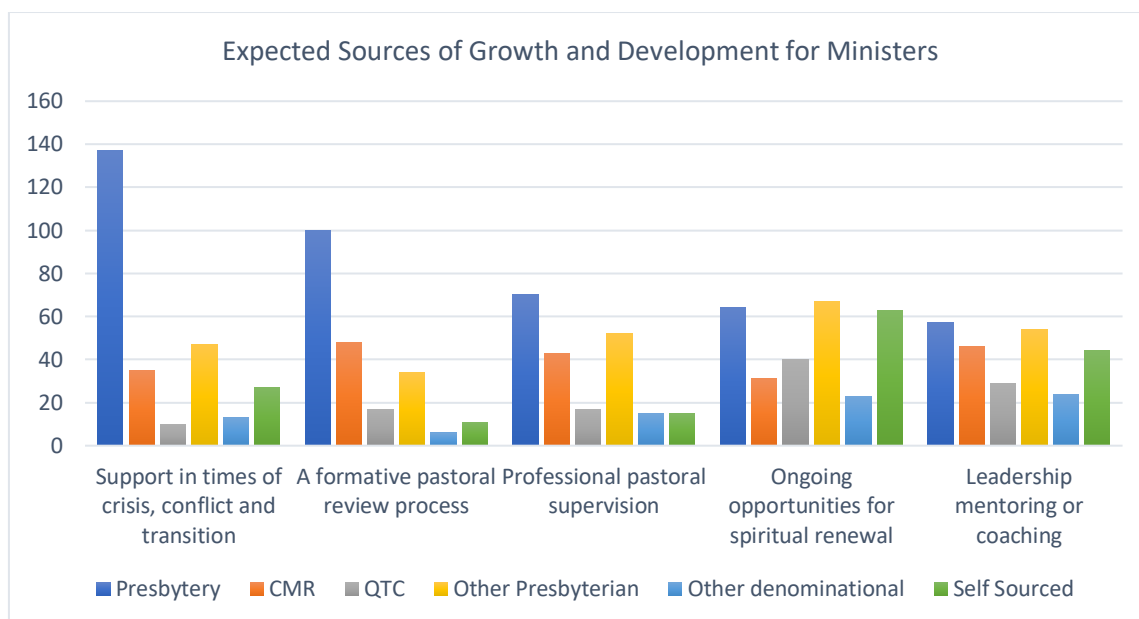
*The task of Presbyteries should be the spiritual oversight (and accountability) of local churches. Denominational committees and leaders should be focused on resourcing Presbyteries to do this work well.*

- a) The Review group facilitated seven face-to-face and one zoom consultation (South Australia) in the PCQ Presbyteries. The second of three sections of the consultation explored questions around the health and function of Presbyteries. This part of the consultation generated the widest variety of responses in the data collected, indicating there was less shared understanding around the health and functioning of Presbyteries than around any other entity within PCQ.
- b) Overall, the picture presented by participants of Presbyteries was healthy. Although of all courts surveyed for perceptions on health, several Presbyteries attracted a cluster of the lowest scores and the most negative descriptors.
- 71% of those responding to the surveys saw their Presbytery as healthy or possessing most aspects of a healthy culture. These tended to be described in predominantly positive terms commonly using words like ‘supportive’, ‘caring’, ‘welcoming’, ‘godly’, ‘relational’, ‘prayerful’ and ‘collegial’.
  - 24% saw aspects of healthy culture only rarely demonstrated and a further 5% felt their Presbytery was clearly not healthy. These were described with terms like ‘conflicted’, ‘cliquey’, ‘irrelevant’, ‘cold’, and even ‘dysfunctional’.
- c) As discussion unfolded around what might indicate the health of Presbyteries, it became clear that there is a significant question still to be resolved around what being Presbyterian should look like, the purposes of Presbytery and the nature of the relationship between Presbytery and local churches. Presbyteries will need a renewed understanding of their purpose and function before a discussion of their health can be fully engaged.

- d) While there are assumptions around the purpose of Presbytery inherent in each of the points below, the indicators of a healthy Presbytery offered to the Review were:
- Christ centred, gospel focused, prayerful oversight of local ministries.
  - A warm collegial environment which allowed honest sharing and also robust discussion of issues in a high trust atmosphere.
  - A shared vision and strategic focus for the work of the Presbytery.
  - Open transparent communication between Presbyteries and churches so that mutual understanding and prayer are fostered.
  - Efficient processing of necessary business to enable time for strategic discussion and prayer.
  - Providing training, resources, mentoring and supervision to Ministers, Elders and Specialised Ministry Workers.
  - Proactive support, encouragement and care for Ministers and their families including providing accountability and a formative review process.
  - Proactive support for the health of local churches through accountability, oversight and a formative church health review process.
  - The capacity to assess, consult, facilitate, mediate and arbitrate in complex and difficult church situations.
- e) A summary of the input from Presbyteries on the elements a healthy Presbytery would provide to local churches is contained in this word cloud.



- f) Figure: A word cloud of reflections on what a healthy Presbytery should contribute to a local church generated from discussion and responses at the Presbytery consultations.
- g) When asked where they saw their primary source of support, growth and development, most Ministers saw this coming from a healthy Presbytery. There was acknowledgement through the review process that Presbyteries do not tend to have proactive pastoral support and development high on their agendas. They act when things deteriorate and become an issue but are not always ready to be proactive in their support of Ministers and of churches.



