

A Theological Vision

For the Presbyterian Church of Australia

in the State of New South Wales

and the Australian Capital Territory

PCNSW Special Committee for Denominational Renewal

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Part 1 - Introduction

What should a healthy *Presbyterian* church look like? Most of us want our church to be healthy yet would struggle to answer this question. As a result, many church leaders embrace health frameworks and ministry models from churches and para-church organisations that don't share all our theological convictions. As a confessional church that holds Scripture as our Supreme Standard, we should be able to define for ourselves, from Scripture, what a healthy church looks like. This theological vision seeks to define what health should look like for *us* – for our churches, our Christians, our leaders, and our presbyteries and assemblies.

We are committed to the historic orthodox Christian faith, grounded in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, centred on the gospel of Christ, and enabled by the Holy Spirit, to live and work for God's praise and glory. This theological vision seeks to maintain this commitment by presenting a vision for church and the Christian life which reflects the confessional position of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, and seeks to apply that to the mission of the PCNSW.

As a theological vision, this document aims to set out the direction and ethos which the PCNSW might pursue. It is not seeking to be unnecessarily prescriptive for the life and practice of the churches, but to be the basis for discussion about how the PCNSW can continue to develop church life which best expresses its theological convictions.

The original draft for the vision was completed by Murray Smith and John McClean who are Assembly-appointed faculty of Christ College, our church's theological college. This work was reviewed in 2015 by several working groups made up of pastoral leaders from our church. It was amended and developed in 2016 in light of those reviews. Further feedback was obtained through consultation with the Presbyteries of PCNSW throughout 2017 and 2018. Additional changes were made in 2018 and 2019 prior to distribution across the PCNSW.

This document has been written in five sections, beginning with this introduction. Section 2 is a summary of the vision; section 3 is the vision in detail; section 4 presents the biblical and theological foundations on which the vision rests; and section 5 outlines some enabling conditions – the things that will help our church flourish towards this vision. Soft copies of this document can be downloaded from the Refocus website (www.christcollege.edu.au/refocus) and distributed without restriction.

Part 2 - Vision Summary

1. Healthy churches: centred on the gospel of Christ

God's church plays a central role in God's mission in the world. Particular churches are meeting-communities of believers and their children in which true doctrine is taught, the sacraments are faithfully administered, and people are cared for and matured in Christ.

They are communities called into existence by God through the gospel to:

1. *worship God* by listening to his word, receiving the signs and seals of his grace, relying on him in prayer, praising him in song, and living for him in faithful obedience;
2. *love each other* as they share life together, building each other up, by speaking the truth in love, towards maturity in Christ;
3. *bear witness to Christ in word and deed* by proclaiming the gospel and serving others in love in their local community, and beyond, as part of God's global mission.

2. Healthy Christians: trusting in Christ and living for God's glory

These churches are made up of God's people, graciously chosen by God, and called, by his Word and Spirit, out of the state of sin and death, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ.

They are people who:

1. trust in Christ alone for justification, sanctification and eternal life;
2. are committed to Christ and his gospel, through which they are being saved;
3. seek to grow in love for God and others;
4. demonstrate their faith in God and their repentance from sin in a life of loving obedience to their heavenly Father;
5. join with God's people in the worship and life of the local church;
6. use their God-given gifts to serve Christ in their churches, families, workplaces and all other areas of life.

3. Healthy leadership: teams of shepherds and servants under Christ

These churches are led by teams of properly qualified and carefully selected Shepherds (elders) who together, under Christ's authority and authorised by him, lead the church as it plays its crucial role in God's mission.

The task of the Shepherds, working together, involves:

1. *leading the church in its life and mission* — providing biblically-rooted, contextualised vision, leading the church in declaring the gospel to unbelievers, conducting God-glorifying worship, caring for people to see them mature in Christ, and organising community life so each member is freed and equipped to serve according to their gifts;
2. *praying with and for God's people* — leading the church in public and private prayer, and praying for the church together;
3. *proclaiming the gospel, teaching the whole counsel of God from the Scriptures, and refuting those who oppose it* – preaching and teaching in public, in small groups and in personal ministry, and equipping and empowering others to speak the truth in love in a range of contexts;
4. *modelling life in Christ* by setting an example of the Christian life of faith and repentance.

The goal of the Shepherds' work is that God's people might worship him, love each other, and bear witness to him in the world for God's glory.

Teams of Shepherds ('sessions') work together to fulfil these common, God-given functions, but do so according to their diverse gifts. Each team will normally include at least one paid Shepherd ('minister') who is set apart to 'labour in the word and teaching' (1 Tim 5.17).

Churches will also normally be cared for by properly qualified and carefully selected Servants (Deacons), who manage the practical and material needs of the church, with particular concern for the needs of the vulnerable, weak and the poor.

Note: This theological vision adopts the titles 'Shepherds' and 'Servants'. These titles have good biblical foundations but are not in common use in the PCNSW. The hope is that the use of these titles will stimulate renewed reflection on the biblical vision for church government and leadership. The vision is not proposing that these titles be formally adopted in the church.

4. Healthy presbyteries and assemblies: working together for Christ's mission

Because God's church is united in Christ, Shepherds of particular churches work together in wider councils (Presbyteries and Assemblies) to promote joint gospel mission, and to oversee the health of the particular churches.

These councils:

1. provide a context in which Shepherds from different particular churches support and encourage each other;
2. carefully oversee the examination and setting apart of new Shepherds and encourage and discipline existing Shepherds;
3. pray and work for the health and mission of the churches, by applying God's word and prayerfully seeking to promote the growth of the gospel in and through them;
4. encourage, promote and enable the planting of new churches;
5. oversee, co-ordinate, resource and direct the wider mission of the church.

In the same way, Servants from particular churches work together in joint projects designed to demonstrate God's love by providing for the needs of the vulnerable, weak and poor.

Part 3 - Vision

1. Healthy churches: centred on the gospel of Christ

God's church plays a central role in God's mission. A particular church is a meeting-community of believers (Acts 2.42–47; Col 3.12–17) and their children (Col 3.20; Eph 6.1–3) in which true doctrine is taught (Eph 4.11-12; 1 Tim 4.11–14) and the sacraments are faithfully administered (Matt 26.26–29; Lk 24.47). It has a recognised membership marked by baptism (Matthew 28.19; Acts 2.38; Romans 6.3-4; Eph 5.4) and meets weekly (Heb 10.24-25; 1 Cor 16.1; Acts 20.7) with an active community life of worship, mutual love and witness.

We long for churches to serve the Lord and grow in him in the following areas:

1. They *worship God*, fearing, loving, praising, calling upon, trusting in, and serving the Father, Son and Spirit with all their heart, and with all their soul, and with all their might through the mediation of Christ alone (WCF 21:1-2):
 - a. listening to his Word with a humble and contrite spirit through both the reading of Scripture with godly fear, and sound preaching of apostolic doctrine from Scripture which brings God's word to heart, mind and will, promoting love and good deeds (WCF 21:5; Acts 2.42; Eph 4.11-12; Col 3.16; 1 Thess 5.12; 2 Tim 1.13; 4.1-2,13);
 - b. consistently relying on him in prayer with thanksgiving, in the name of the Son, by the help of the Spirit, according to his will, with understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love, and perseverance (Rom 12.12; 15.30; 1 Cor 11.4ff; Col 4.2; Eph 6.18; 1 Th 5.17; 2 Thess 3.1; 1 Tim 2.1; WCF 21:3);
 - c. praising him in song and praying with grace in the heart (Rom. 15.11; 1 Cor. 14.15; Eph. 5.19; Col. 3.16; Heb. 2.12; James 5.13; WCF 21:5);
 - d. receiving the signs and seals of his grace, in baptism and the Lord's Supper (Matt 26.26–29; Lk 24.47; Acts 8.12; 9.18; 22.16; Rom 6.3; 1 Cor 1.13; 11.17–32; Gal 3.37);
 - e. living for him in faithful obedience.
2. They *love each other* as they share life together (John 17.9; Rom 12.13; 16.23; 1 Cor 16.20; 2 Cor 13.12; Col. 4.3; 1 Thess 5.25-26; 1Tim. 5.10; Heb 13.2; 2 Th. 1.11; 3.1; 1 Pet 4.9; 5.14; 3 John 8), building each other up by speaking the truth in love, towards maturity in Christ (Eph 4.9–16).

3. They *bear witness to Christ in word and deed* by proclaiming the gospel (Matt 28.20; Phil 1.7) and serving others in love in their local community (Gal 6.10) and beyond as part of God's global mission (Acts 18.2; Rom 15.25ff; 16.1-5; 1 Cor 4.17; 7.17; 11.16; 13.33-34; 16.1; 2 Cor 8.19; Col 4.12-16; WCF 25:2), including partnership with other churches locally, regionally, nationally and globally (Rom 15.25-29; 16.1-16; 2 Cor 8.19; Eph 4.4-6; Col 1.5-6; 4.12-16; 1 Jn 1.3-4; 1 Peter 1.1). They welcome the least and the lost and those seeking God into their life as they offer the message of Christ and practical care and support.

