

History

The Presbyterian denomination has its roots in the Reformation in Europe in the 1500's and, more particularly, in Scotland in the 1600's. Later, when Scots settled in Australia in the 19th century they brought "Presbyterianism" with them. In 1901 the various state Presbyterian Churches united into a federal church to form the Presbyterian Church of Australia.



In Australia, in 1977 about two-thirds of congregations in the Presbyterian Church voted to leave and form the Uniting Church (combining with the Methodist Church & many Congregational Churches). This left the continuing Presbyterian Church much smaller but more clearly focussed.

Theology

During the time of the Reformation many of the Reformers adopted the motto "Faith alone, Christ alone, Scripture alone" which summed up their core beliefs. We believe in one God of three persons - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We look to Jesus Christ's death and resurrection for forgiveness and the sure hope of eternal life. The Bible is God's Word to us. The Presbyterian understanding of Christianity is summarised in a document called The Westminster Confession of Faith. This was drawn up after the Reformation in 1640's.

The Westminster Confession contains what is called a "reformed" outlook. That is, Presbyterians tend to emphasise God's initiative and sovereignty in such important matters as knowing God and being saved. God's sovereignty is not taken as lessening the need for human responsibility but is rather the condition under which human response occurs

Ministers and elders are required to assent to the Westminster Confession of Faith. Congregational members are not required to sign a doctrinal statement.



Structure

Each congregation in the Presbyterian system is relatively autonomous. We are responsible for our own finances and appointing our own leadership. There is a constitution that stipulates how our finances are to be organised and our leadership structured, etc. But, in all this, it allows freedom in most matters such as how we meet for church on Sundays.

The Assembly

The state assembly is made up of a pastor and elder from each congregation. It meets annually and sets broad policy for the various congregations in the state.

The Presbytery

The Presbytery covers a specific geographical area and they oversee the congregations and plant new congregations in that area. The Presbytery is made up of a pastor and an elder from each congregation in the area.

The Presbytery of the Hastings, to which we belong, basically covers the Mid-North Coast. Within this region there are about 12 Presbyterian churches

The Elders

The word 'Presbyterian' comes from the Greek word *presbuteros* which simply means "elder". This reflects the fact that within the Presbyterian Church congregations are led by a pastor (or minister) together with a team of elders.

The elders' meetings are chaired by the pastor and are called "the Session". While the pastor is responsible for all aspects of the Sunday meetings, the Session is responsible for the overall spiritual oversight of the congregation.

The elders are elected by the congregation. Elders are not re-elected each year. They continue until they resign, retire or are removed by the Session.

We have eleven active elders in Coffs Harbour spread over our three congregations.