

Highlights of the 2006 General Assembly (thus far!)

This year, due to the enormous amount of complex and time consuming business before it, the Assembly did not finish all it had to do by Friday night, and so it has adjourned until the 31st of October, to sit until it finishes all that remains to be done, whether that takes one day or three! So these highlights are only the highlights of the first six sederunts, with more to come perhaps — or they might be lowlights!

Praise and Worship

Assemblies are great times for the PCV to get together as a ‘family’ and to worship God, and to be encouraged by the wider work that the Church is doing in Christ’s name, and in the extension of his kingdom through the missionary work of the church, and this year was no exception.

- **The Assembly opened** with a wonderful service of worship and praise to our gracious God. During this service the Rev Grant Lawry, minister of the Canterbury congregation, was installed as the Assembly’s Moderator for 2006/07. An unusually large congregation (there was still room for more — resolve now to come to next year’s opening service) enjoyed singing by the Canterbury Presbyterian Korean Choir, and a challenging message from Mr Lawry, *A Vibrant and Dynamic Church* – it 1. Shares the gospel; 2. Is a welcoming and Encouraging Community of Faith; 3. Teaches the Word of God; 4. Provides Diaconal Aid; 5. Has a Vision and Heart of Mission. May all our churches be more like this!
- **Tuesday morning** the Moderator led in a worship service, which was well worthy of a larger congregation to hear Rev Dr Douglas Milne’s truly inspirational message on *Christ’s Love* (John 13:1b) ‘having loved his own he loved them to the end,’ and to remember His love in the Lord’s Supper.
- **On Wednesday and Thursday mornings** Dr Milne opened the scriptures on the theme ‘Make Much of Jesus Christ,’ with wonderful heart-warming messages, firstly from 1 Corinthians 3:11 on the subject ‘Jesus Christ the Church’s One Foundation,’ and then from Philipians on the subject ‘Joy and the Lord Jesus Christ.’
- **Wednesday evening** a crowd gathered for the Mission Tea to be challenged by *Short Term Mission--Long Term Result?* Missionaries brought greetings. David Price spoke of the profound impact of short term missionary experience. Don Elliot spoke of the Eltham team’s visit to Malawi; A young lady named Alice (I didn’t catch her surname) told with passion how she had deferred her university studies to spend two months in the Sudan and two months in Uganda, where she celebrated her 21st birthday on the mission field with joy at being useful! Andrew and Suzy Vines spoke of the ‘Highlights and Lowlights’ of their eight weeks in the Middle East as short termers. Gerald Vanderwert told how a team from the Donvale congregation had worked on the new Library Building at the Talua Training Centre Vanuatu (ask him for a copy of his DVD on short term missions – it was great!) And Rev Phil Simmonds spoke with passion on the value of short-term mission for the church at home and overseas. Well-done APWM (Vic)! What a joy it was to see so many young people from our Church keen to serve Christ and his people with hard costly sacrificial work!

Appreciation

In a bittersweet combination, the Assembly resolved to convey through its Moderator its sympathy to the Rev Dr J Graham Miller on the occasion of his wife’s passing, and its warm congratulations on the 65th anniversary of his ordination. The Assembly thanks God for the life and faithful missionary service of the late Mrs Flora Miller.

Hearing Grievances (Appeals)

Hearing Grievances may not sound like a highlight, but they were — not in themselves, but in the way that, with the Lord’s help in answer to much earnest prayer by his people, the Assembly handled them — earnestly, carefully, with determination to do what was right, and in one crucial point, with a unanimous decision! Who can remember the last time the house was nearly full late on Thursday night? This year the Assembly has 25 appeals and several petitions to deal with, and it began to hear these on Wednesday (two groups of appeals took all day!) and again on Thursday afternoon and evening (another two groups of appeals!). One of our inter-state visitors appointed at the Assembly’s request by the GAA to help with these matters said, ‘I was proud to be member of the Assembly.’ So was I. It was awesome! Pray for us as we resume this task on the 31st of October.

Strategies for the Future

The 2004 Assembly appointed a Strategy Committee to investigate ways in which new evangelistic outreach can occur and funds provided for church planting. This year its work came to an end as the Assembly adopted a number of recommendations by the Committee, including dividing the tasks of church planting and church welfare, which have up to this time been handled by the Home Mission Committee, between two new committees — the Church Planting Committee and the Healthy Churches Committee.

It is hoped that this will reduce the onerous burden the Home Mission Committee (and especially Bob Carner, its Director) had been carrying, and give a sharper focus to the most necessary task of planting centres of gospel witness in the fast developing outer areas of the sprawling metropolis that is greater Melbourne and to the equally vital task of strengthening existing congregations of our church, and especially those that are struggling. Steps were also taken towards improving the training and appointment of graduates from our College to parishes, and to establish a Property Development Fund to assist strategic purchases of land in developing areas. The committee was thanked and discharged. Well done!

