



# **The Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia**

## **An Introduction to Beliefs and Practices**

**Published by the Church and Nation Committee, Presbyterian  
Church of Eastern Australia, 2006**

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## WHO WE ARE



For over 150 years The Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA) has been part of the religious life of our nation. The aim of this booklet is to acquaint Christians from other backgrounds and members of the wider community with something of our history, an outline of our beliefs, and an explanation of those things, which distinguish us from other branches of the Christian Church. As its name suggests, the congregations of this Church are found in the Eastern States including Tasmania.

It may be as you read this booklet that you would like to know more about our witness and activities. At the end you will find a directory of local PCEA congregations. Enquiries are welcome and services and activities are always open to visitors. Helpful literature is also available, including the denomination's monthly magazine, *The Presbyterian Banner* and also the Website of the church at <http://pcea.asn.au>.

### OUR AIMS

As a fellowship of those who love the Lord Jesus, we come together to worship him, we study the Bible to learn more about him and we seek to make him known to others. Briefly, our

**worship** is simple and Biblical.

**preaching** is plain, applied and a careful exposition of Scripture.

**fellowship** is warm and genuine with each person made welcome and all encouraged to build one another up in the things of God.

**belief** is the historic Christian Reformed Faith.

# WHAT WE BELIEVE



At a time when spiritual confusion abounds and many people have no religious certainty, the PCEA seeks to maintain a clear testimony to the truths of the Bible. Many of these truths or doctrines have been undermined by liberal and modernist teaching, but through adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith the PCEA maintains the historic Christian faith. This Confession provides a useful guide to the understanding of Bible teaching for all Church members, and sets forth the doctrine which ministers and other office bearers are pledged to maintain, assert and defend. The Confession can be viewed in full on the PCEA Website.

## THE BIBLE

We believe all 66 books of the Old and New Testaments are divinely inspired, authoritative and infallible, and constitute the only God-given rule of faith and duty. The Bible, the whole Bible and nothing but the Bible, is the supreme standard of the PCEA. The books of the Apocrypha are not divinely inspired and so not part of the canon of Scripture. The Bible is the living and powerful word of God (Hebrews 4:12), to be read, understood and obeyed by all believers.

## THE TRINITY

There is only one God, the living and true God, the God of creation and the God of redemption (Deuteronomy 6:4). There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, who are the same in substance, equal in power and glory (John 5:18, 10:30, 15:26). The Three are One, and the One is Three. While this truth is not easy to understand it is clearly taught in the Bible. We must humbly remember that the eternal God is infinite and we are finite, created beings. The important thing is to believe in him as he has made himself known to us in the Bible.

Thus with orthodox Christians everywhere we believe **God the Father** is the uncreated Creator and Sustainer of heaven, earth and of all things visible and invisible. He is sovereign, infinite, eternal and unchangeable, the God of love, wisdom, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

**God the Son**, Jesus Christ, is begotten of the Father, not made; who became man, being conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary at

Bethlehem; who was and continues to be God and Man in two distinct natures and one person. Those who reject the divinity of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, are rejected by God (John 8:27), as are those who reject his humanity (1 John 4:3).

God the Father sent God the Son into this world to die on the Cross for the sin of the world (John 1:29). He died that those who believe in him shall not suffer eternal death but have eternal life. Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day after he was crucified, just as the Scriptures promised, and he ascended into heaven where he makes intercession for his people.

**God the Holy Spirit**, the third person of the Trinity, is God and is the Spirit of the risen and ascended Lord Jesus poured out upon the Church as the gift of the Father. It is the Holy Spirit who regenerates men by his grace and convicts them of sin, and bestows the graces of repentance and saving faith. He unites all believers to Christ, dwells in them as Comforter and Sanctifier, gives them the spirit of adoption and prayer, and seals them unto the day of redemption.

## **THE CREATION**

We believe God created all things by his great power, wisdom, and goodness. The created order came into being without pre-existent materials, at the command of God's word, and originally was all very good (Genesis 1, Hebrews 3:11)

Even the marred creation which we see today at macroscopic, microscopic and telescopic levels is a powerful witness to the majesty of God (and there is still so much not seen or understood!). The created order did not arise by chance, as the evolutionary hypothesis promotes, but by the deliberate and purposeful act of the Triune God. We believe that the Genesis record is God-given history, including the creation of the world in six days, the subsequent entrance of sin and the fall of man, together with the judgments at the fall and the catastrophic flood due to man's sin.

