

**(xii) From the Elders and Deacons Committee to amend The Code Part II 4.02(c) concerning male only elders**

To the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in the State of New South Wales:

Whereas:

- A. "The Lord Jesus, as king and head of His Church, has therein appointed a government, in the hand of Church officers" (Westminster Confession of Faith [WCF] 30.1), and presbyterian churches have, since the Reformation, held that among the "officers" appointed by Christ, the office of "elder" is a biblically instituted office, founded in the old covenant, renewed by the Lord Jesus Christ as an ordinary and perpetual office in his Church, and regulated by his Word in Scripture, the office of "elder" is, therefore, crucial for the life and mission of the Church until the Lord's return;
- B. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia (GAA): from 1901 until 1967 allowed only men to be ordained as elders; from 1967 allowed women also to be ordained as elders (GAA 1967 Min 131); and from 1997 ruled that the question of the sex of elders is a matter of government not doctrine and so left the determination of the issue to the State Assemblies (GAA 1997 Min 59); and the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in the State of New South Wales (GANSW) currently allows for the ordination of both men and women to the office of elder; and, GANSW has, from time to time, considered restoring the Church's original practised doctrine of ordaining only biblically-qualified men to the office; and several arguments against this possibility have been advanced, namely, that: (a) elders in the Presbyterian Church of New South Wales (PCNSW) are not the same as New Testament (NT) elders, such that even if NT elder texts require elders to be men it is illegitimate to apply such texts directly to PCNSW elders; (b) the Scriptures, in fact, do not require elders to be men; (c) a reversion to male only eldership would be inimical to healthy relationships between men and women in PCNSW churches, and injurious to the health and gospel witness of the Church, and; (d) GANSW is not competent to rule on the question because it entails matters of doctrine that properly fall under the supreme powers of the GAA;
- C. The following recitals show that: (a) the classic statements of presbyterian church government teach that presbyterian elders occupy the biblical office of elder, and apply NT elder texts to them (Recital D); likewise, GAA's declared and practised doctrine of the eldership, as well as GANSW's declared and practised doctrine of the eldership, teach that PCNSW elders occupy the biblical office of elder, since both the GAA's *Constitution, Procedure and Practice* (CPP) and the GANSW Code apply NT elder texts to PCA elders (Recitals E–M); (b) the Scriptures, both by example and by precept, do require elders to be men (Recitals N–R); (c) male only eldership, enacted faithfully, is not only consistent with long-standing and widespread presbyterian practice, but also provides opportunity for the growth and health of the Church and the strengthening of its gospel witness (Recitals S–X), and; (d) GANSW is competent to rule on the matter (Recitals Y–Z);
- D. The classic statements of presbyterian church government, namely, the *Second Book of Discipline* (SBD; AD 1578) and the *Form of Presbyterian Church Government* (Form; AD 1645), taken together, affirm that: (a) the Lord Jesus Christ, as king and head of his Church, "hath instituted" the government of his Church, as is "necessary for the edification of his church, and perfecting of his saints," and has regulated this government by "the express word of God," such that the officers appointed by Christ are those which, and only those which, "the Scripture doth hold out" (Form, Preface; §4–6; SBD §2.3; 2.6–7; 6.3); (b) these officers are "pastors," "teachers," "governors," and "deacons," the first three of which are *all* types of biblical "elders," even though the term "elder" is usually applied to the "governors" (Form §4–5; SBD §4.1; 5.1; 6.1, 9); (c) among the officers, the "governors," commonly called "elders," stand in continuity with Old Testament (OT) "elders" (Form §5; cf. SBD §2.2–3); (d) such "elders" were established by Christ himself as an "ordinary and perpetual office" in his Church, "according to his word" (Form §3; SBD §2.7; 6.2); (e) the qualifications and functions of such "governors" or "elders" are regulated by specific texts of Scripture, including those NT texts which refer to "overseers" or "elders," as is evident in the following statements (italics added throughout): (i) "*as there were in the Jewish church elders of the people joined with the priests and Levites in the government of the church; so Christ, who hath instituted government, and governors ecclesiastical in the church, hath furnished some in*