2. Healthy Christians: trusting in Christ and living for God's glory

A Christian is a person, chosen by God in Christ by his eternal mercy, whom God has called by his Word and Spirit, out of the state of sin and death, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ (WCF 10:1). In most cases a Christian will be able to explain their understanding of the gospel, have a profession of faith, demonstrate repentance from sin, and live a life of obedience — though God also works in his people who are not able to be called by the ministry of the Word or make a response which we can understand (WCF 10:3). A Christian is a member of God's church (WCF 25:1) and is bound to a "holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God" (WCF 26:2).

We long to see members of the PCNSW serve the Lord and grow in him by:

1. trusting in Christ alone for new life, justification, adoption and sanctification, and glorification with Christ after death;
2. growing in love for God and others; growing in knowledge of God and his ways through reading and hearing his Word; growing in Christ-likeness— putting off old ways and putting on new, including particular repentance of particular sins (WCF 13:1; 15:2,5; 16:2) and the development of Christian virtues, such as thankfulness, generosity, sexual purity, honesty, self-control, patience, kindness, joy, peaceableness, faithfulness, gentleness, compassion, humility, endurance, submission, mercy, impartiality and sincerity (Gal 5);
3. demonstrating faith in God and repentance from sin in a life of loving obedience to their heavenly Father;
4. joining with God's people in the worship and life of the local church;

5. using their God-given gifts to serve Christ in their churches, families, workplaces and all other areas of life.

We expect to see Christian growth expressed in:

1. an active devotional life including consistent prayer and regular personal Bible reading;
2. a commitment to and active participation in a congregation, including regular worship, use of gifts to serve others in church, financial commitment and participation in small group/personal ministry and other ministries of the congregation;
3. an awareness of the brokenness of church life and a readiness to bear with others, to forgive and seek forgiveness;
4. the development of close relationships within church and with other Christians and non-Christians;
5. a willingness to submit to elders in the church (Heb 13.17) and support their leadership while also being able to assess the life and teaching of elders on a biblical basis;
6. a concern for the salvation of unbelievers, developing relationships, praying, and seeking to share the gospel;
7. a commitment to serve God in the family setting to which they are called — including an appropriate loving servant leadership from husbands and parents, and an appropriate submission from wives and children (Eph 5.22–6.4; Col 3.18–21; 1 Tim 5.4, 11–14; 1 Pet 3.1–7);
8. a commitment to good works, love of neighbour, and concern for the common good of society;
9. preparation for, and capacity to face, suffering;
10. a commitment to serve Christ in their vocation, including an understanding of a Christian approach to their vocation;
11. a readiness to embrace their gender and to live as a man or woman of God under Christ;
12. a confidence in Christian freedom, which leads to a willingness to follow their own conscience as informed by Scripture, and to allow others freedom in *adiaphora* and secondary and disputable matters;

13. a growing understanding of Scripture which leads to a growing understanding of God, of our salvation in Christ and living for Christ, including a growing discernment of sound doctrine and false teaching (Eph 4.14–15);
14. a readiness to follow Christ in his Word and an awareness of the need to be distinct from the surrounding culture;
15. a concern for the salvation of unbelievers through local, cross-cultural and global mission expressed in prayer, participation according to gifts, and financial support according to means and opportunity.

3. Healthy leadership: teams of shepherds and servants under Christ

Teams of Shepherds (elders) work together, under Christ's authority, to lead the church in its crucial role in God's mission. This shepherding involves: i. leading the church in its life and mission; ii. praying with and for God's people; iii. proclaiming the gospel, teaching the whole counsel of God from the Scriptures, and refuting those who oppose it; and iv. modelling life in Christ by setting an example of the Christian life of faith and repentance. Teams of Shepherds ("sessions") work together to fulfil these common functions, but do so according to their different gifts. Each team will normally include at least one paid Shepherd ('minister') who is set apart to 'labour in the word and teaching' (1 Tim 5.17). The goal of this shepherding work is that God's people might grow to maturity in Christ, live as his people in the world, and bear witness to him in word and deed, for God's glory.

Particular churches will normally also be cared for by a team of Servants (Deacons), who manage the practical and material needs of the church, with particular concern for the needs of the vulnerable, the weak and the poor. The goal of this servant work is to facilitate the proclamation of the gospel and the teaching of God's word, to effectively manage the church's resources, and to demonstrate God's love and bear witness to Christ in practical ways.

Teams of Shepherds and Servants, working together with the whole body of Christ, are a primary means by which God's church advances its gospel-centred mission in the world.

The Scriptures establish the offices of Shepherd and Servant, give their primary tasks, and indicate the goals of their ministry (the glory of God, the promotion of the gospel, the gathering and perfecting of the saints, witness and service in the world). The Scriptures, however, do not provide any detail as to how teams of Shepherds and Servants might most fruitfully work

together in order to promote the church's maturity and to advance its gospel-centred mission. Such details must be worked out "by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed" (WCF 1.6). The following vision therefore seeks to contextualise and apply the biblical teaching about Shepherds and Servants into the present context of PCNSW.

1. Teams of Shepherds (sessions)

a. Goal

Under the Chief Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, the team of Shepherds in each particular church (a Session) provides pastoral leadership for the church's life and mission. The Shepherds co-operate in the oversight and government of the church, and work together to promote its maturity in Christ and gospel-centred mission in the world.

The Shepherds *all* perform the primary functions common to the office by: i. leading, ii. teaching, iii. praying, and iv. modelling life in Christ. They perform these functions both as a group and as individuals, where each individual performs them in different ways and to different extents, depending on whether they are paid or unpaid, and according to their individual gifts and life circumstances.

b. Primary functions

i. Leadership: Shepherds lead and organise the church so that it might flourish as a community in which God's grace abounds, so that God's chosen people might come to salvation through faith in Christ, grow to maturity in Christ, and live as his people in the world.

a. The Shepherds, acting together, are a 'leadership team':

- i. Leading the church in developing a biblically-rooted, contextualised vision for the church;
- ii. Leading the church in its gospel-centred mission in the world both locally and globally, so that unbelievers hear the gospel and are saved, and the whole body grows to maturity in Christ (Matt 28.18-20; 1 Tim 2.1-5; 3.15-16);
- iii. Organising the church's community life such that each and every member is freed up to serve according to their gifts, so that the whole body grows to maturity in Christ (Eph 4.12, 16; 1 Cor 12.7; 1 Pet 4.10);

- iv. Exercising right discipline in the church by applying the word of the gospel, first in private admonishment, and then – if needed – in public censure and exclusion from the sacraments, with the goals of glorifying God, protecting church members, and regaining those who wander (Matt 16.19; 18.15-20; 1 Cor 5.1-13);
- v. Overseeing and complementing the Servants as they administer the church's financial affairs, and care for the material needs of God's people; this implies that the Servants also must wholeheartedly embrace working with the Shepherds and being led by them;
- vi. Overseeing, co-ordinating and enabling a range of other teams and individuals for particular tasks;
- vii. Dividing the responsibilities of leadership among themselves and co-ordinating their individual work.

The Shepherds, acting as a leadership team, thus provide an important governance function for the church. Nevertheless, the functions of the Shepherds should not be reduced to that of a 'board' which provides high level policy governance. The Scriptures clearly call Shepherds to be personally involved in the pastoral leadership and teaching ministry of the church.

b. The Shepherds, acting individually, and each according to their gifts, are a team of leaders:

- i. Leading gathered worship in ways that glorify God according to his Word;
- ii. Leading the church in promoting the gospel in the world so that God's chosen people might be saved through faith in Christ;
- iii. Knowing those entrusted to their care, sharing not only the gospel but also their lives with them, and proactively discipling them so that they might grow to maturity in Christ (Acts 20.28; 1 Pet. 5.3; Heb 13.17; cf. Ezek 34.1-4; John 10.14; Acts 5.42; 20.20, 31; 1 Thess. 2.7-12). The biblical expectation that Shepherds will know the people they lead, and be known by them, strongly implies that Shepherds should ordinarily not take responsibility for people with whom they do not regularly gather;
- iv. Taking responsibility for any particular ministries assigned to them.

c. The Shepherds are part of the wider leadership of God's church.

They lead a particular church in the context of the wider life and mission of all the

churches. This principle, together with the biblical pattern noted above, suggests that some Shepherds from each particular church should also work together by joining in wider councils (Presbytery and Assemblies) to promote joint gospel mission, and to oversee the health of the particular churches.

ii. Prayer: Shepherds lead the church in prayer ‘in the name of the Son, by the help of His Spirit, according to His will, with understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love and perseverance’ (WCF 21.3).

Shepherds, each according to their gifts:

- a. Lead public prayer in gathered worship;
- b. Pray with individuals and small groups, including teaching others how to pray;
- c. Devote themselves to private prayer for the congregation, its life, its mission and its individual members (Acts 6.4 with Jas 5.14).

iii. Preaching and Teaching: Shepherds proclaim the gospel and teach the whole counsel of God from the Scriptures, consistent with the Church’s confession, promoting faith, love and good deeds.

