

A Change in Living Church Governance

What's Happening and what is this document about?

There are some upcoming changes that are being made to the governance structure here at Living Church. This document is going to let the Living Church community know what's happening and why. To do this, we'll outline the typical means of church government in the Presbyterian Church of Queensland. Next, we'll explain the current governance structure at Living Church and the reasoning behind its adoption. Then, we'll provide you with a summary of the evaluation of this structure. Finally, we'll present the new model for governance at Living Church and give you a brief timetable for implementing these changes.

Typical Means of Government in the PCQ

The document that explains the how the Presbyterian Church of Queensland organises itself is called the *Presbyterian Church of Queensland Standing Orders and Rules and Forms of Procedures* (henceforth referred to as the '*PCQ Code*'). In the *PCQ Code* it says,

“the Kirk Session is a Court of the Church...consists of the Ministers and Elders of the Charge, and other Ministers and Elders appointed by the Presbytery in accordance with the rules of the Church.” (*PCQ Code* 3.1)

Later it explains the Kirk Session,

“has jurisdiction and powers of government, discipline and oversight extending over the Charge, and over all Communicants and Adherents of the Congregation, and other persons who have associated themselves for worship and service and over all congregational organisations.” (*PCQ Code*, 3.10)

So, the Kirk Session (two old fashioned Scottish words meaning 'church sitting'), is made up of the elders and ministers (who also count as elders) of the church who oversee church governance.

The role of 'elder' has been defined by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia (the highest court of the Presbyterian Church in Australia). The PCA have said,

“elders occupy a pastoral office to which belongs the spiritual oversight of the Church. Under the Chief Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, elders shepherd and serve the church by sharing in its government, teaching the word of God, praying with and for God's people, and modelling life in Christ, according to their gifts.”
– GAA 2019 Min. 42(12).

Essentially, what this section of the code and the GAPCA is saying is that the government and spiritual oversight of the congregation rests in the hands of the ministers and elders of the church and that they do this primarily through governing, teaching, praying, and modelling life in Christ.

When it comes to matters of finance and property the *PCQ Code* explains that,

“The financial and property matters of a Charge are administered by a Committee of Management hereinafter called the Managers. The members of the Session are ex officio members of the Committee of Management (CoM).”
(*PCQ Code*, 2.1)

The Managers (and elders because of their status – *ex officio*) are therefore responsible for the finance and property of the church.

Typically then, the elders and managers are separate groups that had clear areas of responsibility.

The Current Structure

Some years ago, the decision was made for Living Church to have a different model of governance which was still meant to respect and rely upon the *PCQ Code's* rules and regulations. At the heart of this different model was the idea that Ministers, Elders and Managers would meet together to govern the affairs of Living Church.

The Living Church Governance Policy (henceforth known as *LC POL 100*), explains why this change was made.

“The CoM and Session meet jointly in this way for a variety of reasons. The main reason for this is to allow discussion around strategic direction and associated financial and other resource implications to occur in the same room with the people whose positions are responsible for the associated decision making at the Board level (Managers, Elders, and Ministers).”

The *LC POL 100* further explains that the Board is,

A colloquial term used within Living Church for the monthly meeting of the governors of Living Church.

The *LC Pol 100* also states that:

Living Church will be governed by the Living Church Board, as defined.

The Board will be up to 6 Managers and 4 Elders (plus the full-time Ministers).

The Qualities of Board Members (qualifications) will include:

- An existing personal ministry of equipping, care, encouragement and/or prayer within the church.

- Ability and willingness to serve in a communal spiritual oversight role.
- Capacity to think, reflect and oversee the church as a whole
- Spiritually mature – a person of faith and prayer with humility to listen to God, the congregation and other governing leaders.
- Wisdom to reflect and discern
- Ability to work as a team including an ability to resolve conflict and to communicate well.
- Not given to power, control or pushing of a personal agenda

The *LC Pol 100* lists several roles and activities that lie with the Board, including:

- Overall Governance role
- Visionary role
- Oversight role
- Strategy role
- Management role

To fit this arrangement within the governance rules outlined in the *PCQ Code, LC Pol 100* states that:

the Living Church Board meeting is a Committee of Management meeting immediately followed by a Session meeting.