## **UNIVERSAL SIN**

The first man and woman were created upright and altogether very good. Adam and Eve were put on probation but fell from the state of innocence when they ate the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. Sin came into this perfect world and everything was cursed (the Fall of mankind). This original sin affected all humanity – we have all gone astray like lost sheep and are by



nature sinners alienated from God. Every baby born into this world (Jesus Christ alone excepted) comes with a sinful bias against God.

Because God is altogether righteous and just, it would be a denial of his very being for him simply to ignore man's rebellion. He is rightly aggrieved by the ingratitude and opposition of his creatures. Here is mankind's plight. People go against God and are justly deserving of condemnation and Hell. Because this rebellion or sin is in the very nature of man, we are unable to help ourselves (Ephesians 2).

## **THE GOSPEL**

God has graciously acted in our favour. In his mercy and justice he has planned a way to justify the guilty (Romans 3:28). He sent his Son into this world to pay the penalty of our rebellion – death – and cover us with his righteousness, making us acceptable to the Father. This is the Good News of the gospel – Christ Jesus came and died, and is risen from the dead, that sinners might be made right with God and have life eternal!

God has promised salvation to all men and women who will come humbly to the Lord Jesus and believe in him as their Lord and Saviour. The Bible declares: ‘God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life’ (John 3:16).

## **THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRIST**

We live in a time when it is widely held that there are many roads which lead to ‘God’ (‘pluralism’), and that it is unkind and intolerant to ever tell anyone that they are wrong. The Bible clearly teaches that there is only one way to God. Jesus said ‘I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’ (John 14:6). ‘He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him’ (John 5:23).

The uniqueness of Christ as the Son of God and as the only Saviour of men was upheld by the Apostles as shown for example in Acts 4:12: ‘nor is there salvation in any other for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved’.

## **THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE**

The PCEA is an evangelical church, believing the Bible to be the inspired and inerrant word of God. Furthermore we hold to the doctrines of grace,

believing that God is sovereign in the election and preservation of his chosen ones- also called **Reformed** doctrine. We believe that God is truly sovereign and personally reigns over his creation, ordering and governing all things, so that his perfect will is done (Daniel 4:35; Acts 15:18; 17:25-28; Romans 11:36; Ephesians 1:11).

What holds true of God's rule over creation, applies equally in the particular matter of redemption. God must be sovereign in the salvation of people whom the Bible describes as 'dead in trespasses and sin' (Ephesians 2:1). If such are to be saved, God must take the initiative and secure what we cannot secure for ourselves. In other words, we believe salvation is altogether of grace (Ephesians 2:4-10). We reject the idea that people have anything to contribute to their salvation, or that it might be earned or merited by us in part or whole (John 1:12, 13; Romans 3:19, 20, 23; Galatians 2:16).

When we come to ask how sinners might be made right with God, the Reformed faith answers from the Bible: 'Salvation belongs to the Lord' (Psalm 3:8). God has taken the initiative in every stage of redemption and it is solely his accomplishment (Romans 8:28-30). Is it not clear that all people ought to repent and believe on Christ? Yet man, left to himself, will not come to God. Therefore, the Lord chose, freely and unconditionally, a people for himself, even before the foundation of the world (Acts 13:48; Ephesians 1:3-7; 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14).

## **A COVENANT GOD**

The Bible teaches us that God relates to his people by covenant (a binding commitment initiated by God), by which he promises to be the God of those whom he calls and makes his people (Genesis 17:7). After the Fall of man, and in face of man's total inability to save himself, God enacted what is termed the **Covenant of Grace**, freely offering life and salvation to all who would believe in him and his promises. This covenant underwent different administrations – the covenant with Abraham, with Israel at Mt. Sinai (Mosaic), and with David- but its essential promise remained the same throughout. 'I will be your God and you shall be my people' (Jeremiah 31:33). It was fulfilled in the New Covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ (Luke 22:20). The Covenant of Grace is the unifying theme which runs through both Old and New Testaments.