Shepherds, each according to their gifts:

- a. Read the Scriptures in gathered worship;
- b. Preach the gospel and the whole counsel of God from the Scriptures in gathered worship;
- c. Teach from the Scriptures in Christian education, small groups, and one to one;
- d. Administer the sacraments (The PCA limits this function to ‘ministers’, in recognition of the Reformed conviction that the sacraments are an extension of the ministry of the Word. Biblically speaking, all Shepherds are called to the authoritative ministry of the Word. There does not, then, seem to be any biblical rationale for restricting the administration of the sacraments to ‘ministers’);
- e. Train and equip others to serve Christ in the church, home, workplace and world;
- f. Proactively disciple and discipline God’s people to live for Christ in all of life;
- g. Share the love of Christ and the message of the gospel beyond the congregation.

iv. Modelling: Shepherds model Christ-like living for the particular church of which they are

a part, demonstrating what it means to live for Christ in all of life. This should mean that:

- a. The Christ-like life to which God calls all of his people must be evident in the life of any man before he is appointed to the office of Shepherd, and consistent in his life as long as he remains in the office (1 Timothy 3.1-7 and Titus 1.5-9);
- b. Shepherds should not be appointed hastily (1 Tim 5.22), or if they are recent converts (1 Tim 3.6);
- c. Each Shepherd must:
 - i. Be 'above reproach' (1 Tim 3.2; Tit 1.6; i.e without unrepentant or gross sin);
 - ii. Guard his own heart (Prov 4.3), and watch his life and doctrine closely (1 Tim 4.16; cf. Acts 20.28);
 - iii. Grow in grace and in love for God and others as he is grounded in the gospel (Matt 22.37-38; Col 2.6-7; 2 Pet 3.18; Heb 13.9);
 - iv. Faithfully love his wife as Christ loved the church (Eph 5.21-33; 1 Tim 3.2; Tit 1.6);
 - v. Manage his house and family well (1 Tim 3.4-5; Tit 1.6), bringing up his children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6.4), and caring for weaker members of his extended family (1 Tim 5.8);
 - vi. Do his daily work in a manner that blesses others and wins the respect of outsiders, while also enabling him to provide for his family and have enough to share with those in need (1 Thess 4.11-12; 2 Thess 3.6-12; Col 3.23-24; Eph 4.28; 1 Tim 3.7);
 - vii. Be free from destructive addictions (1 Tim 3.3);
 - viii. Not be violent, or quick-tempered, or a lover of money, but instead be a lover of good, sober-minded, self-controlled, gentle, respectable, hospitable, upright, holy and disciplined (1 Tim 3.2-3; Tit 1.7-8);
 - ix. Lead the way in confession of sin and repentance from it (1 Jn 1.9).

In short, Shepherds must model life in Christ for God's people.

c. Paid and unpaid Shepherds

Teams of Shepherds will normally be made up of paid Shepherds ('ministers') and unpaid Shepherds ('elders').

i. Paid Shepherds

Each team of Shepherds will normally include at least one paid Shepherd ('minister'). Paid Shepherds, biblically speaking, are those who have been freed up from other labour in order to 'labour in the word and teaching' and who are therefore 'especially' worthy of 'double honour' (1 Timothy 5.17-18).

Since such paid Shepherds are set apart to 'labour in the word and teaching', it seems wise that they should:

- a. Be particularly gifted in teaching, including preaching;
- b. Take primary (but not sole) responsibility for the particular church's preaching and teaching ministry;
- c. Take primary (but not sole) responsibility for the particular church's gathered worship, including primary (but not sole) responsibility for the administration of the sacraments;
- d. Be able to provide leadership in the areas of oversight / governance and pastoral care. The precise role they play in these areas will depend on the relative gifts of others in the shepherding team (= session);
- e. Be trained in the Scriptures and theology, and in preaching / teaching, leadership and pastoral care, to the degree required of those for whom the work of Shepherding is a major part of their life's work.

ii. Unpaid Shepherds

Teams of Shepherds will normally also include unpaid Shepherds ('elders').

Since such unpaid Shepherds share in the pastoral leadership of a particular church, but normally also have other major God-given and God-honouring responsibilities (especially paid employment outside the church), it seems appropriate that they:

- a. Play supporting roles in the particular church's preaching and teaching ministry, each according to their gifts;
- b. Play supporting roles in the conduct of the particular church's gathered worship, including the administration of the sacraments, each according to their gifts;
- c. Provide leadership in the areas of oversight / governance and pastoral care, according to their gifts and life situation;

- d. Be trained in the Scriptures and theology, and in preaching / teaching, leadership and pastoral care, to the degree appropriate for those for whom the work of Shepherding is one major responsibility among others.

iii. Co-ordinating the work of Paid and Unpaid Shepherds

Teams of Shepherds require leadership and co-ordination. The biblical category of Shepherds who 'labour in the word and teaching' strongly suggests that those set apart as paid Shepherds ought to take primary (not sole) responsibility for the church's preaching and teaching ministry, and primary (not sole) responsibility for the church's gathered worship, including the administration of the sacraments.

There is no clear biblical teaching regarding how the other tasks of leadership might be managed within the team. There is some wisdom in the present arrangements that grant the responsibility for moderating a congregation's session to the paid Shepherd ('minister'). This task, however, does seem to be a necessary part of 'labouring in the word and teaching'. In some sessions, at least, there may be others in the Shepherding team who are better equipped to lead and administer the session. It may be wise, then, to allow for each session to organize its own processes for leadership and management within the session, and to communicate this clearly to the church. Sessions could, for example, elect their own moderator on an annual basis, similar to the common practice in PCNSW presbyteries. This practice may allow those gifted in leadership to improve the governance functioning of sessions.

d. Term of appointment

The term of appointment for Shepherds is not clearly indicated in Scripture. There are certain advantages to the current practice of appointing Shepherds for life, but there are also disadvantages. Our church may wish to consider terms of appointment in the future.

e. Engaging others, including women, in the church's mission

The biblical vision of the unity, diversity and mutual dependence of the body of Christ, and the apostles' teaching regarding gifts (1 Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4; 1 Peter 4) means that the Shepherds of each particular church will give careful thought to how other people with the appropriate character and gifts, including women, might be engaged in complementary leadership, teaching and pastoral care ministries.

Shepherds will likewise lead the church in rejoicing in its unity in Christ and by the Spirit, and

so give careful thought to how the church's God-given diversity (of gender, gifts, age, demographic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds) can be celebrated, so that each and every member is equipped and freed up to serve according to the gift they are to the church.

In particular:

- i. With regard to other leaders, including women: teams of Shepherds (sessions) will consider how they might appropriately engage and involve other gifted leaders, including women, in their development of vision for the church, in decision making processes, and in the delivery of the church's ministries. In particular, the biblical vision of complementary roles for men and women in the church requires that the Shepherds of each particular church proactively consider how women might genuinely complement the male shepherds in their own ministries of leadership and teaching and pastoral care. For example, while the PCNSW Code has the session as a 'closed court' by default, sessions may freely and regularly choose to open their meetings to a wider circle of leaders, including women.
- ii. With regard to the whole church: the unity of the body of Christ is best served when teams of Shepherds proactively and regularly communicate, via a range of means, with the whole church, regarding the church's vision, life and ministries.

2. Teams of Servants (= Diaconates)

a. Goal

The goal of teams of Servants in the particular churches is to facilitate the church's gospel-centred mission.

b. Primary functions

Servants facilitate the church's gospel-centred mission by:

- i. freeing up the Shepherds to be Shepherds;
- ii. effectively managing the church's resources;
- iii. co-ordinating and delivering care for the vulnerable, weak and poor as a tangible demonstration of God's love and a witness to the gospel.

c. Servants of Management and Servants of Care

In the present context of PCNSW, with its complex laws for property and employment, there is little doubt that each particular church needs wise Christians who serve through their management of finances, property and other ministries. In PCNSW, Committees of Management currently take responsibility for these tasks. However, given the demands of this work, the other important work of caring for the vulnerable, weak and poor is often neglected. It might, therefore, be beneficial to have two “types” or subsets of Servants (= Deacons) so that each can focus on particular tasks.

i. Servants of Management

Servants of Management perform all of the basic functions currently performed by the Committee of Management.

In addition, some of these Servants may be specifically tasked to support the ministry of the Word by providing administrative support to the Shepherds.

Framing this work in terms of the biblical category of Servants (= deacons) helps to ensure that office bearers are chosen based primarily on their Christian character.

ii. Servants of Care

Servants of Care are specifically tasked to care for the physical needs of Christians who are poor, sick, unemployed, aged, shut-in, dying, or in difficulties of one kind or another, including crisis situations.

d. Paid Servants

It may be helpful, in some churches, to employ one or more Servants, of either or both kinds, to better facilitate the church's ministry.

e. Relationship of Shepherds and Servants and other church members

The Shepherds and Servants in each particular church need to work together closely. Their work, especially in the area of discipleship and pastoral care, is overlapping rather than mutually exclusive. In teaching and caring for the church members, Shepherds also care for physical needs; in caring for physical needs, Servants also offer encouragement from God's word and prayer.

