



Presbyterian Church of Queensland

State Moderator-Elect

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Update from the Commission of Assembly

The Presbyterian Church of Queensland Assembly met at Central Church Ipswich over two weekends at the end of July and the start of August. The Assembly involved a mix of 'business as usual' matters and updates around the receivership. The Commission of Assembly also met this past week.

There are several pressing matters currently facing us as a Church. This communication updates you, as best we can, on the situations we are facing together, and our ongoing Gospel mission in our church communities around Queensland, South Australia, and the Northern Territory.

Receivership Update

The Receivers have advised that a directions hearing has been set down for late September, at this stage, at which the court will consider whether they can continue with the proceedings outlined in their report. It may be some weeks after that time before the court provides a determination.

QTC Update

One of the most pressing issues facing our denomination is the future of the Queensland Theological College. The receivers need to be paid for their work, and the Spring Hill building that is home to QTC and the denominational offices is the asset that they have earmarked to raise the required funds. The receivers have appointed an agent to manage the marketing and sale of the building. The expression of interest phase of the process will commence shortly and it is expected that the building will be sold by the end of 2022. This brings the deadline for QTC securing the funding required to purchase the building into the immediate future — with a deadline of weeks not months.

A separate legal entity has been created that can receive donations to secure the future of QTC. At the date of writing this QTC Foundation has received over \$2.9 million. This is a very encouraging start but leaves the QTC Foundation significantly less than halfway towards making a competitive offer for the building. You can find out more about the situation, and how to give towards the future of the college, at:

<https://www.qtc.edu.au/securing-the-future/>

In early August, QTC Sundays were held around the state, and many churches and individuals contributed towards securing the future of the college, as well as providing generous support to the development of QTC as a ministry of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland. The Assembly expressed its ongoing commitment to the college by pledging to financially support QTC as funding becomes available through the receivership process. We are committed to this vital work within the life of our Church. Please join us in praying that God might provide the funds required through generous partners and donors.

The College faculty have done an immense job keeping things running under the pressure of a pandemic and the receivership; their efforts saw 9 candidates graduate into exit appointments to Presbyterian churches around the state last year, and provided ministry training and theological education for a variety of men and women pursuing a life of service of the Kingdom.

Future Directions

The Assembly considered a number of reports from Committees appointed to provide us with ways forward beyond the receivership; for example the Future Structures Committee provided some preliminary guidance on the way the Presbyterian Church of Queensland might be legally structured beyond the receivership. One of the challenges facing us in this situation is that our corporate body is a Letters Patent Entity. We have been advised that PCQ may be the first Letters Patent Entity in the Commonwealth to be placed in receivership, and so, there are limited precedents for the courts to draw on in assessing our situation. Beyond this, there's a broadly shared view that this corporate model from the 19th Century may not be the best legal entity to use for our future. To directly address this question the Assembly authorised the Commission of Assembly to seek all legal, financial or other professional advice necessary to present a recommendation to the Assembly on the most appropriate future legal structure for the Church.

A committee appointed to implement recommendations from the 2021 PCQ Review consultation process has identified a couple of key next steps in implementing the findings of the review. This Design and Implementation Team has identified communication across our churches as a key area for improvement that will enable other areas of improvement to be implemented. The team identified the development of a denominational web portal — an intranet — to store key information for churches as a key step and they will be developing and rolling out a solution in this area.

Alongside the Design and Implementation Team, another committee was tasked with providing a concise paper for the 2022 Assembly which, “on the basis of a discussion of theological and philosophy of ministry principles, proposed a clear way forward for our denomination concerning the nature, roles and responsibilities of Teaching and Ruling Elders, Deacons, Presbyteries and the PCQ as a denomination.“. This committee has produced a discussion paper, “On Being the Church”, that will be circulated to Presbyteries for discussion and response by the end of 2022.

The Commission of Assembly will then convene a special forum specifically to discuss the issues raised in “On Being the Church”.

Please keep praying for those in our committees as we continue to grapple with the present situation while looking forward to how we might learn from our mistakes and commit ourselves anew to the work of the Gospel in our churches.

Stipends

Cost of living challenges are impacting all of us both in our church budgets and our household budgets. The Stipends Commission is tasked with setting the stipend for ministry staff with regard to the cost of living. As no stipend increases had been applied to keep pace with inflation since 2020, the Commission approved an increase of 3.6% to the stipend for ministry staff from April 2022. The Stipends Commission also stressed to the Assembly that the rates set by the Committee are ‘minimums’, and that where possible churches are encouraged to go beyond those minimums to provide for the needs of those tasked with the work of the Gospel.

The Commission has also faced some complications around a tax ruling concerning expense payment fringe benefits (EPFB) for church ministry staff. The EPFB arrangement provides significant financial benefit to local churches in paying staff however recent legal advice indicates that many non-ordained ministry workers may now not be eligible for EPFB. This outcome will present challenges for church budgets in an already challenging time. The Commission will continue to advise treasurers about the impact of these changes.

Ministry with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

The Gospel in Society Today committee has produced a report on Gospel ministry to and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; the report was prompted by questions about the place of Acknowledgements and Welcomes to Country in church events.

The paper is available on the GIST website: <http://www.gist.org.au>

The Assembly appointed an ad hoc committee to consider how we might move beyond the recommendations of this paper to provide practical guidance for ministering to and with Aboriginal people around our state through our churches.

Risk Management Employment Updates

The Assembly appointed Helen Underwood as our Child Safety Risk Management Officer. Helen has an extensive background in education, including as a Principal. She has already begun liaising with appropriate child safety authorities, reviewing PCQ child safety policy and procedure, and is looking forward to developing her connections with our church communities. She can be contacted by email at helen.underwood@pcq.org.au and a mobile contact number will be available on the contact page of the PresSafe website (pressafe.org.au) in the next couple of weeks.

We are still seeking a Workplace Health and Safety Compliance Officer and Property Audit to work across our churches. Please consider the attached Position Descriptions and forward them to any suitable candidates.

Commission of Assembly

As part of our commitment to continuous improvement the Commission of Assembly has been conducting a review of its purpose under the Code, and how best to serve the church while understanding the limits that should guide our work. The Commission will provide ongoing updates around these discussions as we seek to make our operations more transparent and improve our governance model.

Please keep praying for wisdom and guidance for all those serving our denomination. Pray for Helen Underwood in her new role and that the Lord will provide the right people to fill the other Risk Management positions. Please continue to pray for the future of QTC and the court as it makes decisions around the Receivers report.

For and on behalf of the Commission of Assembly,

Yours sincerely in Christ



(Rev) Andrew Purcell
PCQ Moderator-Elect