As covenant Head of his people, Christ lived and died to fulfil Scripture and make the only once-for-all sacrifice sufficient to merit life everlasting (Luke 22:20, Hebrews 9:15-28). He fulfilled all righteousness to save those given to him by the Father, and to secure, not merely make possible, their salvation

(John 6:37-40, 44 ; 17:9, 10, 24). We come to Christ empty-handed and undeserving of the free gift of everlasting life, but happily owning that:  
Upon a life I did not live,  
Upon a death I did not die,  
Another's life, another's death,  
I stake my whole eternity.

## **HOLY LIVING**

Belief in God must be accompanied by obedience to his word and holy living. 'For this is the will of God even your sanctification' (1 Thessalonians 4:3). Most of the letters of the New Testament begin with teaching or doctrine and then turn to practical aspects of Christian living. Romans 12 is a classic passage outlining many duties required of the believer- 'I beseech you therefore brethren by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God'.

As God's children, Christians are called to be different in their attitudes and standards from the prevailing ethos of a secular society. Love, gentleness, mercy, and all the fruits of the Spirit, are distinguishing marks of Christ's disciples (Galatians 5:22-26). Jesus calls us to holiness of life (1 Peter 1:13-16). The Holy Spirit is given, as Christ promised, so that we may be sanctified (i.e. 'made holy'), through his purifying application to our hearts of that Word which is truth (John 17:17; *cf.* 14:26, 16:13, 14). We are to be subject to the authority of this truth in all spheres of life (Matthew 7:24-27; 2 Corinthians 10:4, 5; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17). Without the fruits of good works, our faith is not true but dead. Faith and obedience are inextricably linked together (James 2:14-16).

## **GOD'S MORAL STANDARDS – the Ten Commandments**

The Bible teaches universal moral duties and principles as summarised in the Ten Commandments- further summarised by Jesus in the two 'love' commandments (Matthew 22:40). This is not an ethic restricted to any particular time or culture. It is binding upon all humanity because it is the righteous standard of the God who made us, even though no one is able to obey all this holy law.

The law cannot save us and we may never hope to be made right with God through observing the law (Galatians 2:16). Rather, it points us to Christ,

who came and died to save his people from the curse of law-breaking (Galatians 3:13, 24). It is by the law that we know sin, for sin is ‘the transgression of the law’ (1 John 3:4). Being saved and united to Christ, the Christian is under no condemnation from the law because the Son's righteousness is accounted ours (Romans 8:1).

The new relationship we have with God means we have a new standing with respect to his law, so that it may truly be said, ‘You are not under the law, but under grace’ (Romans 6:14). But this does not mean that the Christian repudiates the law, for those who are saved from its condemnation will view the righteous law of God in a way which is not possible for those who are still under sentence as law-breakers. With the Apostle Paul, believers find themselves ‘delighting in the law of God’ (Romans 7:22).

The Moral Law is not simply a personal standard for Christians, but sets the standard which God as Creator and Judge requires of all mankind. It is the only foundation upon which true justice and righteousness can be built. It is the standard by which national life, in every aspect, ought to be regulated. We want to preserve what is pure and good in all spheres of life. The family needs to be protected from the ravages of marital breakdown, violence, and the polluting influences of pornography and sexual perversion. The selfish and unnecessary killing of the unborn is a national disgrace. The effects of alcohol and drug abuse are evident to all. Our children need protection from those who exploit the young and weak. Honesty and integrity in government and business urgently need to be promoted.

What is to be done? It is only right that we do what we can to help the victims of man's inhumanity to man. But we also need to address the underlying causes and promote a lifestyle which will preserve purity and truth. Our nation needs to return to the Lord and to the only sure guide which is God's Moral Law (Proverbs 13:24). Love demands that society be shown a better way – the way which agrees with our Maker's righteous standard.

## **THE LORD'S DAY**

As a memorial of his creation work God has always required of man that he keep one day in seven as a Sabbath (day of rest) to the Lord (Genesis 2:3; Exodus 20:8-11; Isaiah 56:2). This principle is enshrined in the Ten Commandments: ‘Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God’ . The Lord Jesus upheld and reiterated this commandment, declaring himself to be ‘Lord of the Sabbath’ (Mark 2:27, 28 *cf.* Luke 4:16; Matthew 5:17, 18).