Moreover, since all church members are 'teachers', 'servants' and 'ministers', the work of teaching and serving is, of course, not restricted to the Shepherds and Servants. Rather, a key task of the Shepherds is to lead church life in such a way that each and every member is equipped and enabled to serve according to the gift they are to the church.

f. Term of appointment

The term of appointment for Servants is not indicated in Scripture. It may be best if Servants are appointed for relatively short but renewable terms (1-3 years).

g. The wider work of Servants

In Acts 6, the Servants are set apart to care for the widows across a city-wide church which comprising multiple particular churches and thousands of members. The work of the Servants was thus not limited to any one particular church. In the PCNSW it may be worth exploring how Servants from different churches might work together in co-ordinating wider work designed to effectively manage the church's finances, and especially to care for the vulnerable, weak and poor.

4. Healthy presbyteries and assemblies: working together for Christ's mission

Presbyteries and Assemblies are God-given Councils of Shepherds, which promote the joint gospel mission, and oversee the health, of the particular churches.

Under God, Presbyteries and/or Assemblies:

1. Encourage, equip and refresh Shepherds from the particular churches, through the ministry of the Word and prayer, for the pastoral leadership role God has given them;
2. Carefully oversee the examination, approval and setting apart of new Shepherds, in appropriate co-operation with Sessions and congregations, while also overseeing the evaluation and discipline of existing Shepherds;
3. Provide a context in which pastoral leaders across the churches develop common theological vision;
4. Pray and work for the health and mission of the churches, by applying God's word and prayerfully seeking to promote the growth of the gospel in and through them;
5. Facilitate co-operation between particular churches in gospel mission;
6. Resolve disputes between and within particular churches;
7. Encourage, promote and enable the planting of new churches, the revitalisation of old churches, and the closing of dead churches;
8. Oversee, co-ordinate, resource and direct the wider mission of the church in the world.

Part 4 – Biblical and Theological Foundations

1. Healthy churches: centred on the gospel of Christ

God chooses his people in Christ.

God saves his people and unites them with Christ by his Spirit as the bride, body and fullness of him that fills all in all (WCF 25:1). In the broadest sense the Church is the people of God from across history united to Christ, anticipating the final gathering of God's people in perfect fellowship with him in the new creation (Rev 7.5–12; 21.1–3; 22.2–5).

God gathers his people in Christ as a visible church throughout the world, which consists of all who profess faith in Christ, together with their children. This is the company which Christ rules and is the household of God. It is God's ordained means of bringing his people to Christ and sustaining them in faith to the end of their lives (WCF 25:2).

Christ alone is the Head of his church, both invisible and visible (WCF 25:6), and it lives under his authority and grace.

The visible church consists of meeting-communities (usually called congregations). The word *ecclesia* primarily denotes an 'assembly', and the life of the church in the NT is characterised by 'meeting' (Acts 1.14; 2.46; 4.24, 31; 6.5-6; 11.26; 12.12; 14.27; 15.6; 16.40; 20.7; 1 Cor 5.4; 11.34; 14.26-40; Eph. 5.19; Col. 3.16; 4.16; 1 Thess. 5.27; 1 Tim 4.13; Heb 10.25). Consistent with the doctrines of creation, incarnation, resurrection and new creation, God's people meet together physically, to pray, hear God's Word, praise him and share the Lord's supper. These meetings create and express an ongoing community in which Christians are under the care and oversight of Shepherds and have ongoing mutual obligations.

Christ has given to the visible church the Word of God read and preached, worship, and the sacraments, so that, under the care of elders, his people will be gathered and perfected in this life, to the end of the world. By his own presence and Spirit, according to his promise, he makes these gifts effective to this purpose (WCF 25:3).

Christ has appointed elders to his church to care for, direct, teach, encourage and guard congregations and the wider Church.

The visible church exists between Christ's resurrection and return — it is broken and fails the Lord at many points. It will sin and it will be in error. The church is called to constant

confession and repentance, and to guard against the spread of sin and false teaching within itself. Until Christ returns, it will include those who turn out to be non-believers (WCF 25:4-5). The elders of the church are to strive to ensure that all who are under their care hear and understand the gospel, live consistently with their profession, and grow in their walk with the Lord, while recognising that they cannot determine directly who is truly united to Christ.

Churches should be communities in which those who have not yet come to Christ find a welcome and hear the gospel. It must remain clear that full participation in the community requires commitment to Christ.

2. Healthy Christians: trusting in Christ and living for God's glory

God elects his people in Christ (WCF 3:5), accomplishes their salvation in the person and work of Christ (WCF 8:1-7) and "certainly and effectually applies and communicates" salvation to them to through his Word by his Spirit (WCF 8:8; 10:1).

A Christian receives from Christ:

- new life, when God takes them from spiritual death and enlightens their minds to understand the gospel, softens their hearts to trust, love and desire him, and renews their wills to obey him (WCF 10:1);
- justification, in which God pardons their sins, and accounts and accepts them as righteous for Christ's sake alone (WCF 11:1);
- adoption, in which God takes them as one of his children and grants them the liberties and privileges of his children (WCF 12);
- sanctification, in which the power of sin is defeated and the sinful desires weakened and mortified, and the Christian is enlivened and strengthened in all saving graces. This is a process which affects the whole person but is never perfected in this life, so the Christian life is a continual struggle with sin. Through this struggle the Spirit will bring the believer to growth in grace (WCF 13).

A Christian is given saving faith by which they accept, receive, and rest upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification and eternal life; and, further, they believe the Scriptures to be God's Word, obeying his command, trembling at his warning, and embracing his promises

(WCF 14:2). Faith is the sole instrument of justification, yet it is not alone in the Christian, for it works by love and is accompanied by a changed life (WCF 11:2).

A Christian is given repentance by which they grieve for and hate their sins and turn from them to God, committing and striving to walk with God on the basis of God's mercy in Christ to all who repent and acknowledge the hurt they have brought to others (WCF 15:2,6).

As a result of faith and repentance, a Christian, by the work of the Spirit, serves God in good works, following the commands of the moral law, growing in Christian virtues and serving their fellow believers and their neighbours in love (WCF 16:2,3). God gives each Christian avenues of fruitful service in church, family, work and wider community, the exact nature of which will depend on their gifts and opportunities (Eph 2.10).

In Christ, by the Spirit, a Christian is given all that is needed for them to become more like God in Christ, and so they are to make every effort to grow in grace, becoming more like Christ and showing the fruit of the Spirit (2 Peter 1.3–5; Gal 5.22-23). Yet, in this life, the Christian will always struggle with sin, will fall into sin, and need ongoing pardon.

Because a Christian is chosen by God, redeemed by Christ and called and sanctified by the Spirit, they will be preserved faithful and “receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1.11). Yet they may, through the temptation of Satan and the world, and by their own sinfulness, fall into serious continued sin, grieving the Holy Spirit and losing some of the grace and comfort they have known, their heart becoming harder (WCF 17:3).

Christian growth and perseverance is accomplished by God through the means of grace. The most basic and foundational grace is the message of the gospel, found in the Scriptures. The gospel is taught and applied through the church — in its worship, its teaching, the sacraments, fellowship and its discipline; through personal worship, reading and study; and through fellowship in the family and with Christian friends.

A Christian may not always have a certainty of, and confidence in, their own salvation, but true faith can give a genuine assurance of salvation based on God's sure promises, the evidence of the work of the Spirit in their life and the testimony of the Spirit that they are God's children (WCF 18:1-2).

3. Healthy leadership: teams of shepherds and servants under Christ

1. The Lord Jesus is the only King and Head of the Church (WCF 30.1)

The Lord Jesus alone is ‘head’ of the church, his ‘body’ (Eph 1.10, 22-23; 5.23, 27, 32; Col 1.18); the ‘husband’ of the church, his ‘bride’ (Eph 5.25-33); the ‘cornerstone’ of the church, his ‘temple’ (Eph 2.20; cf. 1 Cor 3.11; 1 Pet 2.1-8); the ‘true vine’ in which all of the ‘branches’ of the church find their life and bear fruit (Jn 15.1-11); the ‘Good’, ‘Chief’ or ‘Great’ Shepherd of the church, his ‘flock’ (John 10.14; 1 Pet 5.4; Heb 13.20). Although the Lord calls others to lead his church, their leadership is always derived from, ordered under, and directed towards Jesus’ leadership as the one and only King and Head of the church.

