

REFORMATION PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, AUSTRALIAN PRESBYTERY
Moderator: Rev C Tuck Clerk: Pastor N van der Wel
C/O 206 High Street, Berserker, QLD 4701

REFORMATION PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, AUSTRALIAN PRESBYTERY
BACKGROUND: DOCTRINAL STANDARDS, PROTOCOLS, GOVERNMENT,
AND COURTS.

EXTRACT MINUTE

Reformation Presbyterian Church, Australian Presbytery, met via teleconference, on the Fourteenth of February 2019 and was constituted, was adjourned and then resumed on the Twenty-First of March 2019. Among other things,

5. General Business.

VII. RPCAP Background Document: Doctrinal Standards, Protocols, Government, and Courts.

It was moved, seconded, and agreed THAT:

The Presbytery receive the document 'Reformation Presbyterian Church, Australian Presbytery Background: Doctrinal Standards, Protocols, Government, and Courts' for its own records, and to be distributed to interested parties.

Extracted from the Records of the Presbytery by the Clerk on the Twenty-Ninth of December 2020.

Pastor Neil van der Wel
Clerk of Presbytery
206 High Street, Berserker, QLD 4701

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Preamble.

Reformation Presbyterian Church, Australian Presbytery (RPCAP) takes seriously the responsibilities given, by Christ the King and Head of the Church, to the Church as a whole and to the ministers of the Gospel in particular, in the Great Commission, which is most fully set out in Matthew 28:16-20. RPCAP is firmly persuaded that the worldwide triumph of the Gospel for an extended period of time is very clearly and emphatically taught in the Scriptures, and is therefore committed to the spread of the Gospel wherever the Lord grants opportunity in his providence.

To this end the RPCAP earnestly seeks, by the Lord's grace, to conform its doctrine and practice to the Word of God, and not to bind itself to practices that might have some historical precedent but that are not capable of being sustained by the plain testimony of the Scriptures e.g. arbitrary numbers required before a congregation can be constituted.

At the same time RPCAP recognises the wonderful provision the Lord has given his Church in the heritage of the labours of his servants in days gone by. The Protestant Reformation was a glorious revival of true religion that "turned the world upside down". The reformation heritage that we have is of great value to the Church, but must be viewed as a foundation on which to build and not as the "high-water mark of the Church". To this end we whole heartedly subscribe to the Westminster Standards as the Subordinate Standards of the Reformation Presbyterian Church. We also whole heartedly adhere to the principle of "Semper Reformanda" – Always Reforming". This must not be understood as meaning that we think that the Church should be in a constant state of change, but rather that everything in doctrine and practice must be brought back to the Scriptures, evaluated in light of the same, and brought into conformity to the precepts and principles set down in them.

We are simply seeking to please the Lord by obeying Him in all that he requires, and all by his Grace.

Doctrinal Standards.

The Westminster Confession;

RPCAP wholeheartedly subscribes to the Westminster Confession (WCF). We are of the view that it is the most biblically balanced of the confessions of faith prepared at the time of the Protestant Reformation.

The Larger Catechism;

The Larger Catechism is an excellent summary of the practical application of the Doctrine set out in the WCF.

The Shorter Catechism;

The Shorter Catechism is an excellent summary of the principal doctrines taught in the Scriptures.

The Principles of the Government of the Church set down in the "Form of Church Government";

It is important to note that by stating adherence to the "Principles" set down in the "Form of Church Government" we recognise the Divine imperative of the government of the Church by Presbyters, and the lawful authority of Church Courts constituted by Presbyters, but we also recognise that there are requirements set down in the Form of Church Government that cannot be sustained from Scripture as binding upon the Church e.g. requiring a candidate for the Ministry to submit a discourse in Latin – the principle derived is that the candidate must be examined as to adequacy of knowledge in terms of language.

The Principles set down in the “Directory of Public Worship”.

It is important to note that by stating adherence to the “Principles” set down in the “Directory of Public Worship” RPCAP wholeheartedly adheres to the Regulative Principle of Worship, but does not condone a “Reformed Liturgy”. It rather sees much wisdom in the advice given as to administering Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, the conduct of the Public Worship of God, and the conducting of Weddings and Funerals.