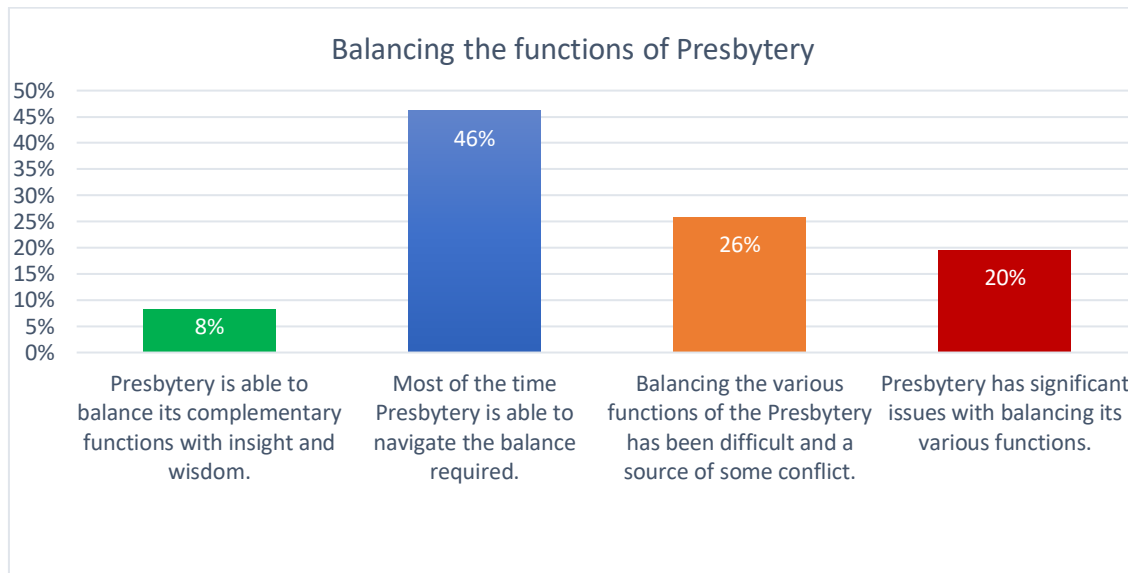
h) Figure: Sources of support, growth and development for Ministers.

#### Issues impacting the effectiveness of Presbyteries.

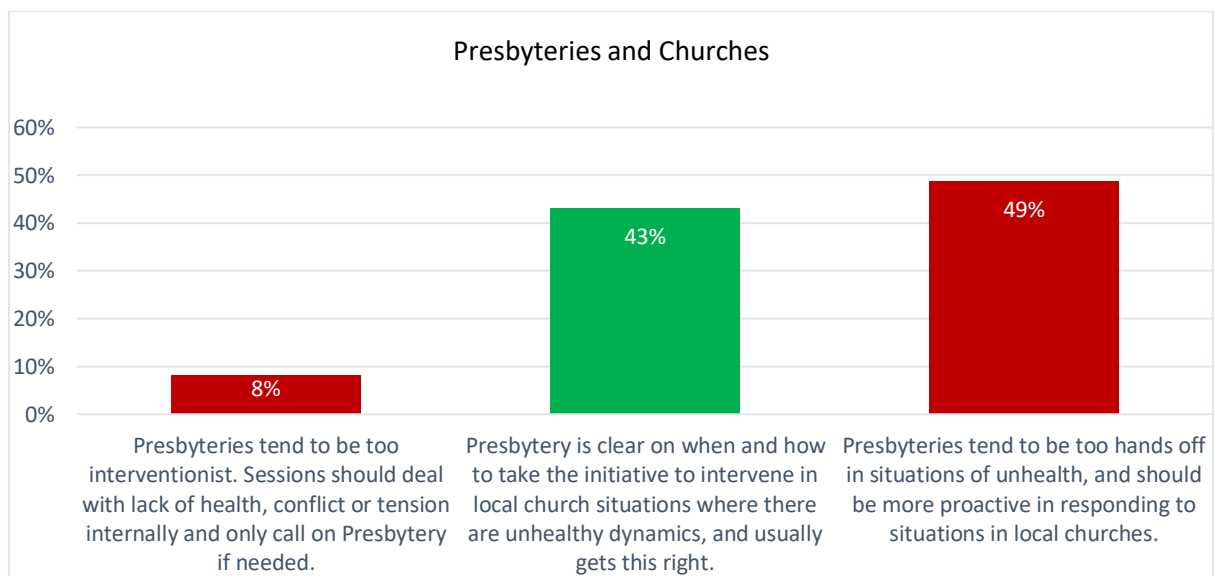
- i) The primary structural issues impacting the effectiveness of Presbyteries were listed as size and distance. In larger Presbyteries, members reported being less involved and do not know each other well. The observation was made in these Presbyteries that there were too many charges and churches to adequately oversee them all.
- j) In regional Presbyteries, distance creates a wide range of issues for effective functioning and was mentioned as the major issue impacting effectiveness. A consequence of COVID19 has been opening the way for improved communication and networking through technologies like Zoom. While there are limitations to these forms of communication, they do fill an important gap for Elders and Ministers separated by significant distances. As technology improves it is likely to become more important in the future.
- k) The observation was also made that those churches of different size and resources, need to work out how to function well together in the same Presbytery for mutual benefit.
- l) The relationships within some Presbyteries have been impacted by difficult and complex local church histories with their Presbytery which have left residual distrust.
- m) Two thirds of all responses indicated that overall Presbyteries handle conflict and disagreement well and that honest open debate was usually conducted in a supportive environment. There were 20 responses indicating that the capacity for healthy discussion and discernment had improved significantly in their experience over years in Presbytery. A similar number indicated there was still an occasional need to address instances of poor behaviour. Around 15% felt that training in managing differences would assist the capacity of Presbyteries to deal with conflict.
- n) A consistent observation was offered that Presbyteries tend to be preoccupied with business and administrative detail and appear unable to make adequate time to think about gospel ministry in the region, proactive care for churches or the wellbeing, health and leadership development of Ministers. Time for meals and retreats, spiritual encouragement and fellowship were valued by most Presbytery members, however most wanted also to keep meetings streamlined

and effective. The idea of enabling Presbyteries to prepare well for meetings and to employ the use of consent agendas was suggested.

- o) Two charts below indicate the perceptions Presbytery members had about the role of Presbytery in relation to local churches.



- p) Figure: Perceptions of how well Presbyteries are able to balance their support and accountability relationships with local churches.



- q) Figure: Perceptions of whether Presbyteries tend to be too 'hands off' or too interventionist in their relationship with local churches.
- r) One of the common concerns raised within the Presbytery consultations was the lack of an adequate basis in the Code (other than rule 4.34) for Presbyteries to engage with difficult or complex local church situations at early stages before unhealth causes issues, conflict escalates, or dysfunction becomes embedded. It was reflected that the capacity to assess, consult, and facilitate early in unhealthy or difficult situations can often bring about a resolution and save consid-

erable suffering, cost and loss to churches. It was noted that church health consultants, trained mediators or skilled members of Presbytery should be available to assist when called upon.