Importantly for the below evaluation, however, further on the *LC Pol 100* says,

The discussion and voting that occurs regarding substantive issues shall be formally as the CoM, in which all motions can be put, seconded and voted on by all Managers, Elders, and Ministers sitting as members of the CoM (excepting the chair who only has a casting vote). These motions shall include those which are fully within the jurisdiction of the CoM (and with which the Session will concur) and those which are motions recommended for the Session to approve (and with which the CoM will concur). If a motion cannot proceed through this CoM phase of the meeting procedure, it is the policy of the CoM and the Session that the motion has failed and will not be put formally to the Session at the conclusion of the CoM meeting.

To put it simply, what this means is that functionally, the CoM meeting is the primary governmental body as the Session agreed that it will not seek to pass motions that the CoM has not approved.

Evaluation of the current model

Recently, the Board has conducted a review of the current governance model at Living Church and several conclusions were agreed upon.

Positively:

1. The adoption of the current model was done with good intentions and sincere attempt to work within the bounds of the *PCQ Code*
2. One excellent outcome of the current model has been the involvement of women at the highest level of discussions about church governance.

Negatively:

1. The current government structure effectively elevated the Managers to a functional eldership role. This is problematic on several levels.
 - a. The role of 'elder' is a recognisable biblical office and those that serve in this office are to have the responsibility of the spiritual oversight of the church. For time's sake, the biblical argument will not be presented here, but the GAPCA's statement regarding elders is a sound summary of the biblical teaching. By inviting others who are not elders to serve in the overall governance of the church, this blurs the lines about who is truly responsible for the governance of the church.
 - b. Elders in a Presbyterian context, in line with the recognised maturity that is required for the role, are required to take vows that speak to their character, and their commitment to Presbyterian teaching and governance. Similarly, there is a lengthy selection process that involves the congregation and Session selecting new elders to lead the church. This process has somewhat been circumvented in the current situation. The potential results of this circumvention are:
 - i. The current process runs a greater risk of those lacking in the necessary maturity and qualifications being promoted to the level of overall church governance. While we believe the managers at Living Church have acted with integrity in their service to the church, the potential for someone being appointed to a manager role without proper scrutiny of their character and faith is real.
 - ii. While we welcome all who believe in the Lord Jesus and who have been baptised to be members at our church, those who govern the church should be required to be Presbyterian in both practise and belief. Those who govern a Presbyterian church should be required to profess their Presbyterian faith and practise.