*his church*, beside the ministers of the word, with gifts of government ... which officers reformed churches commonly call *Elders*" (*Form* §5 citing Rom 12:8; 1 Cor 12:28); (ii) "what manner of persons they [the governors] ought to be, we refer it to the express word of God, and, namely, *the canons written by the apostle Paul*" (*SBD* §6.3 with 1 Tim 3:1–7; 5:17–22; Tit 1:5–9); (iii) "their office [that of the governors] is ... *to watch diligently upon the flock committed to their charge*" (*SBD* §6.4 with 1 Pet 5:2–3; cf. Acts 20:28; Eph 4:11); (iv) while "it is not necessary that all elders [i.e. governors] be also teachers of the word," nevertheless "chiefly they ought to be such, and so are *worthy of double honour*" (*SBD* §6.3 with 1 Tim 5:17); (v) "it appertains to them [the governors] to assist the pastor ... *in visiting the sick*" (*SBD* §6.6 with Jas 5:14); (vi) "they [the governors] should be diligent in *admonishing all men* of their duty, according to the rule of the evangel" (*SBD* §6.8 with 1 Thess 5:12), and; (vii) "their principal office [that of the governors] is *to hold assemblies* with the pastors and doctors (*who are also of their number*) for establishing of good order, and execution of discipline" (*SBD* §6.9; with Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22–23);

- E. The Scheme of Union adopted by the Presbyterian Church of Australia (PCA) on 24th July 1901 and contained in the PCA's CPP affirms that the Presbyterian Churches of the various States came together "holding the same doctrine, government, discipline, and form of worship" (PCA Scheme of Union), which "same government" is reasonably understood, given the Scottish presbyterian origins of the colonial presbyterian churches, to be that laid out in the *SBD* and the *Form*; and, in fact, the Basis of Union of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria (PCV 1859) subscribes that state Church to "the general principles" of both the *Form* and the *SBD* (PCV Code §1.4), and PVC thus brought this subscription into the PCA in 1901 as part of the "same government" shared with the other states; subsequently GAA 1967 declared that "the Presbyterian Church of Australia holds the doctrine of the Eldership as set forth in the Westminster Form of Presbyterian Church Government under the heading 'other Church Governors'" (GAA 1967 Min 131 (1)), which declaration was further relied upon by GAA in 1997 (GAA 1997 Min 59);
- F. GAA nevertheless reserves its right, "under the authority of Christ alone, the Head of the Church" (Scheme of Union), being ruled, always, by the "Supreme Standard of the Word of God contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments" (Basis of Union I), and in consistency with the "Subordinate Standard" of the Church, namely, "the Westminster Confession of Faith, read in the light of the ... declaratory statement" (Basis of Union II), to exercise "supreme powers" with respect to "[the] doctrine ... worship ... [and] discipline" of the Church (CPP, Art. 2.1 (a)–(c)); thus while the PCA's professed doctrine of office, expressed in the WCF and Declaratory Statement, is not explicitly stated in relation to the eldership (WCF 15.1; 27.4; 30.1–2; 31.1–3; Dec. Stat. §1), and while the PCA's practised doctrine of eldership was founded on that expressed in the *SBD* and the *Form*, the GAA's supreme powers include power to clarify and strengthen its doctrine of the eldership by declaring the necessary entailments of its professed doctrine, thus making explicit what is only implicit in the WCF; moreover, the "liberty of opinion" that the Church allows "on matters in the subordinate standard not essential to the doctrine therein taught" (Basis of Union, Dec. Stat. §5) does not proscribe the GAA's supreme powers with respect to doctrine, since the Church guards "against the abuse of this liberty to the injury of its unity and peace" (Basis of Union, Dec. Stat. §5); GAA thus reserves the right to set the bounds of such liberty, either by proscribing departures from the teaching of the WCF, as the GAA has done, for example, with respect to infant baptism (GAA 2013 Min. 83), or by declaring its understanding of the entailments of the doctrine professed in the WCF, where these are not fully clarified in the WCF itself, as the GAA has done, for example, in its declaration on "Sex, Gender, and Marriage" (CPP §5.3); thus, with regard to the doctrine of the eldership, GAA has, from time to time, made declarations and determinations which clarify the Church's doctrine of office and of the eldership (GAA 2019 Code Committee Report on the Eldership, Appendix); further, GAA 2016 advised GANSW that in 2016: "The Church's doctrine on the eldership *is not fully developed* and the General Assembly requests that no substantial changes to state Codes in relation to eldership be made *until the matter has been further considered* within the General Assembly," and so reaffirmed its right to further clarify and strengthen the Church's doctrine of the eldership (GAA 2016 Min. 68(1)(e)); moreover, GAA 2019, having considered a detailed report from its Code Committee, further declared the Church's doctrine of the eldership, and removed the GAA 2016 request that State Assemblies make no substantial changes to State Codes on elders (GAA 2019