- s) The suggestion was made that Presbyteries also need accountability for how they are fulfilling their role in the denomination. This could include a report to Assembly, aligned with their shared vision and strategic directions and outlining how they have conducted their responsibilities of oversight through the year.



*Presbyteries should devote time to receiving regular (annual) reports from charges and leaders about how their ministries are seeking to promote maturity and how they are seeking to grow spiritually mature themselves. Some Presbyteries already do this, however if clearer measures of maturity were developed it would assist Presbyteries in having meaningful oversight of churches in their bounds.*



*Presbyteries should consistently undertake and complete visitations (or equivalent alternative and well-designed means of review to churches), even when no obvious problems have been flagged, or when resistance to accountability and review is met. They should consistently apply searching accountability questions to leaders across the board as well as providing encouragement<sup>17</sup>.*

#### **Potential Outcomes:**

1. An agreed denominational set of indicators for the health of a Presbytery.
2. Presbyteries proactively supporting Ministers and their families.
3. The size and composition of Presbyteries optimised for healthy functioning including the potential of boundary changes.
4. Presbyteries have competency in dealing with conflict internally and are confident of when and how to intervene in conflicted or dysfunctional churches.
5. Presbyteries have access to consultancy and facilitation skills or trained church health consultants to assist in matters of local church health.
6. Presbyteries undertaking a regular process of review, identifying changes in the way they handle business and the action they need to undertake to foster healthy culture within their meetings and as a source of spiritual leadership within the denomination.

### **Strategic Priority 5: Evaluate Committees**

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- a) The Presbyterian Committee system, as it serves the church, continues to be valued within PCQ for its capacity to engage co-operative work on specific issues or tasks, its ability to draw on the shared wisdom and experience of a wide range of individuals, its consultation with and support of Presbyteries, and the expertise in both governance and activity it brings to the domain in which the committees serve.
- b) It was, however, consistently observed that the functioning of PCQ Committees is currently in a state of flux and change, due in part to elements of the following:

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<sup>17</sup> Quotes are from two different papers

- the 'PresCare crisis', receivership and its implications for funding (e.g. the loss of resourcing grants formerly overseen by CMR, the loss and potential further loss of positions of paid workers overseen by CMR and O&N committees.)
  - changes of longer-term committee membership and leadership (several longer-term convenors, and members have transitioned in recent years)
  - significant changes to the working responsibilities of some committees (e.g. the sale of campsites has changed the focus of O&N)
  - changed rhythms of meeting due to restrictions related to COVID19 (Zoom meetings vs face to face taking place over much of 2020 and parts of 2021)
- c) In their interviews, several committees reported a renewed sense of focus and direction, and improvements in their functioning and culture over the last 12 months. This was true of O&N, FAB, CMR, QTC and GiST. In particular, the clear identification of the purpose of the committee had assisted a renewal of focus.
- d) It was noted that the knowledge and expertise required to serve effectively on several committees is generally accepted to be outside the normal training and experience of ordained Ministers and Elders. It was strongly suggested that these committees operate in an executive only mode, made up of suitably skilled lay people. The requirement of some formal training in Corporate Governance and potentially the support of PCQ for members to complete the Australian Institute of Company Directors Course would be appropriate. E.g. FAB and potentially the Property Board.



*We rightly require a theological degree to become a pastor but it is unclear whether we require requisite competencies or qualifications to fulfil (committee) roles requiring the skills as listed<sup>18</sup>.*

- e) Most committees reflected that the increasingly complex nature of their activities and work now required some level of training and induction of new members on joining the committee. It was commented by newer committee members that it took a full year for them to feel as if they understood the responsibilities and activities of the committee and were able to meaningfully contribute.
- f) Committees balance their governance and operational roles very differently depending on the nature of their responsibilities and whether they directly engage operational staff. Committees who offer oversight and governance of a specific domain by providing policy and guidelines for others to follow clearly require skills in governance and policy formation. Similarly, committees who oversee staff need clear levels of delegation, oversight and support and appropriate processes of accountability. Other committees are more operational working groups charged with completing a task or overseeing a process as a group. Some committees feel they operate in both governance and working-group modes. Several observed that the Code makes little provision for different types of committees or working groups, requiring the same level of reporting, record keeping and accountability for each.
- g) The presence of staff members on some committees means that boundaries around the operational and governance aspects of committee work need to be understood and observed, potential conflicts of interest need to be managed, and the place of executive sessions without staff present included in the agenda.

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<sup>18</sup> A committee member after listing the skills needed to serve on the committee being reflected upon.



- h) Reflections on the role and functioning of committees within the Presbytery consultations revealed significant differences in the knowledge and understanding of the various committees, and different levels of appreciation of the value attached to their areas of oversight and operation. Presbyteries identified communication with committees as a key issue.
- i) Similarly, in their committee interviews, executive members identified communication and consultation with Presbyteries and local churches as a significant issue to be addressed. Many felt that clear communication directly from the executive committee to Presbyteries would result in improved understanding of and interaction with committees' roles and functions.
- j) Executive members and staff reflected that the current system of Presbytery Appointees (Rule 5.35) sitting on committees leads to less effective decision making and less functional committee meetings. The intent of interaction envisioned by the Code (e.g. 5.39) between committees and Presbytery Appointees assumes a capacity to bring the view of Presbyteries to committee deliberations and the work of Committees to the Presbyteries.
- Presbytery representatives are expected to be able to meaningfully engage in multiple committees often with detailed and at times complex agendas.
  - The differences in working knowledge between executive members and Presbytery representatives means decisions are being made by individuals who do not share the same level of insight and understanding of issues. Where this is acknowledged, the time and questioning required to bring all to a shared level of understanding is frustrating for both executive members and for Presbytery representatives.
  - If the full membership of a committee meeting attend, it may mean that there are potentially 15-20 individuals in some meetings. This would be widely accepted as too many for an effective discussion, discernment and exploration of issues. The ideal number is suggested as seven.
  - The levels of communication, consultation and reporting by Presbytery representatives on behalf of the committee to their Presbytery, and on behalf of their Presbytery to the committee, appears from the reports of Presbyteries to be inconsistent.
- k) In a desire to improve the understanding between Presbyteries and Committees, suggestions were made around generating committees from Presbyteries rather than from both Presbytery and Assembly. i.e. all Presbytery Treasurers together would comprise FAB with no other appointees from Assembly, etc. While this suggestion came from multiple sources, it appeared to run counter to the assertion of executive committee members that while they recognised the need for improved connections with Presbyteries, there were increasing needs for Assembly to appoint appropriately skilled and experienced members to committees.
- l) Some committees reflected that over time areas of both real and potential overlap between their responsibilities and those of other committees have developed.