2. The Lord Jesus, through his apostles, has appointed his government to lead his church in its life and mission (WCF 30.1)

i. The Lord Jesus, following his resurrection and ascension, appointed first the Apostles and then, through them, a settled form of embodied leadership for his church (Matt 16.19; cf. 18.18; 28.18-20; Luke 24.46-49; Acts 2.33; John 20.21-23; cf. 16.7, 13). Jesus’ ascension and gift of the Spirit simultaneously create the space for, and necessitate, an ongoing, God-ordained, human leadership for the church.

ii. This God-ordained leadership for the church was given in two stages: the ‘extraordinary’ leadership of the Apostles and the ‘ordinary and perpetual’ leadership they established to follow after them. The ‘extraordinary’ office of the Apostles is distinguished from the ‘ordinary and perpetual’ offices in five ways:

a. *Call*: the Lord Jesus specifically chose and *directly* commissioned the Apostles as authoritative witnesses to his life, death and resurrection (Acts 9.1-19; 1 Cor 15.8-11; Gal 1.1, 11-12). By contrast, the Lord called and appointed all subsequent leaders *indirectly*, by his Holy Spirit, and through the Apostles (Acts 14.23), or their delegates (Timothy: 2 Tim 2.2;– Titus: Tit 1.5), or other members of the settled leadership once it had been established (1 Tim 4.14; 5.22);

b. *Qualification*: the Apostles were ‘eye-witnesses’ of the gospel events ‘from the very beginning’, while those who followed them relied for their authority – and continue to rely – on the apostolic testimony to Jesus (Luke 1.1-4; 24.48; Acts 1.8, 21-26; 2.32; 3.15; 5.32; 10.37-41; 13.31; John 15.26-27; 19.35; 21.24; 1 Peter 5.1; 1 John 1.1-5; 4.14);

c. *Authority*: the Lord appointed the Apostles to be “first” and to have “authority” in the Church (1 Cor 12.28; 2 Cor 10.8; 13.10; Eph 4.11; 1 Thess 2.6). By contrast, all subsequent church leaders have only a secondary and derivative authority in the Church;

d. *Task*: the Apostles exercised the unique ministry of ‘laying the foundation’, while all subsequent church leaders were given the task of building on that foundation (Eph. 2.20; 1 Cor. 3.10.11);

e. *Jurisdiction*: the Apostles exercised a catholic or universal jurisdiction, taking responsibility for all of the churches and exercising their authority directly in them, even in churches of which they were not a regular part (Acts 15.36-41; 1 Cor 7.17; 14.33), while the leaders they appointed were granted a more limited sphere of responsibility and authority for a particular church in a given location, with whom they regularly gathered for worship (Acts 14.23; Tit 1.5).

iii. The apostolic appointment of the ‘ordinary and perpetual’ offices is *prescriptive* for the ongoing life of the church between the Lord’s ascension and return, not merely descriptive of apostolic practice in the first century.

This is evident from six observations:

a. The Lord himself gives the ordinary and perpetual offices (Eph 4.11-12; Acts 20.17);

b. The Shepherd office (= elder / overseer / pastor) has its roots in God’s provision of elders to lead his people throughout the whole of covenant history. The NT office of Shepherd (= elder / overseer / pastor) is a continuation of the OT office, with some significant modifications due to the in-breaking of God’s kingdom in Jesus’ life, death and resurrection;

c. The book of Acts presents the ‘Apostles and Elders’ of the new covenant church (15.2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16.4) as the replacement of the ‘Chief Priests and Elders’ of the Jews (Acts 4.23; 23.14; 25.15; cf. 4.5, 8; 6.12);

d. The Apostle Paul regulates the offices of Shepherd (= elder / overseer / pastor) and Servant (= deacon) (1 Tim 3.1-13; 5.17-22; Tit 1.5-9; cf. Phil 1.1). Paul indicates that these regulations are not merely an *ad hoc* arrangement for some churches in the first century, but ‘how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth’ (1 Tim 3.15);

e. the NT presents the appointment of Shepherds as normative apostolic practice in *every* church (Acts 14.23 and Titus 1.5), and provides evidence that Shepherds (= elders / overseers / pastors) provided leadership in churches connected with the apostolic missions of Paul, Peter and James, and across diverse geographical regions (Acts 11.30;

14.23; 15.2-6, 22-23; 16.4; 20.17; 1 Tim 5.17; Tit 1.5; Acts; 1 Pet 5.1 with 1.1; Jas 5.14 with 1.1);

f. Jesus and the Apostles present 'false teaching' as a fulfillment of prophecy and a definite sign of the inauguration of the end times (Matt 7.15; 24.11, 24; Mk 13.22; 2 Thess 2.9, 11; 1 Tim 4.1-5; 2 Pet 2.1; 3.1-4; 1 Jn 4.1; Jude 3-4, 14, 17-19; Rev 2.2, 6, 14-15, 20, 24-25.), and explicitly appoint Shepherds (= elders / overseers / pastors) to guard the truth of the gospel against such error, which suggests that the God-given office of Shepherd is necessary to the church's life and mission until Christ returns (i. Acts 14.21-23 with 20.27-32; ii. 1 Tim 3.1-7 and 5.17-25 with 1.3-7, 19-20; 4.1-7; 5.11-16; 6.20-21; iii. Tit 1.5-16. Cf. also 2 Tim 2.2 with 2 Tim 2.14-18, 23-26; 3.1-13).

Taken together, these six considerations indicate that the Lord's appointment, through the Apostles, of an ongoing government for the church comprised of Shepherds and Servants, should be understood not merely as descriptive, but as prescriptive for the church in the period between Christ's resurrection and return.

This conclusion is consistent with the classic Reformed and Presbyterian conviction that God has given in Scripture a form of church government that is normative for the Church in all ages. It is important to notice, however, what this view does *not* claim for church government. It *does not* claim that a fully biblical church government is part of the gospel. It *does not* claim that subscription to a fully biblical church government is a matter necessary to be believed for salvation. It *does not* claim that a fully biblical church government is one of the marks of the true church. It *does not* claim that a fully biblical church government is a means of grace which somehow guarantees church health and growth. And it *does not* claim that Scripture gives all the details of church government. It claims, simply, that the central matters of the Church's government – including the offices of Shepherd and Servant and their basic functions – are given in Scripture, and that God's Church ought, therefore, to order itself according to his Word. The gospel-centred ministry of the offices, as they work together with the whole body of Christ, is a primary means by which God's church advances its mission in the world.

3. The Lord's government for each particular church consists of a team (i.e. a plurality) of Shepherds (elders / overseers / pastors) to lead the church (Acts 14.23; 20.17, 28; Phil 1.1; Tit 1.5; Jas 5.14; cf. 1 Thess 5.12; Heb 13.17), and a team of Servants (deacons) to facilitate its ministry and to care for the vulnerable, weak and poor (1 Ti 3.8-13; Phil

1.1)

a. Shepherds

i. The office of Shepherd

a. The apostles envisage a single pastoral office, that of the Shepherd. They refer to this office variously by the titles 'Elder', 'Overseer' and 'Pastor'. The three titles are used interchangeably (Acts 20.17, 28; Tit 1.5, 7; 1 Tim 3.1-7 and 5.17; Eph 4.11). The title 'Elder' emphasises the wisdom and maturity required for the task. The title 'Overseer' emphasises the task of governance and leadership. The title 'Pastor' emphasises the role of leaders in lovingly teaching and caring for God's people.

b. The apostle Paul indicates that some Shepherds may be supported financially so that they can 'labour in the word and teaching' (1 Tim 5.17-18). The apostle teaches that *all* Shepherds are called *both* to teach and to rule (1 Tim 3.2, 4-5; 5.17; Tit 1.9; 1 Pet 5.2), and that *all* Shepherds are worthy of the 'double honour' of respect and remuneration (1 Tim 5.17-18). The apostle, therefore, does not make any sharp distinction within the Shepherd office between 'ministers' and 'elders' or between 'teaching elders' and 'ruling elders'. Nevertheless, the 'double honour' due to all Shepherds is 'especially' due to those who 'labour in the word and teaching'. The implication seems to be that these Shepherds have given up other labour (from which they might have supported themselves and their families) in order to 'labour in the word and teaching'. These 'labourers' are not given a different title, and do not occupy a different office, or even a different 'order' within the one office. They do not perform different functions to other Shepherds. The distinction between them and the other Shepherds is not one of kind, but of degree. Still, it is an important distinction: some Shepherds will particularly 'labour' in the Shepherding function of teaching, and these, especially, should be honoured and supported.

c. The apostles know nothing of a single pastoral leader, styled 'the Minister' who leads a particular church on his own. The apostles, rather, employ the nouns 'minister' and 'ministry' as well as the verb 'to minister', broadly, to mean 'service'. They do not restrict the language of 'ministry' to any particular group of people or any particular kind of activity. In the four instances where the noun 'minister' (Greek: *diakonos*) is employed as a title for an office, it is not for the pastoral leadership office of Shepherd, but for the assistance office of Servant, more commonly known as 'deacon' (1 Tim 3.8, 12; Phil 1.1; Rom 16.1).

d. The apostles know nothing of a single pastoral leader, styled 'Priest'. They declare,

rather, that Jesus is the one Great High Priest of his people (esp. Heb 2.17; 3.1; 4.14-15; 5.5-10; 6.20; 7.15-26; 8.1; 9.11; 10.21), and that in him all believers are 'priests' (1 Pet 2.9; Rev 1.6: 5.10; 20.6).

e. The apostles know nothing of a single pastoral leader, styled 'Bishop', who oversees multiple congregations of which he is not a part. The Greek noun *episkopos*, translated as 'bishop' in older English translations, is best translated 'overseer'. It is used interchangeably with the other titles for the single Shepherd office (overseer = elder = pastor). Timothy and Titus are no exception to this rule: they are never styled 'bishops', and do not seek to replace themselves with others who will function in the same role. They are best understood as apostolic delegates.

ii. The role of Shepherds

The role of the Shepherds is to jointly pastor (= shepherd) a particular church of which they are a part (Acts 20.28; Eph 4.11; 1 Pet 5.3; Jas 5.14; Heb 13.17). This pastoral leadership involves lovingly caring for God's people by:

- a. Leading / governing the church in its life and mission, in the manner of the father's leadership in the family (1 Tim 3.4-5; 5.17; 1 Pet 5.2);
- b. Praying with and for God's people, with a particular focus on the life and mission of the church they lead, and the individuals within it (Acts 6.4 with Jas 5.14);
- c. Proclaiming the gospel and teaching the whole counsel of God from the Scriptures, and refuting those who oppose it (1 Tim 3.2; Tit 1.9; cf. Acts 20.27);
- d. Setting an example of Christ-like living (1 Tim 3.1-7; Tit 1.5-9; 1 Pet 5.3; Heb 13.7).