Since our Lord's resurrection on the first day of the week this day has been observed by Christians as the Lord's Day or Christian Sabbath (*cf.* Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2; Revelation 1:10). Not all the particulars of the old Mosaic code relating to the Sabbath are binding upon believers today, but we are bound to keep this day as a special day to the Lord and to refrain from unnecessary work and worldly entanglements.

What a privilege it is to have one whole day each week in which we may especially remember that Christ is risen and is coming again, meet in worship, refresh both body and soul and leave aside the worries and cares of the past week! Those who use the Lord's Day as God intends will soon find themselves calling 'the Sabbath a delight' (Isaiah 58:13).



# WHY WE ARE PRESBYTERIAN



## THE LOCAL CHURCH

The first Christians were Jews who were accustomed to attend the Temple in Jerusalem or their local synagogue. But when the Apostles began to preach the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ, the Christians began to gather in homes or hallst o hear them. They prayed and broke bread together, and shared in the Lord's Supper according to Christ's command. This gathering of Christians was called a church, congregation or assembly. In each place where the gospel was preached and people believed, they came together for worship as the church in that place. Leaders called elders and deacons were appoint ed for each local church (Acts 6, 20:17).

But the local church was also in contact with other local churches. Paul's letters were passed around between them and collections were taken to send to churches in need. Moreover, the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 was actually a presbytery or assembly of apostles and elders from various churches. Their decisions were binding on all other churches, and brought them much joy. The local church therefore is not independent of other churches.

## PRESBYTERIAN GOVERNMENT

Each local PCEA congregation has a body of elders called the Session. The teaching elder is called a minister. To the local Session belongs the responsibility of admitting new members, as well as the exercise of pastoral care and discipline. Elders are to lead as under-shepherds of the flock who must give account to the Chief Shepherd (Jesus) in whose name they serve (1 Peter 5:1-4). The deacons and elders act together for financial and administrative purposes at a meeting called the Deacons' Court. It is worth noting that in the PCEA every member of the congregation has the right to raise concerns with, and make suggestions to, their local Session.

The minister and an elder from a number of congregations come together to form a Presbytery. Presbyteries oversee the ordination of ministers and have general pastoral oversight of the congregations within their bounds (1 Timothy 4:14). It is the body to which ministers are immediately responsible for the discharge of their duties. When all Presbyteries meet together it is called a Synod. This meets annually to review matters from lower courts and determine national policy.

Different matters are dealt with and decisions made at each of these courts of the Church according to the constitution. These bodies are called 'courts of the church' because they administer and apply the law of God in Scripture to particular situations. Appeals can be made through the courts of the Church with regard to a decision or action. The system of graded courts (session, presbytery, synod), provides a system of checks and balances, and helps to ensure that Church leaders remember that their calling is not to dominate nor oppress the Lord's people, but to serve (1 Peter 3:5).

Ours is an age of individualism and of the rejection of traditional institutions. It is not surprising therefore, to find some Christians maintaining that the Bible has little to say about the institutional aspects of Church life. It is very easy for someone with a strong personality to dominate in a so-called 'independent' church. We must also be aware of preaching what itching ears want to hear (2 Timothy 4:3). The Bible commands that 'all things be done decently and in order', because God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40). We must remember that the Church is Christ's permanent institution (Matthew 16:18) and that Christ is the head of the church- not the Pope or Archbishop or any self appointed man (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22).

The denominational term, Presbyterian, arose because of our historic testimony for the Biblical role of the corporate eldership as over and against the claims, on the one hand, of Roman Catholic and Anglican hierarchy and, on the other, of Congregational independency.

### **Elders:**

These are men (not women) who are appropriately qualified, gifted spiritually and chosen by the people (1 Timothy 3:1-7; cf. Acts 1:15-26). In the New Testament these rulers are sometimes called 'bishops', or 'overseers' (Greek, *episkopos*), and sometimes 'elders' (Greek, *presbuteros*). The same office is meant by both terms. Some elders are chosen and trained to focus on preaching and teaching. We call these 'teaching elders' or 'ministers'. All elders are equal in authority and operate corporately at both the local and broader levels (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7; Acts 14:23).