### Potential Outcomes

1. The documenting an appropriate 'Charter' for each Committee potentially including:
  - a. Statement of Purpose
  - b. Primary Functions and Responsibilities
  - c. Current Membership
  - d. Requirements for Membership (Training and induction, requisite skills)
  - e. Schedule of Meetings
  - f. Communication and Consultation Plan with Presbyteries

- g. Reporting and Accountability Processes
  - h. Committee Review Process
2. Clarity on the different types of Committees and the implications for reporting, expectations of membership and the conduct of meetings
  3. Improved management of the staff – committee
  4. Clear communication and consultation processes between Presbyteries and Committees,.
  5. Discontinuing Presbytery Appointees to committees reducing members to an executive of around seven only.
  6. The potential discontinuation and merger of some committees.
  7. The potential establishment of required committees.

### Enabler 1: Training Leaders

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- a) As indicated in the Summary of Key Themes, training and equipping in leadership skills was fed back to the Review Group as the primary need across PCQ.

- b) Training for Elders

When Presbyteries were asked an open question about ways in which the ministries and well-being of Elders in local churches could be enhanced, Eldership training was mentioned three times more than any other single response. The need for a systematic, authorised, practical and easily delivered training program for Elders was recommended consistently throughout the process. The areas of training highlighted included the role and responsibilities of Eldership, pastoral care skills, training in preaching skills, communication, understanding the polity and Code of the Presbyterian Church, managing conflict, teamwork and appropriate local church governance skills. This need was recognised by Elders themselves and by Ministers (in the Presbytery consultations) and by denominational leaders (in interviews).



- c) Figure: A word cloud generated from Presbytery responses to the open question around support for local church elders.

- d) Those reflecting on the training need indicated their support for an Assembly approved training program for newly appointed Elders and for those considering serving in Eldership. The potential of providing this training in an accessible online format coupled with being personally mentored by an experienced Elder was attractive. Complementing initial training was enhancing the ministry and wellbeing of Elders through offering ongoing training at least once a year as a refresher or upskilling program in an Eldership retreat or Eldership training conference setting.



*“We should give some thought to systematic and organised training for eldership rather than simply expecting men to work it out on their own. Men will work better if they are shown what they are expected to be and to do and given the tools to accomplish that.”<sup>19</sup>*



*There needs to be some kind of standardised training from PCQ for elders on what their role means and what skills they should be aiming to develop to help them serve better (communication, organisation, listening to and speaking with congregational members going through times of difficulty).*

- e) Training for Elders was directly linked in this review to the wellbeing of Ministers and their families. Trained Elders and also trained lay leaders in a local church enhance the opportunity for a clergy family to take annual leave or the Minister to take study leave. This training and its resulting capacity were listed as the second highest value for the support of clergy families.

**f) Post-college leadership training for Ministers**

The primary theological formation offered by QTC is highly valued by Ministers and Elders throughout PCQ and there is a strong desire to see this continue to provide the basis of effective pastoral ministry. What is clear though, is that the complexities of pastoral ministry, particularly in the early post college years, mean that there are specific pastoral and leadership skills in which further equipping in the light of ministry experience is needed. Specific areas for this training include: leadership skills, teamwork, emotional and social intelligence, pastoral skills, communication, conflict resolution, delegation, resilience in ministry and equipping processes for training church members for service and leadership. Again, both Ministers themselves and Elders identified this type of training as a high priority.

An Assembly approved post-college training program covering pastoral and leadership skills was seen as a key step forward in providing this level of equipping.

**g) Mentoring**

Receiving mentoring through the phases of life, stages of ministry, and specific challenges of pastoral leadership was seen as a significant factor in enabling long term healthy ministry. It is noted that mentoring itself is a leadership skill and mentors need to be trained and equipped for this ministry.

**h) Two weeks study leave for Ministers**

In recognising the changing landscape of church leadership and the challenges of being equipped to lead well, both Elders and Ministers supported a proposal for churches to provide for ministers to take two weeks study leave per annum for the purposes of leadership training. This would be seen as an investment in the leadership development of the whole church and Ministers would ideally share their learning with Session and other leaders in the church.

**i) Induction to Presbytery and Assembly**

Within the Presbytery consultations, Elders indicated that having an induction to Presbytery and

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<sup>19</sup> From a paper

Assembly functions and processes would have assisted them understand the responsibilities involved and enabled their active participation.

**j) Training for members of Assembly Committees**

A significant theme that developed in the committee consultations was the need for an induction process and general training in governance, communication and teamwork for all committee members, specific training if required in the domain of responsibility for the committee, and specific training for convenors of committees in facilitation skills and meeting process.



*“Governance training would be helpful so that all those serving on courts and committees have a basic understanding of their responsibilities and how to effectively fulfill them<sup>20</sup>”*

- k) The need for ongoing leadership training is linked to the increasing challenges of church leadership in our changing context. As indicated in the contextual statement above, the challenges of ministry are likely to continue to increase and the need for support and training will parallel this. There is a consequent need to reflect on modes of delivery and training processes, and also the accessibility and maintenance of up-to-date training resources.