The goal of this loving pastoral leadership is that God's chosen people might be called to faith in Christ, grow to maturity in him, live as his people in the world, and bear witness to him word and deed, for God's glory (Eph 4.11-16; 1 Tim 3.15-16).

Some Shepherds gather in wider councils to co-ordinate the gospel mission and oversee the health of the particular churches. The purpose of these Councils is to ministerially determine doctrine from Scripture, to resolve disputes, and to oversee the health and promote the mission of the particular churches (Acts 15.2-6, 22-35). These councils are sometimes called 'presbyteries' (1 Tim 4.14). Participation in these wider councils may be representative (Acts 15.2-6).

iii. The qualifications of Shepherds.

Shepherds must be rightly qualified and duly appointed

a. Shepherds are qualified by:

- i. *Confession*: Shepherds must have a living faith in Christ, openly confessing him as Lord and Saviour, and holding firmly to the truths of the faith (Tit 1.9; 1 Tim 3.6; Acts 20.28; cf. 1 Tim 4.16; 6.12-13);
- ii. *Character*: Shepherds must be men of exemplary Christ-like character (1 Tim 3.1-7; 5.22; Tit 1.5-9; 1 Pet 5.3; Acts 20.28);
- iii. *Competence*: Shepherds must be both “able to teach” (1 Tim 3.2; Tit 1.9) and “able to lead” (1 Tim 3.3-4; 5.17; Tit 1.7);
- iv. *Conviction*: Shepherds must have a conviction that God is calling them to the role. They must “desire” the “noble task” and undertake it “willingly” (1 Tim 3.1; 1 Pet 5.2);
- v. *Circumstances*: Shepherds must be in life circumstances that allow them to take up the role (1 Tim 5.8; 6.1);
- vi. *Calling*: Shepherds do not appoint themselves to the role, but must be duly appointed to it by God through the Church (Acts 20.28; 1 Tim 5.22; Tit 1.5; cf. Matt 28.18-20; Heb 5.4-10; Acts 13.1-3; 1 Tim 4.14).

b. Shepherds are to be male (1 Tim 3.2; Tit 1.6).

The Scriptures emphasize that men and women are equally created in God’s image, equally fallen in sin, equally redeemed by Christ, equally called to service in God’s kingdom. At the same time, the Scriptures teach that God places us in ordered relationships in the family and the church, in which husbands (in the home) and male elders (in the church) are to provide loving, Christ-like leadership.

Three observations are decisive:

- i. The biblical norm is for male servant-leadership in the family, modelled on Christ’s servant leadership towards his bride, the church (Gen 2.18-25; Eph 5.21-33; 6.4; Col 3.18-21; 1 Pet 3.1-7). This creates the expectation of male leadership in the church as well;
- ii. The language applied to Shepherds assumes that they are male (1 Tim 3.1-13; Tit 1.5-9);
- iii. The authoritative public teaching function assigned to Shepherds (1 Tim 3.2; Tit 1.9) is restricted to men (1 Tim 2.12; 1 Cor 14.33b-35).

The biblical concern is for rightly ordered relationships – for husbands to lead in the family and male Shepherds to lead in the church. Christ-like male leaders will, however, always seek out ways in which all those they lead (women, other men and children) can grow to maturity in Christ and serve the body according to their gifts. In particular, in relation to teaching, the Scriptures are clear that *all* believers – women and children as well as men – are to ‘speak the truth in love’ (Eph 4.15) and ‘teach and admonish one another’ (Col 3.16) so that the whole body grows to maturity.

b. Servants

i. The office of Servant

The trajectory for the office of Servants is set by the narrative of Acts 6.1-7 in which the apostles appointed seven godly men to care for the widows in the Jerusalem church by ‘serving tables’. The noun ‘servant’ (*diakonos*) does not appear as a title in Acts 6, but the related verb (*diakoneo*) is prominent. The appointment of the seven allowed the apostles to focus on ‘prayer and the ministry of the word’. The direct result was the advancement of the church’s mission: ‘the word of God spread’.

The apostle Paul subsequently regulated the office of Servant (1 Tim 3.8-13). He says that having rightly qualified Servants is part of ‘how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household’ (1 Tim 3.15). This regulation of the Servant office, together with the foundation narrative in Acts 6, and the other texts which assume its existence (Phil 1.1; Rom 16.1-2), establish the Servant office as a biblical norm.

ii. The role of Servants

The role of Servants is to manage the practical and material needs of the church with particular reference to the needs of the vulnerable, the weak and the poor (Acts 6.1-7; 1 Tim 3.8-13; cf. Rom 16.1-2).

The Scriptures do not give much detail regarding this work. The title ‘Servant’ indicates that it is an “assistance” office. The emphasis of Acts 6 suggests that it is designed to enable the church to remain focussed on the proclamation of the word, while also effectively managing its resources, and especially caring for the vulnerable, weak and poor. Thus, although the work is focused on practical needs, it is nevertheless important spiritual work which enables the church’s gospel-centred mission.

The Servants are not required to be ‘able to teach’. This suggests that, unlike the Shepherds,

Servants are not charged with responsibility for the church's authoritative public teaching ministry. Nevertheless, Servants will, of course, play a part in the church's wider teaching ministry as they, together with all the saints, 'speak the truth in love' (Eph 4.15). Those who are appropriately gifted may also take on more prominent teaching roles (e.g. Stephen in Acts 7) even though the Servants, in that role, are not responsible for the church's authoritative public teaching.

iii. The qualifications of Servants

Servants must be rightly qualified and duly appointed.

a. Servants are qualified by:

- i. *Confession*: Servants must have a living faith in Christ, openly confessing him as Lord and Saviour, and "holding fast to the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience" (1 Tim 3.9);
- ii. *Character*: Servants must be people of exemplary Christ-like character (1 Tim 3.8, 10-12; cf. Acts 6.3);
- iii. *Competence*: Servants must be 'able to lead' (1 Tim 3.12). The requirement that Servants must manage their children and household well (1 Tim 3.12) is not applied to management of the church as it is for Shepherds (1 Tim 3.5). This may imply that Servants provide a lower level leadership for the church than Shepherds. Nevertheless, competence in management / leadership is required;
- iv. *Circumstances*: Servants must be in life circumstances that allow them to take up the role (1 Tim 5.8; 6.1);
- v. *Calling*: Servants do not take the role upon themselves but must be duly appointed by the church (Acts 6.4, 6; 1 Tim 3.10).

b. Servants may be male or female (1 Tim 3.11; Rom 16.1-2):

- i. The Servant office does not involve *authoritative* teaching;
- ii. 1 Timothy 3.11 probably refers to female Servants ("women [Deacons], likewise ...");
- iii. Romans 16.1-2 probably indicates that Phoebe held the office of Servant at Cenchrea.

4. Healthy presbyteries and assemblies: working together for Christ's

mission

1. The nature of the church

The one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church is united in Christ and by the Spirit. This universal, not-yet-fully-visible, eschatological church is manifested in particular, visible, and present churches. God has, therefore, provided a form of government for his church that stretches beyond the boundaries of any particular church. The Church's *spiritual or organic unity* finds *organisational* expression.

2. God's provision of Councils of Shepherds to oversee the particular churches

The apostolic practice of providing oversight to the particular churches through Councils of Shepherds is consistent with God's provision of such Councils throughout covenant history. This strongly suggests that God's church should be ruled by representative Councils of Shepherds unless there is good reason to deviate from this biblical principle.

