

The triennial meeting of the General Assembly of Australia testified to our fundamental unity around the truth of God's Word and the power of Christ's gospel. It's time to reflect and review a most excellent week. A flood of memories rise – highlights being:

- We engaged in theological debate as to the merit of retaining the words “contained in” within PCA ordination vows. Currently, the first question is: “Do you believe the Word of God which is *contained in* the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the only rule of faith and practice?” It was argued that omitting these two words would save having to explain to others what we mean by “contained in”. Historically, the words have meant “bounded by” – that if a person wants to find the Word of God written, they must look to the Old and New Testaments and not to any other sources. Some, however, have argued that “contained in” means that the Bible also contains things that are not the Word of God. The debate now passes down to state assemblies and presbyteries under the Barrier Act.
- Wednesday evening was dedicated to the so-called *marriage debate*. The Assembly did not deviate from its historic stand against same-sex marriage, but made an additional declaration that no PCA minister may celebrate such a union if the law is changed. On the question of “when to relinquish recognition as a denomination under the Marriage Act?” ... it was decided to remain *IN* for the present and that the trigger for further discussion on the question would be when the government forces PCA ministers to conduct such unions.
- Further theological debate focused our view on the nature of *the eldership* in our church. Originating from NSW as a desire to rewrite a section of their code, the discussion has now widened into a three-year theological study (to be returned to the 2019 meeting) into whether we can agree to a PCA-wide understanding of the characterisation of the eldership, especially with regard to an elder's *aptness to teach*. Up to this point, the PCA has not required a uniform or exclusive view of the duties and functions of the eldership, but has allowed a variety of practice.
- In the light of massive distances and obvious practical difficulties, PIM churches and their relationship to supervising presbyteries was discussed. We were reminded that it not possible to offer meaningful supervision from thousands of kilometres away. The Assembly declared that churches founded and maintained by PIM are now regarded as mission churches of PIM subject to its exclusive governance and jurisdiction, and asked PIM to exercise power normally exercised by a presbytery until such mission church grows to the stage of being recognised as a regular congregation.
- To assist leaders in conducting public worship, the Assembly recommended the websites pwad.org.au and rejoicehymnbase.com.au as useful resources for worship leading and as an aid to the church in general for private and family devotions.
- Does the PCA have a millennial view? Perhaps the Westminster Confession of Faith teaches or excludes particular views on eschatology and the millennium. Perhaps it doesn't. We'll discover more in three years time as we established a theological study group (to report to the 2019 meeting).
- One further theological note ... Does the PCA have a view on offering the bread and wine to young children (of believers) during the Lord's Supper? Again, we'll have to find out in three years time, as we established a theological study group (to report to

the 2019 meeting) on the biblical, theological, historical and pastoral implications of the PCA practicing paedocommunion.

- Damien Carson gave the Assembly a briefing on the work of the gospel within the Presbyterian churches of Adelaide. The report was encouraging to hear and thanks were expressed for the generous support being given by the Presbyterian Church of Queensland.
- Plans to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation are well underway. Next October it will be 500 years since Martin Luther made his protest and that gentle hammering of 95 theses to the chapel door sounded a resounding bell that has rung throughout the world. With the theme: *Taking God Seriously*, the PCA is launching a celebration that emphasises our reformation doctrine, historical reflection and commitment to evangelism.
- APWM reported on our large family of mission personnel working under the prayerful supervision of PCA, and we rejoiced at the signing of what we anticipate will be a fruitful partnership between PCA and the Presbyterian Church in Japan.
- As the week of meetings drew to a close late Thursday afternoon, the General Assembly considered the implications of our *mother church* (the Church of Scotland) departing the faith in such an obvious way earlier this year in their General Assembly meetings in Edinburgh. The Church of Scotland now allows congregations to call ministers who are living in same-sex relationships. While the PCA is thankful for its heritage, which owes much to the Church of Scotland, we no longer consider ourselves to be in fellowship with the Church of Scotland.

As the writer to the Hebrews admits: And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Archbishop Glenn Davies' greeting, nor of valuable contributions by Flip Buys of World Reformed Fellowship or John Nicholls of the Free Church of Scotland.

I am grateful to God for the men and women of this year's General Assembly - for their vibrant heart-singing, commitment to daily morning prayer, warm embrace of overseas mission leaders, attentiveness to Alastair Bain's expositions from Acts, robust yet respectful theological debate and for the fulsome sense of fundamental unity around the truth of God's Word and the power of Christ's gospel.

The Presbyterian Church of Australia is immeasurably blessed of God. We are blessed to have unity of doctrine expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith. We are blessed because we have a clear focus – in that we hold the gospel of Christ, and the message of the Cross, central to our message. We are blessed because we have passion for the glory of God in everything. Think of it, brothers and sisters: what other church of our size (650 congregations) enjoys such theological unity, clarity of gospel presentation and a passion for God's glory?

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord.

John P Wilson
Moderator-General, PCA