**Potential Outcomes**

1. An Eldership Training Course potentially able to be delivered online
2. Conference / retreat style training events for Elders
3. A post-college leadership training program for ministers
4. Mentoring to support and accompany training
5. Induction and training for new committee members
6. Leadership development training for Specialised Ministry Workers

## Enabler 2: Cultivating Transparency and Accountability

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*The culture of our denomination, as a denomination, should be captured by the phrase ‘fellowship in the Gospel’. This phrase captures both the importance of the relational side of a healthy denomination – it is made up of significant relationships that provide support, encouragement, and accountability. But they are relationships with a particular purpose – to do the work of the Gospel in growing mature churches. If we want a ‘fellowship in the gospel’ culture, courts and committees will need to keep in mind both the fellowship and the Gospel work aspects of the denomination in the way they are structured and conducted<sup>21</sup>.*

**a) Open transparent communication**

Hearing the assessments offered around the health of cultures within each of the courts of the denomination and reflecting with participants on ways to enable these cultures to be more faithful to the gospel and fruitful for the kingdom of God was a core element of the Review process.

- b) The need for regular open communication between all courts of the church and to local churches was a common theme in the Review. There is significant concern around the use of ‘closed

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<sup>20</sup> From a committee convenor

<sup>21</sup> From a submission to the Review via email in response to the questions posted on the website

courts' and the lack of transparency around issues that many believe they have a fiduciary responsibility by virtue of their commitments to the church to understand and engage with.



*'Closed court' has been used as a way of avoiding transparency and has been applied inconsistently. The business of presbyteries being confidential should be the exception, not the rule. There are some things that should not be public knowledge, however the majority of PCQ business should not be kept in the dark.*

- c) It was noted throughout the Review that communication and trust are directly related. That providing appropriate information in an appropriate context builds trust.
- d) The need for improving communication was recognised by Sessions, Presbyteries and Committees throughout the consultation. Many were already developing ways to improve their communication<sup>22</sup>. It was noted that there is significant potential for improved communication using digital technology like email, closed social media groups, and video.
- e) **Clear processes of accountability**  
While accountability was highlighted as one of the primary descriptors of a healthy culture and is highly valued within leadership and oversight, reflections on how it operates within Sessions and Presbyteries indicated a lack of clarity around process.
- f) Reporting is the primary process employed and was observed to work well if there is clarity around what expectations, standards, processes or activities are being reported against, there is honest assessment and reflection around functioning and appropriate actions suggested to address any issues.
- g) There is a need, as indicated by ministers in their reflections, for a formative review process that provides both accountability and also feedback and guidance for growth and development.
- h) Similarly, Sessions, Presbyteries and Committees all indicated the value of a review process which would provide accountability for their functioning and health.
- i) Recommendations were made to the Review that the visitation process engaged by Presbyteries become more of a proactive engagement enabling local churches to reflect in terms of accountability on their gospel focus, church health and needs for growth and change.

#### **Potential Outcomes:**

1. Clear communication plans outlining when and to whom and under what circumstances both regular and special communication should take place are developed for each court.
2. Information to and from Churches, Presbyteries and Assembly is regular, open and accessible to all.
3. Up to date technology is used to enhance communication.
4. A standard pastoral review process is developed and made available to Sessions and Presbyteries.
5. Sessions have a process of review.
6. Presbyteries have developed a process of review for their own functioning.

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<sup>22</sup> Including a Presbytery which created a short video on the spot to provide to churches around their retreat and participation in the review process.

7. The processes involved in church visitation are redeveloped to enable proactive engagement.

### Enabler 3: Engaging Members, especially Women

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- a) As discussion of health, culture and process unfolded within the Review, the issue of how to hear the voices and engage the involvement of skilled, experienced, and wise lay members of Presbyterian churches came to the fore. A focal point in this discussion was hearing the voices and enabling contributions of women. These issues were raised early in the process in several of the papers presented to the Review, and quickly gained traction in the Facebook discussion and in emailed responses to the papers. As a result, several questions, related to the engagement of women in local churches and in Assembly, were added to the Presbytery consultation process. Input related to both lay involvement and the contributions of women also came from consultation with Committees and with Specialised Ministry Workers. It is important to note that, with the Review focused on consultation with Presbyteries and Committees, relatively few women were involved directly in providing input to the Review<sup>23</sup>.
- b) It is important to note that the theological foundations for the ordination of Ministers and Elders, and for the complementary roles of men and women are widely accepted and affirmed within PCQ.
- c) The importance of recognising and creating pathways for the expression of the gifts, experience and skills lay people bring to their participation in church life was highlighted throughout the Review process. It was widely commented in the Review consultations that there is significant untapped potential in the contributions many lay people, both women and men, could make to the health of local churches, to assist the work of Sessions, and to Assembly and Presbytery committees and working groups.
- d) **Deacons**  
The potential for developing the role of Deacons was explored through the Presbytery consultation sessions. When asked about how strongly Presbytery members felt there was a case for creating a structure for Deacons, there was strong support from 23%. 36% felt this should be considered carefully and positively but not urgently. The remaining 41% of members felt the role was either not important or needed.

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<sup>23</sup> The Facebook page was an attempt to address this issue and provide a pathway for women to contribute.

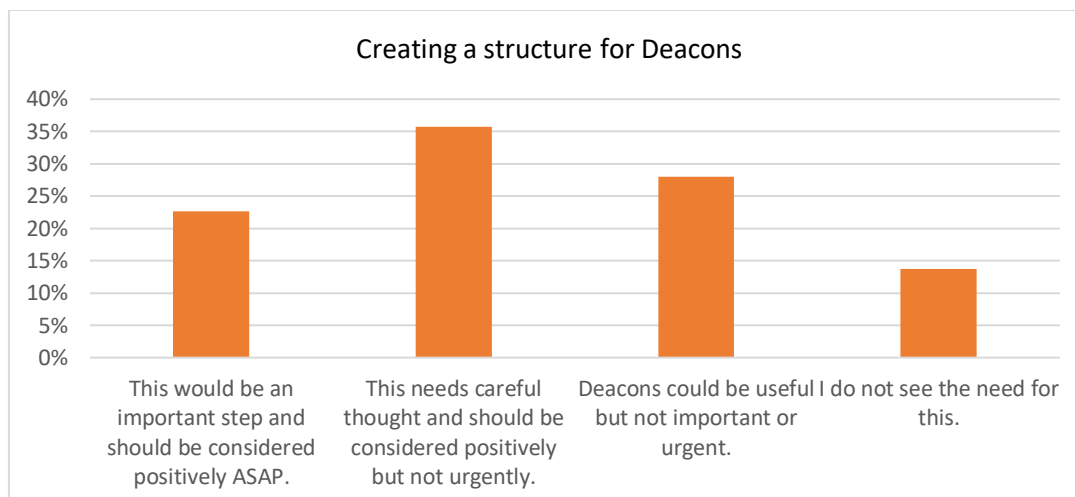


Figure: Presbyterian responses to creating a structure for Deacons.