The following observations are significant:

- i. God's people were ruled consistently throughout covenant history by representative Councils of Shepherds who oversaw the life of the Church (LXX γερουσία: Exod 3.16, 18; 4.29; 12.21-27; 24.1, 9; Lev 9.1, 3; Deut 5.23; 19.12; 21.2, 6, 19; 22.15-18; 25.7; 27.1; 29.10; Josh 23.2; cf. Num 11.16-30; Ruth 4.2, 9, 11; Ps 106.32; Prov 31.23; Ezra 10.14). This practice continued into the NT period (γερουσία: Acts 5.21; συνέδριον: Matt 5.22; 10.17; 26.59; Mark 13.9; 14.55; 15.1; Luke 22.66; John 11.47; Acts 4.15; 5.21, 27, 34, 41; 6.12, 15; 22.30-23.1; 23.6, 15, 20, 28; 24.20; πρεσβυτέριον: Lk 22.66; Acts 22.5);
- ii. The Lord Jesus recognised and affirmed the authority of Jewish Councils (Matt 5.22);
- iii. The church in Jerusalem was almost certainly ruled in an ongoing way by a representative Council of Shepherds (cf. *Form of Presbyterial Church Government* § 13). This is suggested by: a. regular reference to the "Elders" of the Jerusalem church (Acts 11.30; 15.2, 4, 6, 22-23; 16.4; 21.18); b. the size of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 4.4: five thousand *men*) which renders it almost certain that there were multiple particular churches in the city and suggests that the "Elders" exercised representative leadership; c. reports of at least three meetings of the Jerusalem "Elders" which suggests they met as a body on at least a semi-regular basis (Acts 11.30; 15.2, 4, 6; 21.18); d. the church's organisation of a "daily distribution" of food to the widows that extended beyond ethno-linguistic lines (Acts 6.1-2), which suggests a common city-wide diaconal ministry. These observations

suggest that the “Council of Jerusalem” in Acts 15 was not an *ad hoc* arrangement, but part of the ongoing rule of the church through a Councils of Shepherds;

iv. Acts 15 narrates one particularly significant meeting of these Elders with the Apostles and with delegates sent from the church in Antioch to resolve a disputed question of doctrine and practice. This account presents the meeting of the “Apostles and Elders” (15.2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16.4) to judge questions of theology and practice as the new covenant replacement of the Jewish Council of the “Chief Priests and Elders” which meets for similar purposes elsewhere in the book (Acts 4.23; 23.14; 25.15; cf. 4.5, 8; 6.12). This observation underlines both the continuity of God’s rule of his church through Councils of Shepherds throughout the whole of covenant history, and the rise of new leadership under the Apostles in the new covenant period;

v. In this context, Paul’s reference to the presbytery which laid hands on Timothy (1 Tim 4.14: πρεσβυτέριον) appears as an integral and assumed part of church life, which stands in continuity with the role of such Councils of Shepherds in the life of the church from the beginning of the old covenant period. Given the use of the term πρεσβυτέριον as a synonym for the more common terms συνέδριον (Luke 22.66; Acts 4.15; 5.21, 27, 34, 41; 6.12, 15; 22.30–23.1; 23.6, 15, 20, 28; 24.20) and γερουσία (Acts 5.21), it seems most likely that the Council to which Paul refers is a representative body of Shepherds with oversight of a number of particular churches;

vi. The Council of Jerusalem comprised the Apostles and representative Elders and church members from the particular churches. The decision of the Council was made ‘by the Apostles and Elders, with the whole church’ (Acts 15.2, 22). This suggests that while the authority in the Council rested with the Apostles and Elders, other church members, quite likely including women, were involved in some way in the decision-making process.

The apostles nowhere explicitly *appoint* Councils of Shepherds to oversee multiple particular churches, and nowhere *provide regulation* for the operation of such Councils. For this reason, the apostolic teaching may not be said to be as prescriptive in regard to wider Councils of Shepherds as it is in regard to the leadership of particular churches. Nevertheless, the consistent pattern across the whole of covenant history strongly suggests that God’s church should be ruled by representative Councils of Shepherds unless there is good reason to deviate from this biblical pattern.

3. The Apostles affirmed that Councils of Shepherds fulfil certain functions

The Apostles participated in the Council of Jerusalem, and affirmed the role of such Councils in other ways. While the Apostles nowhere provide instructions for the purposes of such Councils, the goals of apostolic ministry – proclaiming the gospel and strengthening the churches towards maturity in Christ – together with apostolic practice in relation to the Councils, suggest that Councils of Shepherds might fulfil the following functions:

- i. Mutual encouragement of the Shepherds in their ministry (Acts 15.4);
- ii. Joint prayer for the health and mission of the churches (Acts 13.1-3; cf. Section 4 below);
- ii. Examination, setting apart, and discipline of Shepherds, and co-ordination of gospel ministry (1 Tim 4.14; cf. 1 Tim 1.18; 2 Tim 1.6; Acts 13.1-3; 1 Tim 5.19-22; Gal 2.7-10);
- iii. Ministerial interpretation of the Word and application of it to the life of the churches, including the resolution of disputes and enactment of common rules for the churches (Acts 15.22-35; 16.4; cf. 1 Cor 7.17; 14.33; cf. WCF 31.2);
- iv. General oversight of the health of the particular churches.

4. Councils of Shepherds might also promote and facilitate gospel-centred co-operation between churches

The Apostles encouraged and expected that particular churches express their unity in Christ by co-operating with other churches in a range of ways. This kind of rich gospel partnership might be achieved without recognised Councils of Shepherds, and promoted in a range of ways outside and beyond such Councils where they do exist. Nevertheless, in the context of Section 2 (above), it seems that representative Councils of Shepherds might well play a key role in promoting and facilitating gospel-centred co-operation between churches.

In particular, in the post-apostolic period, Councils of Shepherds might appropriately fulfil some of the functions fulfilled by the Apostles. In particular, Councils of Shepherds might especially promote and facilitate:

- i. Sending and receiving of gospel workers to encourage existing churches and plant new ones (Acts 18.18; 20.1-6; Rom 16.3-4; 1 Cor 16.19; 1 Thess 3.1-7);
- ii. Sending and receiving of material resources to support pioneering evangelism and church planting, to strengthen particular churches, and to meet believers' physical needs (Acts 15.33-16.5; 17.14-15; 20.4-5; Rom 15.26-27; 1 Cor 16.1-3; 2 Cor 8-9; 11.8-9; Gal 2.10; 6.6, 10; Phil 4.14-18; 1 Tim 5.3-16; Tit 3.14; Heb 13.3; 1 Jn 3.17);

- iii. Prayerfully sharing in the joys and burdens of all other churches (Acts 13.3; Rom 15.30-31; 2 Cor 1.11; 9.11-15; Eph 6.18-20; Col 4.3; 1 Thess 1.2-10; 2 Thess 3.1; Phil 1.19; Philem 22; Heb 13.3);
- iv. Promoting and overseeing the planting of new churches, especially in regions not yet reached by the gospel (Rom 15.20).

Part 5 – Enabling Conditions

1. Healthy churches: centred on the gospel of Christ

Recognising that these conditions are not available for all churches, and may not be necessary for all churches, we suggest that the following are key factors for spiritual health and growth:

1. Overall

- a. devotion to and confidence in the Lord;
- b. shared understanding of the nature and call of the church, shared vision and values based in the gospel;
- c. clear expectations of members and a commitment to community from members;
- d. majority of congregation in “small groups”, with creative responses to time limitations, geographic spread and demands of life stages;
- e. training for congregational service and wider Christian life;
- f. clear communication within the congregation;
- g. functioning eldership and diaconate (see section below);
- h. affirmation that the church welcomes a diverse range of people;
- i. access to a regular meeting area and facilities which promote congregational life;
- j. training and equipping in best practice for committees of management;
- k. good planning processes for congregational vision.

2. Worship

- a. leaders and people valuing all aspects of worship;
- b. admit total dependence on God rather than claim self-sufficiency; praise God instead of self-applause; thankfulness and gratitude to God, rather than a complaint culture; seeking God’s will rather than our own comfort and desires;
- c. theologically informed, biblical, emotionally sensitive, Christ-centred forms of worship;
- d. Christ-centred expository preaching, applied to heart, mind and will;

- e. a variety of media used as a complement to preaching;
- f. extensive use of Scripture in worship;
- g. biblical forms of celebration of sacraments;
- h. kingdom-focussed prayer in worship and wider congregational life;
- i. excellent songs available, including biblical psalms, expressing a range of biblical truths and Christian affections, with effective musical leadership;
- j. small groups with careful, relevant teaching; fellowship in the Word; shared prayer.

2. Love

- a. share life together — opportunity to listen to one another, pray for and with one another and to speak the word of God to each other and to offer practical service and support to each other, especially in small groups;
- b. growing relationships between members — knowing one another better, deeper trust, readiness to reveal needs to each other;
- c. overcoming culture of defensive privacy, including any traces of a ‘religion is private’ ethos;
- d. providing models and skills for encouraging gospel conversations among Christians;
- e. effective resolution of congregational conflict;
- f. structures which encourage and assist practical support of one another.