### **Deacons:**

In the Bible we read of those who were set apart to a ministry of administration and mercy (Acts 6:1-6, cf. Philippians 1:1). These officers are called 'deacons' and, as for the eldership, their qualifications and functions are outlined in the Pastoral Epistles (for elders see: 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; for deacons see: 1 Timothy 3:8-13). In line with Scripture, the PCEA admits only qualified men into this office.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

The Bible assumes all believers will identify with the local Church. It exhorts us not to forsake coming together for worship (Hebrews 10:25). Membership in the PCEA is open to all who profess saving faith in Christ, and whose life gives evidence of a sincere desire to walk with the Lord. Members are encouraged to gain a greater knowledge of the doctrines held by the Church, but only office bearers are required to subscribe to the Subordinate Standard (the Westminster Confession of Faith). Members are exhorted to develop a devotional life including the practice of regular private prayer, Bible reading, and family worship, in addition to attending meetings of the Church. We want all to use their gifts for the Lord and to participate as fully as possible in the life of their local congregation.

## **CHURCH and STATE**

Our Federal and State Governments exist by divine institution (Romans 13:1-4 and 1 Peter 2:13, 14), with elected men and women occupying seats in such government. The institution of the State is part of God's moral government, i.e. it concerns all people, regardless of their specific relationship to God. It is therefore an aspect of God's favour which he shows all his creatures – in Reformed theology termed ‘common grace’. Rulers are to legislate and govern with an eye to the perfect standard of the God who will require of them an account, and citizens are to give due obedience to the lawful enactments of their rulers, remembering that ‘whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God’ (Romans 13:2).

The Church also exists by divine institution, but with Christ as the permanent Head of the Church. While both Government and Church are instituted by God, they operate in two different spheres, namely the civil and the spiritual. Yet there is a relationship between State and Church and this is detailed in the so called ‘Establishment Principle’. This principle starts with the fact that Jesus is Lord over all things (Colossians 1:16-20). Every sphere of human action is therefore accountable to the King of kings, Jesus Christ (John 5:22). Accordingly, rulers have a duty to protect, promote, and to support the interests of true religion (Psalm 72:10, 11; Isaiah 49:23). For her part, the Church has a responsibility to pray for leaders in government (1 Timothy 2:1, 2), to teach the duties of Christian citizenship, and to give guidance, or admonition when appropriate, from God's Word (*cf.* 2 Chronicles 19:8-11).

## **SISTER CHURCHES**



Today we hear much about denominational union as promoted by the ecumenical movement. Unfortunately, the union promoted is often at the expense of truth. All true believers enjoy union with Christ and therefore, as members of his body, spiritual solidarity with one another. It is true that this spiritual fellowship should be given greater visible expression, and we cannot endorse the actions of those who are rightly called schismatic.

But we also believe that there can be no real union between Churches without the bond of true religion. That means an uncompromising loyalty to Christ as Head, a unity of faith founded upon the Scriptures, and fidelity to the principles of Biblical worship. Such union was achieved, for instance, when the congregations of the Free Presbyterian Church of Victoria joined the PCEA in 1953.

The PCEA is not prepared to forsake truth and communion with God for the sake of 'peace' and 'fellowship' with men. Yet it is our prayer that 'He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock' (Jeremiah 31:10). And because we value true Christian unity we are always open to faithful co-operation with other believers on the local level. The PCEA is a member of the International Conference of Reformed Churches.



## HOW WE WORSHIP



It has been said that one of the most pressing questions confronting the modern Church is the matter of worship. Many Christians, across the denominations, are concerned with the lowering of standards and introduction of previously unknown practices into divine worship. The criteria employed in their introduction seems to have more to do with the 'end justifies the means' principle rather than with Biblical warrant. Another principle adopted is 'every man does what is right in his own eyes'. One would expect believers to acknowledge God's requirements for worship, and seek to honour him in this important matter. God alone has the right to determine how we are to worship him and instructs us accordingly. God has given us his own rule of worship. We hold to this so called 'Regulative principle' in worship.