Min 42), thus indicating that progress had been made in clarifying and strengthening the Church's doctrine of the eldership; and, yet further, GAA 2023 reaffirmed GAA 2019's declaration regarding eldership, and resolved to include it in the PCA's CPP (GAA 2023 Min 30), and thus codified its declared doctrine of the eldership;

- G. The GAA 2019 declaration regarding eldership, re-affirmed by GAA 2023, and now included in the PCA's CPP, reads as follows: "The Presbyterian Church of Australia: (a) holds that elders occupy a pastoral office to which belongs the spiritual oversight of the Church. Under the Chief Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, elders shepherd and serve the church by sharing in its government, teaching the word of God, praying with and for God's people, and modelling life in Christ, according to their gifts; (b) holds that teaching is, and always has been, a vital part of an elder's duties and that all elders must be competent to teach according to their gifts; (c) observes a functional distinction between ministers of the word and sacraments, and elders" (GAA 2023 Min 30; cf. GAA 2019 Min 42);
- H. The GAA 2019/2023 declaration, now included in the CPP, indicates that in the PCA's declared and codified doctrine of eldership, elders occupy the biblical office of elder; the GAA declaration regarding eldership indicates this understanding by employing highly distinctive language from NT elder texts when it declares that elders: (a) occupy a "*pastoral office*" and "*shepherd ... the church ... under the Chief Shepherd*" (1 Pet 5:1–4; Acts 20:28; Eph 4:11); (b) exercise "*spiritual oversight*" and "*government*" in the church (Acts 20:28; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:7; 1 Pet 5:2; Rom 12:8; 1 Cor 12:28), and; (c) "*must be competent to teach ...*" (1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:9); these allusions are "high volume allusions," created by the highly distinctive language that the GAA declaration shares with specific NT elder texts, and especially by the combination of the terms "shepherd / pastor," "oversee / oversight," "lead / govern," and "competent to teach," since the NT applies this combination of terms exclusively to elder / overseers; thus the GAA's doctrine of eldership indicates that PCA elders do indeed occupy the biblical office of elder, and applies NT elder texts directly to them; moreover, the GAA 2019/2023 declaration stands in strong continuity with presbyterian tradition at this point, for it alludes to many of the same NT elder texts that are alluded to in the *SBD* and the *Form* (Recital D);
- I. GANSW 2020 received and affirmed the GAA 2019 declaration regarding eldership, and made its own declaration regarding elders (PCNSW Dec. Act, 2020 (c)–(d)), affirming, *inter alia*, that: (a) "elders occupy a pastoral office" and "shepherd ... the church ... under the Chief Shepherd"; (b) exercise "spiritual oversight of the Church" and "share in its government"; (c) "teach the word of God," and; (d) "must be competent to teach according to their gifts"; consistent with this, the PCNSW Code states regarding elders that: (a) "Under the Chief Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, the minister(s) and elders of a congregation are its shepherds, who co-operate in the oversight and government of the congregation" (§4.01); (b) elders "must ... be competent to teach and lead" (§4.02 (e)), and; (c) "according to their own gifts, and in co-operation with the minister(s), elders are to shepherd and serve the congregation" by, among other things, "sharing in its government through the session" (§4.03 (a)), exercising "supervision of the spiritual life of the congregation" and "oversight" of its people and activities (§4.13), and "teaching the word of God, including correcting false teaching, equipping others to serve Christ, guiding and encouraging enquirers, and proclaiming the gospel beyond the congregation" (§4.03 (c));
- J. The GANSW Declaration regarding elders, and the rules of the PCNSW Code on elders, indicate that PCNSW elders occupy the biblical office of elder by employing highly distinctive language from NT elder texts when they state that elders: (a) are "*shepherds*" under "*the Chief Shepherd*" who "*shepherd ... the congregation*" (1 Pet 5:1–4; Acts 20:28; Eph 4:11); (b) "co-operate in the oversight and government of the congregation" and exercise "*oversight*" (Acts 20:28; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:7; 1 Pet 5:2; Rom 12:8; 1 Cor 12:28); (c) "*must ... be competent to teach*" including "*correcting false teaching*" and "*equipping others to serve Christ*" (1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:9; Eph 4:11–12), and; (d) "*must be ... competent ... to lead*" (1 Tim 3:4–5; 5:17; cf. 1 Thess 5:12; Rom 12:8; 1 Cor 12:28); further, the PCNSW Code explicitly applies 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9 to elders in PCNSW churches when it requires that "an elder must ... be a mature Christian, who demonstrates exemplary Christ-like character as defined by the Scriptures (1 Tim. 3:1–7; Tit. 1:5–9)" (§4.02 (c)); moreover, the biblical texts to which the GANSW Declaration and the PCNSW



