

**Reformation Presbyterian Church, Australian Presbytery**  
(Formerly known as the Composite Presbytery of Eastern Australia).

**EXTRACT MINUTE**

The Composite Presbytery of Eastern Australia met on the Third of August 2018 and was constituted. It was Agreed, among other things, THAT:

**Management of Presbytery Finances.**

The Presbytery gave attention to the revised Document “Presbytery Finances” (Appendix B).

It was Moved, Seconded, and Agreed THAT:

1. The Presbytery receive this Report;
2. And that the Presbytery continue to manage its own finances for the time being;
3. And that a ‘Broader Church Deacons’ Court’ not be constituted before at least one Deacon has been ordained in at least two of the congregations associated with the Presbytery, that there ordinarily be a minimum of three Deacons present in the meetings of the Broader Court, and that participation in the Broader Court be by way of delegation once there is a plurality of Deacons in a ‘Local Church Deacon’s Court’;
4. And that once a ‘Broader Church Deacons’ Court’ has been constituted, the members of that Court decide who will fulfil such functions as Moderator, Treasurer and Clerk, as well as how frequently it will meet ordinarily;
5. And that once a ‘Broader Church Deacons’ Court’ has been constituted, the management of Presbytery finances be taken up by that Court and that necessary communications between the related Presbytery and Deacons’ Court ordinarily be through the respective Clerks of those Courts;
6. And that since the task of the Diaconate involves, not just financial management, but also showing mercy in material ways to the poor (Acts 6:1-6; Romans 12:8), so the ‘Broader Church Deacons’ Court’ will have a role in co-ordinating deeds of mercy and assistance relating to needs in local congregations, as well as in the wider Church and in the world (Galatians 6:10).

Extracted from the Records of the Presbytery by the Clerk on the Sixth of August 2018.

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## APPENDIX B

### Presbytery Finances

The following order of enquiry has been applied to this matter:

Firstly, to consider the potential financial needs of a Presbytery, Biblically understood;

Secondly, to consider some Biblical principles that apply to the handling of a Presbytery's finances;

Thirdly, to consider some historical material;

Fourthly, to state some conclusions in summary form;

Fifthly, to make recommendations to the Presbytery.

#### **1. The Financial needs of the Presbytery.**

I. What is the work of the Presbytery in Scripture, for which funds might be required?

A. Regular or *pro renata* meetings – Acts 15.

B. Commissioning messengers and missionaries – Acts 13:1-4; 15:27,30-33.

C. Training, examination and ordination of Presbyters – 1 Timothy 4:14; 5:22; 2 Timothy 2:1-2.

II. In these matters, funds would potentially be required for:

A. Travel expenses and accommodation for attendees;

B. Costs to hire or maintain meeting facilities, administrative costs, telecommunication costs etc.

C. Remuneration for those labouring as missionaries, messengers, or officers in the court (including theological lectures). Regarding provision for the necessities of those preaching the gospel, consider:

i. Those preaching the gospel ought ordinarily to receive from those among whom they minister (1 Corinthians 9:1-14; Galatians 6:6; 1 Timothy 5:17-18).

ii. At the discretion of the Minister (not the Presbytery nor the people), he may choose to receive no recompense, or less than a full recompense, for his ministerial labours (Acts 18:3; 20:34; 1 Corinthians 9:15-18; 1 Thessalonians 2:9; cf. Nehemiah 13:10). This is often called 'tent-making'.

- iii. In missionary situations, provision might be made for a Minister's necessities by his own hands (as above); by the giving of individual believers (Luke 8:3); by the giving of one congregation (Philippians 4:15-16); or by a plurality of congregations (if the Presbytery is sending a man, then it would be envisaged that the various congregations represented by that Presbytery would assist in his support).

## 2. Handling of the Presbytery's Finances

Some Biblical principles that apply:

- I. The task of the Eldership is to teach and govern:
  - A. Ministers (= teaching Elders) – especially “*labour in the word and doctrine*” (1 Timothy 5:17); and are to “*give [themselves] continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word*”.
  - B. Governing Elders – join the Ministers in shepherding and governing the flock of God, but without being called to preach and teach the Word in the same public manner (1 Timothy 5:17; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-4).
- II. It is legitimate, in principle, for the Eldership to handle financial matters in situations where the Diaconate has not yet been established.
  - A. Christ and the Twelve had a “bag” which was managed by one of them (Judas – John 12:6; 13:29).
  - B. The Apostles were involved in co-ordinating the almsgiving of the Jerusalem congregations – collection and distribution (Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-37; 5:1-11; 6:2).
  - C. The Book of Acts and the Epistles show Paul was involved in the encouragement of giving, and in the gathering and carrying of alms (specifically for the Church in Jerusalem) – e.g. Acts 24:17; Romans 15:25-28; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8-9; Galatians 2:10.  
 [Note: It is worth noting that the Elders in Jerusalem received alms from Barnabas and Saul, although the Deacons had already been ordained (Acts 11:30).]
- III. The task of the Diaconate is to relieve the Eldership of dealing with financial matters.
  - A. The Office of Deacon was established by Christ in the context of the situation in the Jerusalem Church where the Eldership (Apostles) became overburdened and needed to focus on their primary calling in prayer and the Word (Acts 6:1-4).
  - B. The ministry of the Deacons is in regard to “the daily ministrations” and to “serve tables”, i.e., to deal with material and physical needs.