Because of widespread departure from Biblical teaching on worship, worship in PCEA churches has become quite distinctive. It was not the case 150 years ago. Public worship in PCEA churches is marked by simplicity, reverence and adherence to what the Bible teaches about worship. The fundamental rule of worship is found in John 4:23-24 'The hour is coming and now is, when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is a Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth'.

Worship in PCEA churches is simple, with few accoutrements and little outward display. Rather, worshippers seek to come with a prepared and humble heart, to worship God without distraction from so many of the modern excesses that have crept into mainstream churches. 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise' (Psalm 51:17). The pulpit is central because preaching and hearing the word of God is central to worship. Musical instruments are neither warranted nor needed. One member leads in the congregational singing of Scripture as found in the book of Psalms.

In terms of reverence in public worship, we encourage an orderly entry and quiet meditation time before a service. While joy is a central theme in going up to the house of God, frivolity is avoided. We enter into the presence of the living God, who we are reminded in Scripture is a 'consuming fire. We do not encourage shouting out, clapping or private discussions during a worship service – but rather give careful and earnest attention to God's word and the elements of worship as led by the minister.

We believe that the elements of praise, prayer, reading of Scripture, preaching of Scripture, giving, along with the sacraments of the Lord's Supper and Baptism, constitute public worship. These are described in more detail below.

**Praise:**

The praise that we offer in public worship comes from the Psalter, which is comprised of the 150 inspired Psalms of Scripture set in a metrical format suitable for singing. We sing without musical instruments – the opening notes are sung by a Precentor to set the pitch and tempo to the chosen tune. The congregation joins in during the opening line of the Psalm. In a number of our congregations Psalmody conferences are held periodically. We believe the 'psalms, hymns and spiritual songs' referred to in Colossians 3:16 refer to the different sections of the book of Psalms. We also encourage the learning of the four basic harmonic parts – Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass. In a number of congregations this is achieved by the use of the Tonic Solfa.

**Prayer:**

Prayer addressed to God the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is made by those leading services of public worship. This does not follow set liturgies, but rather is offered freely and usually without written preparation, as one is led by the Holy Spirit. We generally stand for prayer.

**Reading of Scripture:**

Usually passages of Scripture related to the chosen passage for exposition are read publicly. It is common (although not essential) for there to be both an Old Testament and New Testament reading in a given service. We do not follow a set liturgy of Bible readings. The version of Scripture used is determined by the minister and session, with guidance from the Synod.

**Preaching of Scripture:**

The preaching of Scripture is another essential part of the worship service. Some have said that the authority and centrality of Biblical preaching is the backbone of a healthy church. The preaching is Christ-centred (1 Corinthians 2:2), but it also encompasses the whole of Scripture (1 Timothy 3:16). The preacher, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, brings forward the very truth of the Word of God at a level that can be understood by the gathered congregation and endeavours to apply that Word to daily living.

**The free will offering:**

Worshippers are encouraged to give of their material possession in accordance with the Lord's material blessing upon them. In 1 Corinthians

16:2 for example the early Christian church was instructed to set aside their offering on the first day of the week. We commend tithing (giving a tenth of one's income) as a general principle, however in essence **all** that a Christian owns has been given to them by God and ought to be used in his service.

## **THE LORDS SUPPER**

We believe that the New Testament instructs us to observe only two sacraments, that of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is that sacrament that was instituted and commanded by the Lord Jesus Christ just prior to his crucifixion. The sacrament normally takes place after the sermon has been preached and consists in the receiving of the elements of bread and wine, symbols of the body and blood of Christ, whose sacrificial death for his people we are remembering. We invite only communicant members and believers to the Lord's Supper in accordance with 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 (this is called 'fencing of the table'). Fencing of the table does not mean that we exclude believers from other denominations from receiving the sacrament. The table is Christ's, so visitors, who are members in good standing in other evangelical Churches, are welcome to join with us in the Lord's Supper.