Reviewing the Work of the Assembly's Committees

One of the major tasks of any Assembly is to hear from its Committees — and while this work was to some extent overshadowed by the hearing of grievances it certainly wasn't lost sight of. Highlights included

- **APWM (Vic)** helped us praise God for our Church's growing missionary team, for the service of Robert and Leonie Betts overseas and their new role as 'Partnership Development Coordinators (give them a call to find out what that means), and for your generosity of and the blessing the 3 containers of goodies have been to Malawi. The needs of Southern Sudan were also considered, and a relief appeal is to be launched to provide diaconal aid to the strong church communities there. A champion is needed; someone who will do for Sudan what John Wilson has done for Malawi! Could that person be you?
- The Defence Force Chaplaincy Committee report, as the Assembly heard from Chaplain Martin de Pyle, a minister of our Church and a Chaplain with the Australian Army, of his deployment to Iraq, and the many gospel opportunities he had there. Martin will return to Iraq in due course — pray for him and his family.
- Robert Duncanson and Stuart Bonnington also enthused the Assembly about the vital work of the PIM for the people scattered across the inland of our vast country, and the challenge of establishing a Presbyterian witness in Darwin. Keep praying!
- David Palmer brought the Church and Nation Committee's report, and challenged us to be vigilant and vigorous (and prayerful) with regard to legislative and ethical issues in the wider community, and encouraged us to make better use of the Committee's excellent publications.
- We were reminded that our work in the name of Christ is for the aged and the young, for an address by Rev Dr Evonne Paddison, CEO of the Council for Christian Education in Schools was followed by the report of the Social Services Committee and its care of the aged at Kirkbrae, Kilsyth! It was great to hear of the good work being done by this committee, and to be challenged because the opportunity to take the gospel to children in our schools is not being fully taken up because of lack of workers.
- We also heard from two groups of hard working ladies in our Church — one working for missions at home (the Home Mission Workers Assoc.), and the other for missions abroad (the PWMU). May God bless them for their faithful service, and raise up others to work with them to support mission at home and abroad.
- The Home Mission Committee brought to the Assembly the exciting prospect of the purchase of land in the Officer district for the beginning of a new church plant in that fast growing area, and the Assembly encouraged the new Church Planting Committee to recruit a suitable person to start work there.
- The reports of the Board of Investment and Finance and of the Trusts Corporation (which have the same membership) were separated for the first time this year. This gave a clearer picture of the responsibilities of these two bodies, and we were reminded of the sterling work done by those responsible for the management of our churches administration — as attested by the healthy state of finances and the fact that no Assembly Rate is required for the 2007-08 year.
- Andrew Vines, newly appointed CENC Youth Worker, spoke of the work of PYV — what an encouragement it is to have young men and women of his calibre in our church, especially for some of us who are closer to the end of our work than its beginning. Pray for them!
- The Trusts Corporation drew the attention of the Assembly to our Church's duty of care for the vulnerable, and the Assembly resolved to instruct all in leadership positions to be watchful in the protection of children.
- Since the time of Church Union the Capital Fund has given invaluable support to our Church. The work has not finished, but the time had come for change — and so this year the Assembly authorised the Trusts Corporation to administer the Fund, thanked the former members of the Fund Committee, and discharged them from their responsibilities. Well done, Capital Fund!
- The Theological Education Committee also presented an encouraging report, asking for prayer that the Lord would raise up fresh workers to train at the College for ministry; noting the progress towards the construction of student accommodation units at the College, and the need for funds, an appeal commended to the whole Church, and looking towards the appointment of a Training Officer by the 2007 Commission of the Assembly.
- Amongst the less appreciated of the Assembly's Committees are its Code and General Administration Committee (which writes Rules and Regulations and gives advice on the same) and its Selection Committee, which works hard to place people on the other committees of the Church! Their reports are not highlights, perhaps, but their work is vital for the ongoing work of the Assembly, and so it is right that they should be acknowledged, and the whole Church be encouraged to include these Committees as they pray for the Assembly and the wider work of our Church through its Committees.
- And while on the matter of Assembly administration, carrying on from the last Commission of Assembly, this Assembly approved terms of settlement for a new Assembly Clerk (a nomination is to be brought to the 2007 Commission of Assembly — please pray for the nominating committee, and the presbyteries as they make nominations for the position, and for wisdom for all concerned, that the man of God's choice be appointed to this important work.

Peter Phillips
Deputy Clerk