

Gospel, Society and Culture Committee

The recent visit to Sydney by Tim Keller has reignited discussion about how gospel ministry must involve engagement with society and culture in several modes: evangelistic, apologetic, cultural development and mercy ministry. This is a serious challenge for us as a church — since for various reasons we can be isolated from the wider society. It is also a long term challenge, and won't usually seem terribly urgent. So it is something that we, as a church, have to keep making a priority. The aim of G,S&C is to help the churches of the Presbyterian Church in NSW to think about why those aspects matter and how to do them well.

Meetings

The committee meets quarterly and most meetings are Friday evening and Saturday morning. This allows time for extended discussion and for substantial work between meetings. We invite the moderator to each meeting as a way of building connections with him and to give him the opportunity to raise issues for the committee to consider.

Researcher

At the last Assembly our budget included a proposal to employ a researcher-writer. We have since appointed Sheryl Sarkoezy for at least 144 hours per year. She has proved an excellent support to the committee and she has been involved in developing most of our publications and reports for this year.

Communication with the church

Our primary role is to enable the congregations of the church to engage their culture effectively, therefore we seek to communicate with them consistently and clearly. We have three primary means of communication:

- a short newsletter produced after each meeting
- our website
- our facebook page.

Please encourage members of your church to access these. We also want to hear from churches, church members, Sessions and ministers if you think there are ways we can serve you.

Federal Church and Nation Committee calendar

One of the key ways in which the church can engage our society is to pray for it. The Federal Church and Nation Committee prayer calendar suggests ways in which you can pray for Australia. One area of prayer is suggested each day for a month. This resource is useful in private prayers and for prayer ideas for small groups and worship services.

Christianity Everyday

This is workshop style training which aims to help Christians live confidently in God's world by helping them to see how being a Christian changes the way they live every day and equipping them with the knowledge and skills to respond, with a distinctly Christian point of view, to issues of public interest and concern. We will develop a program to suit your local needs and interests.

The committee ran a second trial of Christianity Everyday on Saturday 12th April at St Aidan's, Wagga Wagga consisting of an introduction to apologetics, an overview of worldviews and topical session on: Science & Christianity; Refugees; Engaging the Media and answering hard questions.

We would love to talk to you about holding a training session (evening/afternoon/day/weekend) for you church or Presbytery. Contact Lewis Jones for details (lewis.jones@simeonnetwork.org).

Resource papers

The following resource papers are available on our website:

Knocking on Australia's Door — Refugees (2014)
Sexualisation (2013)
Facing Infertility (2013)
Marriage Matters (2013)

We are working on the following papers and hope to have some available by Assembly:

Anti-vilification legislation
Christianity and Science
Information and communications technology
Multi-religious society.

In 2014/15 we propose to develop resource papers on the following topics:

Euthanasia
Choosing between public schooling, Christian schools and home schooling
Abortion
Contentment and personal finances
Climate change
Ageing and retirement.

Outreach Media

Outreach Media (<http://www.outreachmedia.org.au>) is a ministry committed to helping churches communicate the gospel to contemporary society in a clear and engaging way. A key activity of their ministry is Outreach Posters. We think their posters are a simple and effective way to spark gospel interest churches and in the minds of people who would not normally be open to either. You can see our brief video about the posters at vimeo.com/81912602. The committee has allocated up to \$5,000 to subsidise churches which sign up to use the posters. This money will reduce the set-up costs and Outreach Media will give a reduction in the annual subscription for churches for one year.

Submissions

The committee made a submission to the NSW Parliament Social Issues Committee Inquiry into Same Sex Marriage from the Presbyterian Church in Australia in the state of NSW and to the NSW Parliament Legislative Council Select Committee Inquiry into the Impact of Gambling. We have been invited to appear at the public hearing of the Impact of Gambling Inquiry on 11th April.

PCV colloquium

Several members of the committee attended the Colloquium on Christianity in the Public Square in Melbourne in August 2013. Peter Barnes presented a paper on the history of the eugenics movement in Australia and John McClean presented one titled "Playing the political game? Christians and lobbying". This is an excellent event hosted by the Victorian Church and Nation Committee and commissioners and others are encouraged to attend the next colloquium planned for 2015.

Same sex marriage

Same sex marriage remains a point of discussion and political agitation, even though it is not part of the legislative agenda of the Federal government. A law allowing same sex marriage in the ACT came into effect on December 2 2013, but was ruled invalid by the High Court on December 7, on the basis that it conflicted with Federal Law. A bill to introduce a state-based version of same sex marriage was defeated in the Upper House of the NSW Parliament in November 2013.

We believe that while the introduction of same-sex marriage is not imminent, it remains a likely development in the medium term and is one for which the Presbyterian Church of Australia should be ready. This will, necessarily, be a lengthy process and as a first step we intend to bring an overture to the Assembly asking it to send a position paper to Presbyteries for consideration and report. On

that basis we hope that the committee could bring a report to the next Assembly which could be the basis for a communication to the GAA. We hope that other State Churches might follow a similar pattern.

Membership

The committee nominates the following current members for appointment for three year terms.

Mr Ben Grieg

Elder, Bathurst Presbyterian Church

Ben did Metro training at Bathurst Church and has since worked as a baker. He has a strong interest in social media, distribution of wealth and sex in advertising. He has served as moderator and clerk of Presbytery and has regularly been a commissioned elder to NSW General Assembly and GAA. He has co-ordinated the committee's website.

Mrs Tracy Nodder

Member of Cherrybrook Presbyterian Church.

Tracy has a Bachelors Degree in Political Economy from Sydney University and has worked as a journalist (in the areas of Finance, Pharmacy and Medicine). For several years she wrote News Reviews and articles on ethical and social issues for Australian Presbyterian and worked as the researcher/writer for the Social Issues Executive (SIE) of the Sydney Diocese of the Anglican Church. Her areas of interest include asylum seekers, abortion, embryonic stem cell research, marriage/family/divorce and industrial relations. She is currently the mother of a growing family. She has taken leave from the committee after the birth of Xavier in November 2012 and has now returned to an active role on the committee.

Dr Joanna Barlow, MBBS, DPM, FRANZCP

Member of Charlestown Presbyterian Church.

Joanna is a general psychiatrist and has been in part-time private practice in Maitland for over ten years. She trained at the Repatriation General Hospital, as it was then, in Melbourne, has worked in consultation-liaison psychiatry there and was a member of the Ethics committee. She has contributed to publications of the Victorian Church and Nation Committee on euthanasia and the psychological effects of abortion. She is the music director at her church and the teaching leader of the Newcastle Bible Study Fellowship women's class, a lay interdenominational group. Joanna contributed significantly to the resource paper on Fertility treatment and has served as secretary of the committee.

Convener

The committee nominates the Rev. Dr. John McClean as convener for the coming year. John is the Vice-Principal of Christ College and teaches theology and ethics. He contributes a column on ethics to each edition of the Pulse as well as contributing to CASE magazine on issues of apologetics and ethics. He is interested in Christian engagement in the public square and apologetics as well as a wide range of ethical issues.

Deliverances

That the Assembly commend to congregations and sessions the Gospel, Society and Culture Website and Resource papers for help in understanding and engaging the society and culture.

That the Assembly commend to Session and Presbyteries the training offered by the Gospel, Society and Culture Committee in Christianity Everyday and encourage them to host a training event.

That the Assembly request the Committee for Gospel, Society and Culture to publish a Resource Papers on the following topics: Euthanasia; Choosing between public schooling, Christian schools and home schooling; Abortion; Contentment and personal finances; Climate change; Aging and retirement.