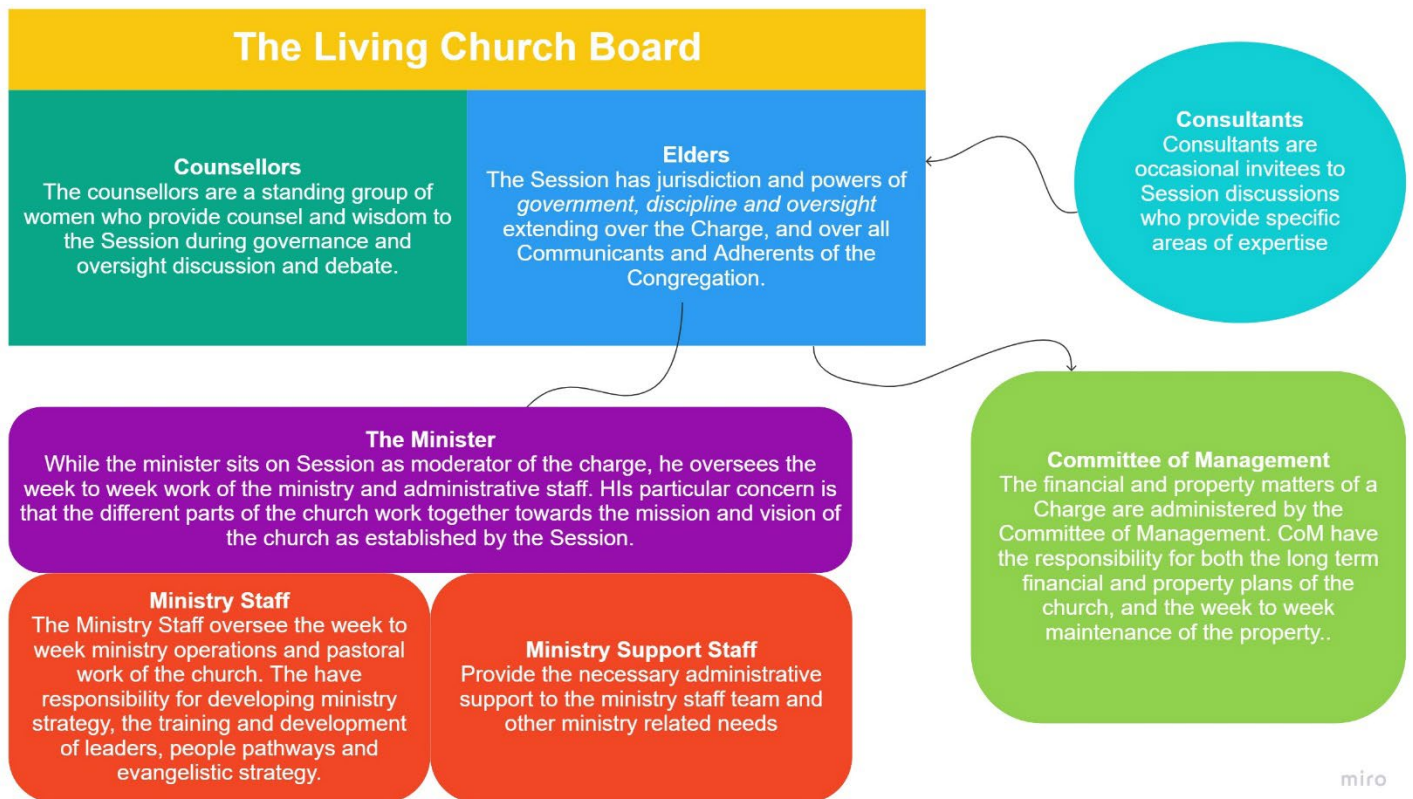
- c. It also appears that despite the best efforts to make the current Board structure fit with the *PCQ Code*, it fails functionally to uphold the clear sense that the *PCQ Code* offers that the governance of the church rests with the elders. This is demonstrated by the *LC Pol 101's* stated position that the elders of the charge will not move any motions that have not first been approved by the joint meeting of the managers, elders and ministers.
2. On a practical level, recent research suggests that larger executive groups are less effective when it comes to making sound decisions and working together as a team. Having an executive team of 12 (Managers + Elders + Ministers) is an ineffective size for executive leadership. (See *Senior Leadership Teams*, Wageman et al, Harvard, 2008, pp117-120)
3. Furthermore, there has been confusion between the Board and the church ministry staff regarding who is responsible for what (although it is noted that part of this confusion has been the result of not having a ministers for a lengthy period of time before January of this year)
4. While previously property management and ministry support were managed by paid staff members, the reduced staff numbers at Living Church, and the Managers being focused on church governance, has meant that property and ministry support matters were being neglected.

The New Model

In seeking to address these issues, the Board considered the following questions.

- How can we organise our governance structures to ensure that elders are fulfilling their proper responsibilities and that the biblical role of eldership is respected, encouraged and empowered?
- How can we encourage and empower women to be involved in high-level decision making while avoiding elevating managers to functional elders?
- How can we organise our governance structures, so they are effective in the roles given to them (size, procedures, goals, purposes)?
- How can we ensure that the responsibilities of finance and property management are being fulfilled?
- How can we organise our government structures so that they work in a church with a medium sized staff team and medium sized church?

After months of discussion and considering a range of different models that might seek to address the above issues and answer the above questions, the Board agreed on the following base model in Figure 1 below.



The new Board structure will consist of the elders of the church (which includes the ministers) and a new standing body, the 'Counsellors'. The Counsellors will be a standing group of women who are chosen using a similar process as the election of new elders. These women will be involved at the highest level of governance discussion, providing advice and counsel to the elders as they seek to lead and oversee the church. This retains the benefit of having women involved at highest level of governance while reinvigorating elders as the overseers of the church.

The minister, while serving as an elder and moderating the meetings of the Board, also has the responsibility for overseeing the work of the ministry and administrative (ministry support) staff.

The ministry and ministry support staff work together to oversee the week-to-week ministry and pastoral operations under the oversight of the church elders.

The Committee of Management will return to meeting separately from the Board and return to focusing on the church finances and maintenance of the property.

While the new executive body will be smaller (6 elders plus 3 counsellors), which could lead to a loss of expertise in some governmental discussions, the Session has the ability to call on consultants from within and outside the church family to advise them as need be.

Timeline for Change

At this point, the intention is for these changes to take effect at the start of 2023. This will coincide with the appointment of two new elders (to replace the retiring Wes Fittel and Tim Hewlitt). The first counsellors will be appointed simultaneously along with these new elders. The process for appointing both new elders and counsellors will be explained during the sermon at Living Church on September 18, 2022.