**e) Creating roles for women**

The need to create appropriate leadership pathways and positions for theologically trained women within the church was seen as a priority within several Presbyteries. It was reflected that QTC does an excellent job of training women for ministry, but there are limited paid full-time positions.



*Theologically trained women are underutilised<sup>24</sup>*

- f) Within the Presbytery consultations there was support for moving beyond creating token opportunities to contribute to finding ways to normalise the inclusion of women in processes so that their voice and counsel can consistently be heard in the courts of the church from Sessions through to Assembly.
- g) It was acknowledged alongside the value of the wisdom common to both men and women, that women bring perspectives and insights to discussion of ministry, important to other women (who often make up more than half of all congregations) that are not naturally available to the men who oversee and lead. It is vital for the health of the whole church that this be heard and attended to.
- h) The two figures below indicate i) the level of support for engaging in a process of rethinking how the contributions of women and men together might be better facilitated in the local church and ii) finding ways to bring the voice of women into Assembly.

<sup>24</sup> A comment in one of the Presbytery consultations

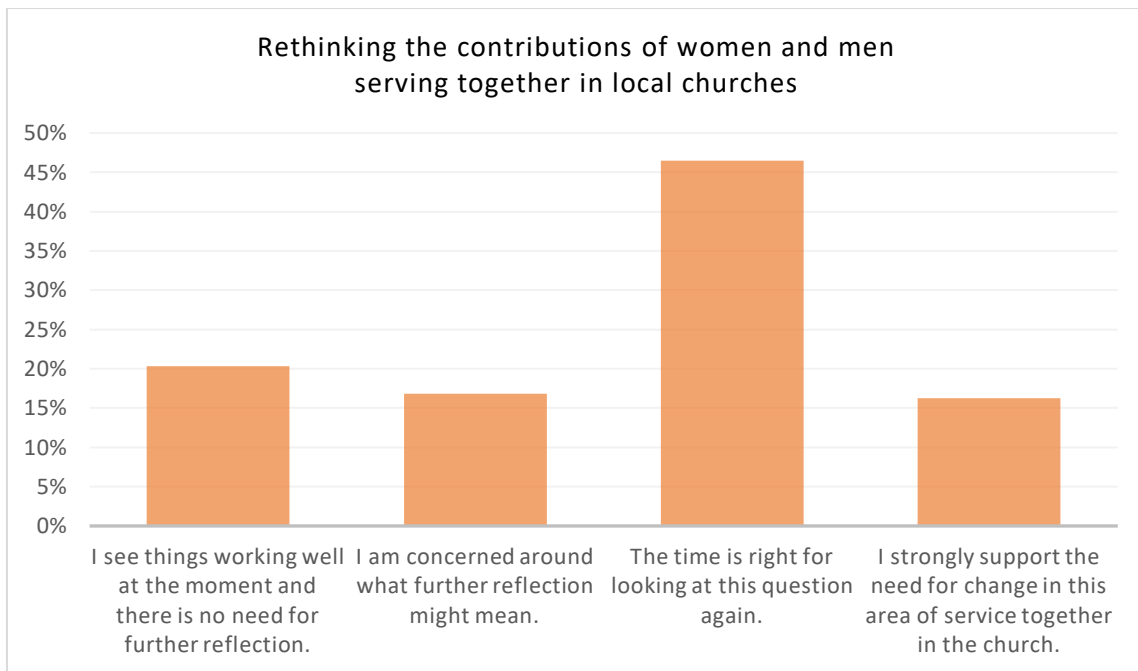


Figure: Presbytery consultation responses to the question of the need within a complementary framework to rethink the contributions of women and men serving in the local church context.

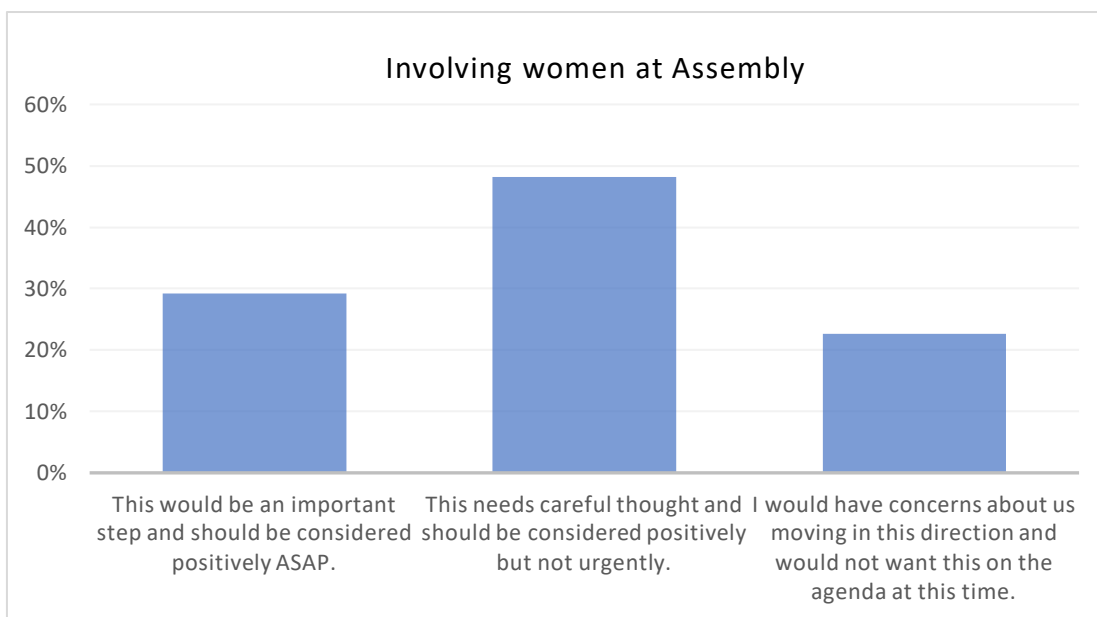


Figure: Responses to the question; While maintaining a complementary framework, what suggestions do you have around the potential for the involvement of women at Assembly?