## **BAPTISM**

Baptism is administered in accordance with the New Testament example and commandment found in Acts 2: 38-41. We believe that children are an important inclusion in baptism and we readily baptise the infants of believing parents (or even one believing parent). Adults are also baptised upon profession of faith. The Baptism itself is administered in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit by the sprinkling of water on the head. We do not hold that baptism itself regenerates a person before God, but it is rather an outward sign of union with Christ.

In conclusion, the regular conduct of the worship service (or means of grace as it is often called) is a vital part of our church life that encourages and equips believers, through God's grace, to lead Christ honouring lives and thus ultimately to glorify God.

## WHAT IS OUR HERITAGE



As a branch of the Christian Church, our history began with its institution by the Lord Jesus. As a Protestant denomination we are heirs to the Reformation of the sixteenth century, when the gospel was revived and the Bible restored to its rightful place. The Australian chapter commenced in the nineteenth century.

Most Presbyterian settlers in colonial Australia came from Scotland, and back there belonged to the largest denomination - the Church of Scotland. This church dated from the Reformation under John Knox in 1560. In 1841 Presbyterians in the colony of New South Wales (which then included Victoria and Queensland) generally belonged to a body which had a lengthy title: The Synod of Australia in connection with the Established Church of Scotland.

### THE DISRUPTION

In 1843 an event occurred which was one of the most significant in the politico-religious (social) history of Britain in the nineteenth century, and which had ramifications throughout the colonies. This event is called The Disruption. It came about because the civil authorities in Scotland interfered in the spiritual affairs of the Church. The immediate matter was the demand by the State that ministers, who were unacceptable to the Church and who had not been chosen by the local congregations, be settled in certain parishes. Such action was contrary to the constitutional relationship between Church and State. More importantly, it was a denial of the spiritual independence of the Church and the sole Headship of Christ over her affairs. Thus in 1843, after a protracted struggle, some 470 ministers, led by Dr. Thomas Chalmers, left the established body and formed the Church of Scotland Free - free of these encroachments on Scriptural teaching. While her founders left the Establishment, they maintained the historic place, teachings and position of the Church of Scotland.

The Disruption involved great sacrifice on the part of faithful Christian people. The ministers who left the Established Church forfeited homes and stipends. Congregations had to start over again, often in the face of stiff opposition from those who supported the State's action. Yet the Free Church of Scotland, as it became known, was greatly blessed of God, and has been a powerful influence for good in that land and beyond.

## **COLONIAL REPERCUSSIONS**

The events of 1843 created great interest in Australia and local Presbyterians could not remain unaffected. One question of immediate consequence was whether the Synod of Australia should receive ministers from the Established Church of Scotland. Some took the view that there was no need to be too precise about the requirements for the ministry and that the Disruption had little bearing on the Australian situation. Others were more perceptive. They realised that many ministers who then remained in the Established Church of Scotland accepted the idea that the State might exercise control over various aspects of the spiritual life of the Church, even though this was manifestly contrary to God's Word. To accept men of such compromised principles was to sow the seed of departure from Biblical standards. Further, while the Disruption was a Scottish event, the principles involved were of universal significance.

Geography could not alter the fact that those Presbyterians who upheld the Headship of Christ and the spiritual independence of the Church were duty bound to support the stand taken by the Free Church. Hence a minority in the Synod of Australia, led by the Rev. William McIntyre of Maitland and the Rev. James Forbes of Scots Church, Melbourne, upheld the truth that 'A Church must honour Christ in the way she orders her life, even if it means considerable cost. She must back up her words with consistent behaviour'. They declared, 'We are not prepared to prefer the Established Church over the Free Church for our supply of ministers. And in any event we ought to be an independent body'. McIntyre and three colleagues withdrew and formed the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia in Sydney on the 10th October, 1846. In Melbourne, James Forbes acted similarly and the body he founded, the Free Presbyterian Church of Victoria, co-operated with the PCEA and in 1953 became fully part of it. Other Free Presbyterian Churches were founded in South Australia and Tasmania.

## **TO THE PRESENT DAY**

By the 1860s, most Presbyterian denominations had come together in the various Australian colonies. These union movements were backed by seemingly persuasive arguments, and the various colonial Free Churches lost ground as large sections of those Churches joined the unions. Unfortunately such unions were only achieved by leaving various important matters open questions. In 1901, the State bodies formed the Presbyterian Church of Australia (PCA), but again allowing compromise on important matters. The PCA appended a Declaratory Statement to the Westminster Confession,

incorporating an ambiguous 'liberty of opinion' clause. This made it easy for error to come in and hard for effective action to be taken against it.