- C. While the Diaconate is a New Testament office, there is an Old Testament analogy in the help given by the Levites to the Priests, in both their ceremonial and moral duties (Numbers 3:5-10; 8:19; Deuteronomy 10:8; 2 Chronicles 17:7-9). Similarly, the Deacons were given to help the Apostles (and Elders), in the work of the ministry by taking care of material matters to “free up” the Elders for the work of governing and teaching. [In v.3, “business” translates the Greek word *chreia*, which has a basic meaning of ‘necessity’ or ‘need’, indicates that there was necessary work to be done which the Apostles found themselves too busy to do adequately].
- D. As appointed co-ordinators of the Church’s giving, particular areas of Diaconal work include:
- i. Collection and distribution of offerings, gifts and alms (taking over from the Apostles).
  - ii. Support for preachers (e.g. 1 Corinthians 9:1-14).
  - iii. Other necessities (e.g. hall hire, administration costs).

#### IV. The Diaconate has a function in the wider Church context.

- A. The care of individuals and families belongs particularly in the context of the local congregation and hence to the local Session of Elders and the Deacon’s court in providing care for both soul and body (Acts 14:23; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-14; 1 Timothy 3:1-15).
- B. However, the institution of the Diaconate seems to be in a ‘Broader Church’ context.
- i. The Church in Jerusalem, as described in the Book of Acts, would seem to be a collection of congregations under a single Presbytery of Apostles and other Elders (see points and Scriptural proofs in The Form of Church Government, “Of Classical Assemblies” – FPP 1994 edition pp.407-409).
  - ii. The first Deacons were appointed in the same Church context as the Apostles ministered (Acts 6:1-7).
  - iii. Therefore, it would seem that the first Deacons ministered, in concert, across a number of congregations. [While no details are given, it would be reasonable to conclude that particular responsibilities were delegated to particular Deacons, perhaps with a view to ethnicity – Grecians and Hebrews, see Acts 6:1].
- C. It would seem consistent to Scriptural principles that there be a Diaconal equivalent to the Presbytery, wherein delegated Deacons from various congregations would assist the Presbytery in matters financial, hence freeing up the Elders to do the work entrusted to them by Christ. This would perhaps involve co-ordinating assistance in

the way of gifts and alms to those in need (e.g. for the Church in \_\_\_\_), and co-ordinating to provide for the expenses of meetings etc.

### **3. Historical Material:**

The following quotations indicate a role for the Diaconate in relation to the wider Church and its Courts. We do not believe that the opinion of Mr Bavinck, that Deacons be given a vote along with the Elders in the “Major Assemblies of the Churches” (point 9), is in keeping with the Biblical form of Church Government and the clear distinction between the offices of Elder and Deacon.

#### **I. Second Book of Discipline (1578).**

Chapter 8, “Of the Deacons and Their Office, the Last Ordinary Function in the Kirk”, Paragraph 3,

“Their office and power is to receive and to distribute the whole ecclesiastical goods unto them to whom they are appointed. This they ought to do according to the judgment and appointment of the presbyteries or elderships (of which the deacons are not), that the patrimony of the kirk and poor be not converted to private men’s uses, nor wrongfully distributed.”

#### **II. Herman Bavinck (1854-1921).**

*“Reformed Dogmatics”* (General editor John Bolt; translated from Dutch by John Vriend; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), Vol.4, p.429.

Taken from a list of recommendations regarding the Ministry of Mercy (Diaconate).

“9. That, along with ministers and elders, deacons be delegated to the major assemblies of the churches and be given a vote in all matters pertaining to the ministry of mercy.”

“10. That at these assemblies the ministry of mercy be organized in terms of general principles, bearing in mind the difference in congregational circumstances; that for general needs it be undertaken communally and expanded by asking the local church to assist other churches and further by assisting poor and oppressed fellow believers abroad.”

### **4. Some Conclusions and Applications:**

- I. It is legitimate, if necessary, for a Presbytery to look after its financial needs, both in receiving and distributing monies.
- II. However, the Diaconate was instituted by Christ to relieve the Eldership of such financial responsibility.
- III. The principles of Scripture would seem to indicate work for the Diaconate in both the Local Church and the Broader Church.

- IV. It would seem in accord with Scriptural principle for the Presbytery to delegate the management of the necessary finances to the Diaconate, as the Lord would raise up such officers.
- V. It is envisaged that there would be a 'Broader Church Deacons' Court', made up of representatives from the 'Local Church Deacon's Courts'.
- VI. By implication, these principles would apply at each level of the Church's courts – for example, Synod, State Assembly, General Assembly.
- VII. Even as the Session of Elders and the Deacons' Court in a Local Church must have close communications, there would need to be avenues of communication between a Presbytery and the 'Broader Church Deacons' Court'.

## **5. Recommendations:**

- I. That the Presbytery receive this Report.
- II. That the Presbytery continue to manage its own finances for the time being.
- III. That a 'Broader Church Deacons' Court' not be constituted before at least one Deacon has been ordained in at least two of the congregations associated with the Presbytery, that there ordinarily be a minimum of three Deacons present in the meetings of the Broader Court, and that participation in the Broader Court be by way of delegation once there is a plurality of Deacons in a 'Local Church Deacon's Court'.
- IV. That once a 'Broader Church Deacons' Court' has been constituted, the members of that Court ought to decide who will fulfil such functions as Moderator, Treasurer and Clerk, as well as how frequently it will meet ordinarily.
- V. That once a 'Broader Church Deacons' Court' has been constituted, the management of Presbytery finances be taken up by that Court and that necessary communications between the related Presbytery and Deacons' Court ordinarily be through the respective Clerks of those Courts.
- VI. That since the task of the Diaconate involves, not just financial management, but also showing mercy in material ways to the poor (Acts 6:1-6; Romans 12:8), so the 'Broader Church Deacons' Court' will have a role in co-ordinating deeds of mercy and assistance relating to needs in local congregations, as well as in the wider Church and in the world (Galatians 6:10).