- i) The Review group noted a degree of anxiety, reactivity and polarisation around this issue, some fearing it would cause unnecessary tension within the church, others concerned that the anxiety would mean that a matter important to many would not be treated with the depth and urgency required.

**Potential Outcomes**

- 1) Sessions and ministers being more intentional and proactive around identifying the gifts of lay people and enabling their involvement in the various ministries of the church.



- 2) Assembly developing a denominational stance on the participation of women in the courts of the church.
- 3) Sessions, Presbyteries and Assembly creating intentional, formal processes to normalise hearing and consulting with women.
- 4) Further exploration of the and ministry of deacons within local churches, Presbyteries and Assembly.

## Enabler 4: Restructuring Administrative Services

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*Much of congregational ministry involves management, administration legal compliance and financial skills. Identifying where assistance can be effectively offered to either skill people up, or to take some of this load off their workload, and then doing so, frees up time and energy that can be put into things that only professional and theologically trained leaders can do.*

- a) Particularly in the current context, the role of church office staff in providing a central point of information, advice and support to Ministers, Session Clerks, Treasurers and Presbyteries is seen as essential. There is clear support for this capacity not only to continue but to be developed within current constraints. These services were seen as time and energy saving to local churches, provided access to essential information and allowed a level of professionalism not available to most churches.
- b) The increasingly complex compliance environment in which churches operate is placing growing levels of demand on the churches and also on the church office team to stay up to date and to be able to service PCQ churches.
- c) The highest rated need for administrative support is in the area of employment and particularly payroll management. This includes Human Resource advice, leave entitlements, allowances, and general employment advice. Some frustrations are expressed around gaining accurate personal information particularly around leave entitlements. The appointment of a specialist Human Resource Manager to oversee this area for PCQ was recommended to the Review Group.
- d) The oversight of child safety compliance through PresSafe is the second highest valued church office process. This included keeping the blue card register, providing training in child safe practices, advice, and providing a process for following up issues and concerns in compliance with State Government legislation around children and vulnerable people.
- e) Within the continuing context of COVID19, managing gathering restrictions, meeting social distancing and mask wearing requirements, following instruction around collective singing, enabling contact tracing and understanding regional differences in requirements, all create a complex and changing environment for churches. The support and advice of church offices throughout COVID19 continues to be a highly valued role.
- f) Financial support and advice to churches was the third highest need for support. The training provided to Treasurers in financial administration continues to be important and appreciated. Church Office staff believe there were gains in efficiency possible through continuing to develop training and through improved financial processes. There was a recommendation for a higher level Financial Services Manager role to be created which would enable development of the capacity of church offices to offer support, training and efficient services.
- g) The provision of advice to churches, particularly to Committees of Management and officers in the follow areas is valued:

- Financial processes, assessments, grants, bookkeeping, GST.
  - Procedural advice on church matters, particularly advice on interpretation and application of the Code
  - Managing church insurances
  - Church administration advice and support
  - Advice and support in dealing with matters requiring legal assistance
  - Property advice in relation to purchases, sales and leases
- h) There is a potential organisational risk in the small number of individuals with a higher-level working knowledge of the Code and of key PCQ processes, systems and structures. It was recognised that the complexity of the Code was a factor which could be addressed over time through a process of redevelopment.
- i) Various options were proposed of providing a more accessible, online, easy-to-navigate knowledge bank of PCQ processes, information, resources, and practices, essentially an FAQ (frequently asked questions).

### Potential Outcomes

1. Well-resourced efficient church office staff able to support churches and Presbyteries with financial, legal, property, compliance and process advice
2. Up to date, accessible, online information, access to forms, process flow charts, FAQ of PCQ.
3. The potential appointment of a Financial Services Manager.
4. The potential appointment of an HR Manager.

## Enabler 5: Redeveloping the PCQ Code

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*“The Code has been reactively responded to for forty years. It is time to rebuild it from the ground up. There is too much detail at the highest level.” PCQ Senior Leader*

*The Code feels like many documents I’ve read where it has been patched, amended and revised to solve individual problems at particular times, and to do so in the most expedient way. Without taking a step back and looking at the document as a whole it becomes unwieldy, convoluted and filled with assumed knowledge and interpretation.*

- a) When asked specifically about the capacity of the Code, as it is, to serve the PCQ into the future, there is widespread support for it to be substantially updated and reworked.

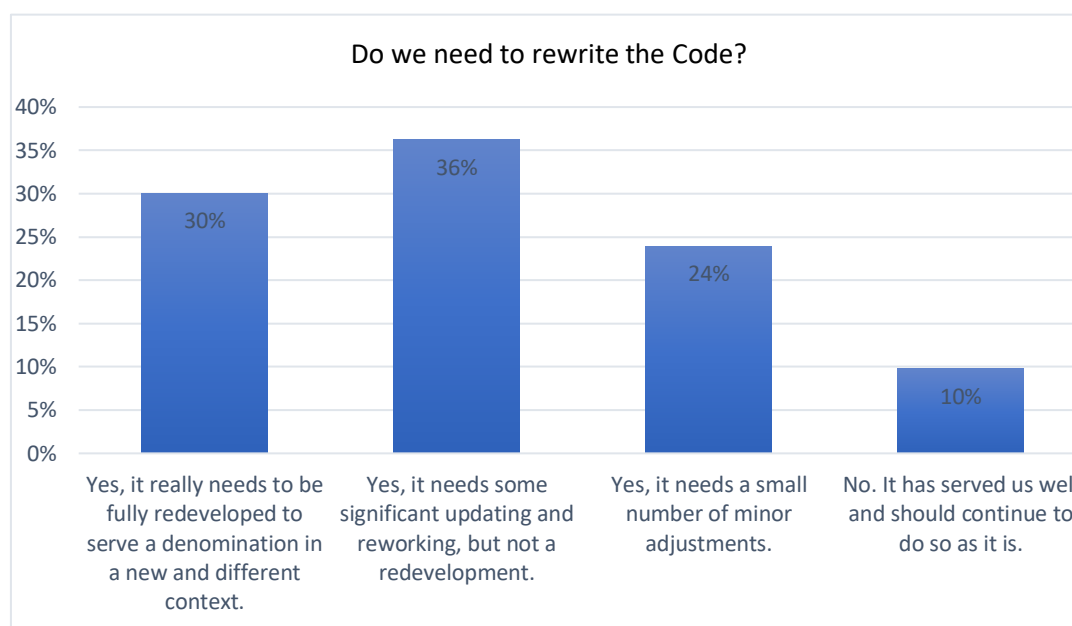


Figure: Presbyterian views on the need to rewrite the PCQ Code.