Meanwhile the PCEA maintained its distinctive witness. In the later part of the nineteenth century and into the next, destructive Biblical criticism and erosion of Christian doctrine occurred in many Churches. Throughout, the PCEA has sought to maintain a stand for the 'old paths.' It has not been easy, but we believe it has been right. More than once the demise of this denomination was predicted but the Lord has upheld it for his own good purpose.

Along with attacks from without there were also troubles within. Even in New Testament times the Church was subject to all types of assaults upon her peace and unity. We are to expect opposition, within and without, if we remain faithful to Christ. At the same time, no one can pretend that our Church did not bring some of its troubles upon itself. Indeed, in over 150 years it would be surprising not to find evidence of the adverse impact of strong personalities or unwise decisions!

In 1977 a majority of the PCA churches withdrew to form with others the Uniting Church in Australia. We rejoice that there has been a return to Reformed faith by many in the ongoing PCA and evidence of a growing rejection of that liberalism which stifled evangelical vitality for much of the last century. However, there remain significant points of difference between the two bodies which ought not to be minimised. We believe the distinctive and, as we would respectfully maintain, more Biblically consistent testimony of the PCEA continues to be needed today.

The PCEA is the oldest Presbyterian denomination in Australia. It now consists of some twenty-seven congregations organised into twelve charges. There are three Presbyteries and the Synod of Eastern Australia meets annually. The Federal Relations Act with the Free Church of Scotland was rescinded in 2004, but the PCEA maintains relations with this and other Reformed churches through the International Council of Reformed Churches.

## WHAT IS OUR FUTURE



The PCEA has strong foundations in the Word of God and the Reformed doctrines. Close adherence to the Scriptures and the Westminster Confession, along with clear teaching on the form of worship, has preserved it from many false doctrines and worship practices which have undermined the witness of other churches. Anyone attending the PCEA for any length of time will testify to the solid Biblical teaching and adherence to Biblical principles in worship.

However we do not believe our heritage is to be preserved simply as a ‘museum piece’, but rather is to be proclaimed as of vital importance. It is a living heritage which bears witness to the unchanging truth of the Bible and maintains the faith once delivered unto the saints. ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever’ (Hebrews 13:8). Our nation is in great need of hearing the gospel again, but it must be the true gospel not one that is watered down and sweetened to please men. A gospel emptied of Christ is powerless to save.

We welcome all who come in search of the truth as revealed in the Bible. We say ‘here is a Church where Christ is honoured, where you can grow in grace and holiness, where you can glorify God and where there is the desire to reach the lost. It has no grandiose programmes nor exciting entertainment to offer, but it guarantees to teach and preach God’s word, to offer simple reverent worship, and to pray and care for you and your family’. As the apostle Paul wrote – ‘I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase’ (1 Corinthians 3:6). ‘We pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest’ (Matthew 9:38).

### **Mission**

The PCEA has been very active in sending workers to various harvest fields over the years. They have gone to South Africa, to India, to Peru and to Fiji. All these centres are now staffed by nationals, but the PCEA continues to support them in prayer and giving, and occasional visits. Many in the Church use the monthly ‘mission prayer notes’ to pray for the ongoing ministry in these lands and other places. More recently the PCEA has commissioned workers to serve with Australian Indigenous Ministries. Church members are also involved with supporting Christian Witness to Israel and other interdenominational missions.



## **Youth**

The PCEA has always sought to train up the young people in the Church through Sunday Schools, Youth Fellowships and other youth ministries. Vacation Bible Schools are conducted to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to children outside the Church. A youth magazine called 'Run for Glory' is published monthly. Children are encouraged to do 'Search Work', write essays and contribute articles to this youth magazine. Congregations work together to conduct Youth or Family Camps at different centres.



# WHERE ARE PCEA CHURCHES

**Website:** <http://www.pcea.asn.au>

## QUEENSLAND

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## NEW SOUTH WALES

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