3. Witness

- a. praying for gospel proclamation to friends and family, the local community, Australian society and the world;
- b. deliberate strategies to bless the surrounding community through the congregation corporately and/or as individuals;
- c. engaged with the surrounding community, praying for it, seeking avenues to engage with it and serve;
- d. participating in local public life (schools, hospitals, service organisations, local government);
- e. welcoming contacts and those exploring the faith;

- f. generously committing resources to support gospel ministry and practical service;
- g. in contact with, praying for and working with other churches in community, especially those with similar theological convictions; with other PCNSW churches, the Presbytery and PCNSW/PCA; and with international churches;
- h. Pulse, AP, news from Presbytery, Assembly and committees produced well and circulated;
- i. educating members about Presbyterian polity and PCNSW/PCA;
- j. awareness of, and support of, healthy relationship with GANSW (and GAA) and committees.

2. Healthy Christians: trusting in Christ and living for God's glory

Recognising that the following conditions are not available for all Christians, and may not be necessary for all Christians, we hold that the following are key factors for spiritual health and growth:

1. clear understanding of and confidence in status in Christ based on the work of Christ; awareness of God's personal love in Christ (WCF 12:1) and assurance of status in Christ;
2. awareness of and confidence in the transforming work of the Spirit;
3. acceptance of God's authority expressed in his word (WCF 14:2);
4. commitment to growth in Christ-likeness;
5. an awareness of particular ongoing temptation and sin;
6. participation in the worship, fellowship and service of a local congregation in an appropriate language (preferably heart language) and appropriate culture;
7. knowledge of and trusting relationship with elders;
8. knowledge of models of godly living in church, family and Christian friends;
9. personal support from other Christians during times of crisis;
10. stable, open, honest, prayerful friendships with several people of same sex, mainly though not restricted to, members of their congregation;

11. reasonable expectations of church life — including a recognition of the reality of sin and conflict in church;
12. church which recognises gifts and encourage and equips for service;
13. social skills to develop and maintain relationships;
14. church community of people committed to and able to develop and maintain relationships;
15. feeding on God's word through the ministry of the word in the local congregation and in personal study;
16. ability to read and understand the Bible;
17. awareness of models of active devotional life;
18. access to appropriate devotional material;
19. access to appropriate material for personal study;
20. understanding of the gospel and ability to explain it appropriately to a non-Christian;
21. ability to give an answer to questions about the faith (1 Pet 3.15);
22. awareness of answers to relevant difficult questions about the Christian faith;
23. awareness of the difference between a Christian view and common community views on: relationships, truth, sex and marriage, gender, life and death, family, possessions and wealth, self-interest, work and leisure, suffering, and drugs and alcohol; ability to manage time and finances;
24. understanding of and commitment to being a Christian citizen;
25. information about and opportunities to support and participate in global and cross cultural ministry.

3. Healthy leadership: teams of shepherds and servants under Christ

Teams of Shepherds (= Sessions)

1. Session members know, love, respect and trust each other.
2. Sessions have a clear vision of their gospel-centred pastoral ministry.
3. Sessions devote significant time to studying the Word and to praying together for each other and for the church and its mission.
4. Sessions include enough Shepherds to meet the needs of the church for leadership and teaching (no less than 3 Shepherds?).
5. Sessions are small enough to facilitate good teamwork among them (no more than 10 Shepherds?).
6. Sessions effectively divide the responsibilities of leadership among themselves, co-ordinating their individual work, and communicate this effectively to the church. Tasks/roles to consider include: i. leading the Session; ii. administering the Session; iii. overseeing gathered worship; iv. overseeing preaching and teaching; v. overseeing mission and evangelism; vi. overseeing and co-ordinating with the Servants; vii. overseeing other teams.
7. Sessions know those assigned to their care by maintaining effective membership rolls, by effectively dividing up church members amongst themselves for oversight and care, and proactively pursuing Christ-centred discipleship relationships with church members.
8. Sessions take pastoral responsibility for the one gathering-community of which they are a part and with whom they regularly meet, and don't attempt to take pastoral responsibility for other congregations (except perhaps for a limited time where there is a plan to transition to an established leadership for each church).
9. Sessions are trained in/develop the skills needed to act both as a leadership team and team of leaders.
10. Sessions have the respect and support of the Presbytery which oversees them, and of the church they lead.
11. Sessions are committed to working with the wider church through Presbyteries and Assemblies, willingly sending delegates to participate in the work of these councils, and actively praying for and responding to opportunities and needs arising from the work of

these councils.

12. Sessions, in most cases, have a working team of Servants to free them up from the management and administration of the church, and from leading the practical and material care of church members.
13. Sessions have a clear understanding of how church employees (such as paid pastoral assistants) who are not members of the Session relate to the Session.
14. Sessions have an understanding of, and commitment to, the wider church in which they operate, including its doctrine, governance and worship.

Individual Shepherds

1. All Shepherds have a living faith in Christ, a firm grasp of the central truths of the gospel, a broad understanding of the whole counsel of God, and keen sense of how this applies to the Christian life in all its details.
2. All Shepherds understand themselves as co-pastors of the church, and act accordingly.
3. All Shepherds are carefully examined before ordination, and their ministry evaluated at regular intervals thereafter. One means of achieving this may be the institution of term eldership. Moreover, the quality of Shepherds across the church might be significantly improved if all Shepherds (paid and unpaid, i.e. ministers and elders) were examined, ordained and disciplined by Presbyteries, with appropriate involvement from congregations and sessions.
4. All Shepherds are trained in the Scriptures and the knowledge of God, in prayer, in Christian living, in leadership, in teaching and in pastoral care. For paid Shepherds, the four year 'Course of Training' required of 'ministers' by the GAA (in 2018) is well suited to this task (even though it could well be further improved). For unpaid Shepherds, the development of a robust training program for elders seems to be required. This training will be greatly enhanced if it proceeds from a shared understanding the common factors in faithful and effective leadership, preaching / teaching, and discipleship / pastoral care.
5. The ministry of the Word may be enhanced if all Shepherds are equipped and empowered to administer the sacraments.
6. All Shepherds know those assigned to their care both in terms of knowing which church

members they have particular responsibility for, and in the sense of developing an interpersonal relationship with those members.

7. All Shepherds have an understanding of, and commitment to, the wider church in which they operate, including its doctrine, governance, worship and mission.
8. All Shepherds have life circumstances that allow them to devote significant time and energy to their ministry.

Teams of Servants (= Diaconates)

1. Servants have a living faith in Christ, the Christ-like character and competency required of the office.
2. Servants have a clear understanding of their role in enabling the gospel-centred mission of the church and of the way in which their primary functions relate to those of the Shepherds and the whole church.
3. Servants are adequately trained for their work.

4. Healthy presbyteries and assemblies: working together for Christ's mission

1. Presbytery members know, love, respect and trust each other. This may be enabled through Presbyters working together in other contexts and not only in the formal meetings of Presbytery.
2. Presbyteries have a vision for gospel-centred mission in the particular churches and for the role of the Presbytery in overseeing and promoting it.
3. Presbyteries devote significant time, whenever they meet, to the Word and prayer.
4. Presbyteries meet often enough for genuine relationships of trust and care to be established between members.
5. Presbyteries have competent leadership. The key functions of moderating and administering the presbytery's mission are performed by Shepherds who have the gospel-centred vision, Christ-like character, skills and life situation which enable them to fulfil the role effectively. Presbyteries also give careful consideration to the appointment of individuals to

other important roles such as the Conveners of students' committee and church visitation committee.

6. Presbyteries cultivate a culture of brotherly-co-operation in gospel mission, with respect for proper process, while also working against a culture of dry formalism or bureaucracy.

7. Presbyteries are large enough to provide for fruitful co-operation in gospel mission, but small enough so that Shepherds can genuinely know and love each other. (no less than 5 churches? no more than 12 churches?).

8. Presbyteries devote significant time to strategic planning.

9. Presbyteries are granted authority, and take responsibility, for those matters which are central to the church's mission and fall within their jurisdiction. In particular, the key functions of: i. examining, ordaining, overseeing and disciplining Shepherds, and; ii. planting, renewing, and closing of congregations, including their financial affairs, are not outsourced to other bodies far removed from the life of the church. These functions may be aided by external bodies, but not outsourced to Trustees, Assembly committees, or bodies outside PCNSW.

10. Presbyteries have the constitutional power, the will and the skills to take action to plant new churches, to strengthen weak churches, to remove unqualified Shepherds, and to close dead churches.

11. Presbyteries have the vision, the will and the skills to assess the viability of proposed church plants, including the suitability of potential church planting teams.

12. Presbyteries have the authority to oversee the application of church finances within their bounds, and find ways of sharing people and resources across the particular churches.

13. Presbyteries may well be strengthened if they proactively engaged church members, including women, in their decision making processes. This could perhaps be achieved by churches commissioning not only elders but also deacons to Presbyteries and Assembly.

13. Shepherds who serve on Presbyteries have an understanding of, and commitment to, the wider church in which they operate, including its doctrine, governance and worship.

14. Shepherds who serve on Presbyteries receive special training for the tasks of government, especially in examining new Shepherds, strategic planning, resolving conflict, and disciplining those who fall into sin.