- b) The primary reflections on the PCQ Code are that it is too complex, it is inconsistent in places, it uses unfamiliar language, it fails to address a range of contemporary church situations, and it is not therefore 'user-friendly'. These issues mean the Code potentially creates unnecessary debate around its interpretation and often requires guidance on its application, both of which are time consuming and disempowering for Sessions and Presbyteries. It was written in a different church context and makes assumptions about patterns of church leadership which no longer apply to all churches.
- c) The observation was made, as in the quote above, that as a foundational document it contains both essential church principles and church structures but also includes a large amount of procedural detail which in contemporary foundational documents would be moved to lower-level derivative documentation.
- d) There are a range of contemporary realities of church life which are not adequately covered in the Code including: larger churches with multiple ordained staff serving in a team ministry and spread over multiple sites, the process and progress of church-plants, the use of communications technology to convene and conduct meetings, the electronic distribution of resources and the capacity for decision making via electronic means, dealing with contemporary standards required of Ministers such as Supervision and compliance issues like safe ministry, fair work, and workplace health and safety.
- e) While there is slightly higher support for the Code to be updated and reworked, rather than completely redeveloped and rewritten, there are good reasons for PCQ to consider a full redevelopment in the near future.
  - There is a significant likelihood that as the denomination emerges from receivership, the legal entity which provides the corporate underpinning of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland will change in structure and composition. This will require a significant rewrite of many sections of the current Code. A number of aspects of the current Code are likely to become redundant.

- An updated and reworked Code would not deal with the issue of too much detail at the foundational level, in fact it could accentuate this problem by adding provisions to deal with a range of elements not covered in the current Code.
  - The implementation of the Strategic Priorities in this review are contingent on a number of adjustments eventually being made to the PCQ Code. Debate and discussion around these changes may be more appropriately conducted in the context of exploring a broader redevelopment which would potentially place some of these in a different context in a rewritten Code.
- f) Some ideas for a redeveloped or reworked Code included:
- Clear statements of principle and the purpose of roles, rules and structures included as foundational elements of the Code
  - A fuller description of the key roles and offices within each of the denominational or PCQ courts; responsibilities, eligibility, appointment, standards, terms, and accountabilities. E.g. Communicants, Elders, Ministers, Home Missionaries, Clerks, Moderators, committee members, convenors etc.
  - Policies which outline the core theological principles which are to be applied in specific situations within the church and then the processes, procedures and guidelines themselves (appended to the Code so that they can be adjusted as required) E.g. Codes of Conduct, Candidature for the Ministry, Conflict of Interest, Dispute Resolution etc.
  - Clearly articulated authority and accountability for developing and changing each of these policies, processes, etc. according to the level of oversight. That is, which persons or bodies should propose changes, and which persons or bodies must approve those changes.
- g) Hesitation around redevelopment of the Code was expressed in terms of the time involved, locating the expertise required, level of debate and discussion required, and the potential overall cost of the process.

#### **Potential Outcomes:**

1. An outline adopted of how the Code might be structured to reflect contemporary Presbyterianism, including the type and status of documentation that is required at each level; Principles, Structures, Roles, Policies, Procedures.
2. Establishment of a process to draft and finalise a redeveloped PCQ Code over a 3-5 year period.
3. Integration of the corporate entity and structure that will be PCQ in the future.
4. Designing a transition process from the current to the new Code.

## Recommendations

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The Review report is a summary of the insights, reflections and contributions offered by many hundreds of individuals in both face to face and electronic form. Many contributed not only individually in completing lengthy surveys and submissions, but collectively, in listening to and engaging the views of others. While the input to the Review has been organised, weighed and analysed by the Working Group, the findings ultimately represent the views of those who contributed on behalf of the denomination. As the contributions to the Review have been broad, distribution of the report to all stakeholders is recommended.

Recommendation 1

**That the Assembly receive the report of the 2021 PCQ Review**

Recommendation 2

**That the Report of the 2021 PCQ Review be shared with all Presbyteries and Congregations.**

In delivering the Report of the 2021 Review of PCQ, the Working Group was asked to outline a set of Strategic Priorities for the denomination to adopt for the next five years. The report has been organised around the proposed Strategic Framework. It is important to note that in recommending the Strategic Framework for adoption, the Review Group is not implying that each of the items listed as 'Potential Outcomes' be mandated. These are items which are likely to be on the agenda for further reflection, discussion and potential recommendations to Assembly in due course should the Framework be adopted.

Recommendation 3

**That the Strategic Framework of Priorities and Enablers for the next five years be adopted and affirmed, recognising that the listed "potential outcomes" are neither exhaustive nor binding outcomes of adopting this Framework.**

### **Strategic Framework**

Strategic Priority 1: Clarify Purposes and Vision

Strategic Priority 2: Enable Healthy Fruitful Churches

Strategic Priority 3: Support Spiritual Leadership

Strategic Priority 4: Renew Presbyteries

Strategic Priority 5: Evaluate Committees

Enabler 1: Training Leaders

Enabler 2: Cultivating Transparency and Accountability

Enabler 3: Engaging Members, especially Women

Enabler 4: Restructuring Administrative Services

Enabler 5: Redeveloping the PCQ Code

Implementation will require a team to guide the denomination through the outworking of the Strategic Framework.

Recommendation 4

**That a Design and Implementation Team, with requisite skills and capacities, be established by the Commission of Assembly to consider the findings of the Review, and in light of the Strategic Framework adopted, develop and implement a five-year plan. This will involve consulting with Presbyteries, Committees and Assembly, reporting regularly, and preparing specific motions for discussion and approval by Assembly.**