In the Formulae of the Scottish reformed and Presbyterian Churches the signatories bind themselves to uphold the “purity of worship presently practiced in the Free Church of Scotland”* +. The flaw in this wording is in the word’s “currently practiced”. This wording by good and necessary consequence merely binds the Office Bearer to the practice current, from time to time, in the particular Church, and not to the Regulative Principle of Worship as an absolute principle that must be upheld at all times. This has been demonstrated in the Free Church of Scotland that has resiled from upholding the Regulative Principle of Worship and has introduced hymns and instrumental music to its worship.

Furthermore in the questions to be put to Ordinands Q 5 asks “Do you promise to observe uniformity of worship and of the administration of all public ordinances within this Church, as the same that are presently performed and allowed?”++ The Ordinand does not bind themselves to conduct and oversee the Worship of God according to the principles set down in the Scriptures, but to the practice of the Church. This is one of fatal flaws in the position taken by these churches in that it opens the door to arbitrary change to conduct and elements of worship within the bounds of the Churches that do not accurately define their view of the practical application of the Regulative Principle of Worship.

It is also to be noted that the above mentioned Formula does not bind the Office Bearer to the “Directory of Public Worship”

*The wording is the same in the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), and in the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

+ “The Practice of the Free Church of Scotland in Her Several Courts; Revised Edition, Knox Press, Edinburgh (undated); p126

++ Ibid p124

The Principles set down in the “Directory of Family Worship”

Family Worship and the prerogation of the Gospel in the home is of vital importance to the spiritual life of the family. The principles set down in the “Directory of Family Worship” provide an excellent guide to heads of households in fulfilling their responsibilities in terms of the worship of God in their homes, and in the spiritual instruction of their families.

The Sum of Saving Knowledge

This Document provides an excellent summary of the Gospel and the practical application of the same in the preaching ministry in the Church. The Sum of Saving Knowledge clearly sets out the full and free offer of salvation in the Gospel to all to whom the Gospel comes.

The Courts of the Reformation Presbyterian Church.

The first principle of Church Government is that the Lord Jesus Christ is the King and Head of the Church. Therefore the Church must be organised and governed according to the pattern set down in the Scriptures “teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you”.

The primary responsibility of the Presbytery is to take responsibility for the oversight of the wider Church, to deal with matters that affect the wider Church, to oversee the preparation of men for the Ministry, examining them, and setting them apart to the ministry of the Word of God, and to ordain them to preach the Gospel wherever the Lord grants them opportunity in his providence. Also to oversee the examination of men called to work of the Governing Eldership, and to ordain them as Elders. The Presbytery has the immediate oversight of the Ministers under its care, and is a court of appeal. It is the view of the RPCAP that a Presbytery must viewed as a “Wider Court”.

The Interim Session.

There is a great need for the provision of pastoral care and oversight of “displaced brethren” – “the scattered flock”. The “Interim Session” was constituted to provide pastoral care and oversight for brethren who do not have opportunity to become members of a local congregation.

The Interim Session also provides government to fledgling congregations pending setting apart biblically qualified local men to the eldership. Once a local Session has been constituted the Interim Session can assist with the provision of an Assessor Elder if there is only one local elder. This provides seamless transition from external government to local government. The aim must always be to establish a local Session and eldership as a matter of priority.

Local Sessions.

The Biblical pattern is that Congregations must have their own Minister and Governing Elders (Titus 1:5). A Session is made up of the minister of the Congregation and the local Elders, and if necessary one or more Assessors who assist the local Session pending the Lord raising up additional men Biblically qualified as Elders.

Presbyteral Assistance Across International Borders.

The Counsel at Jerusalem (Acts 15 *passim*) made decisions that were binding upon the wider Church, including churches in other countries and provinces. The stated aim of presbyteral assistance across International Borders must be the timely establishment of Indigenous Presbyteries that govern in their own right. These Presbyteries may be assisted by Presbyters from other Presbyteries pending an increase in the number of local elders.

Rev Christopher Tuck
18 December 2018.