Code allude include many of the same NT elder texts alluded to in the *SBD*, the *Form*, and in the GAA 2019/2023 declaration (Recitals D and H);

- K. The GAA's doctrine of the eldership now expressed in the PCNSW Code on elders represents the fruit of a rigorous eight year long process of discussion and debate at every level of the Church (2015–2023), which was designed from the start to more fully conform the PCNSW Code on elders to the teaching of the Scriptures; GANSW 2015 initiated the process when it established a Special Committee for Elders and Deacons (EDC; GANSW 2015 Min 87); in the subsequent years the doctrine of the eldership now expressed in the PCNSW Code was: (a) the subject of two major discussion papers commissioned by GANSW (2015 Min 87(2)(a)) and GAA (2016 68 Min (2)), as well as the subject several other reports to GANSW; (b) considered three times by GAA (2016, 2019, 2023); (c) examined by the GAA Code Committee, which also consulted with the Principals of the recognised theological Colleges, as was “require”[d] by the GAA (GAA 2016 Min 68 (2)–(3)); (d) debated four times by GANSW (2016, 2020, 2021, 2022); (e) remitted to the PCNSW presbyteries twice for “consideration and report,” the first of which also extended the consultation to PCNSW sessions (GANSW 2016 Min 87; 2020 Min 76); (f) remitted once to PCNSW presbyteries under Barrier Act procedures (GANSW 2021 Min 60), before finally it was; (g) adopted by GANSW as its Code on “Elders and Sessions” (GANSW 2022 Min 82); significantly, both at the beginning of this long and rigorous process, and at each point along the way, both GANSW and GAA explicitly considered the biblical basis of the affirmations regarding elders now contained in the PCNSW Code: (a) when GANSW initiated the process it requested the EDC to “provide to the next Assembly a paper presenting *the teaching of the Scriptures* on the nature and functions of the offices of elder and deacon and examining The Code (PCNSW) *in the light of this teaching*” (GANSW 2015 Min 87(2)(a); italics added); (b) the GAA Code Committee requested from the EDC, and subsequently considered, a document presenting the biblical basis for its proposed declaration regarding elders, which was subsequently adopted as the GAA 2019/2023 declaration on elders; (c) GAA itself explicitly considered the biblical basis for its 2019 / 2023 declaration before adopting it, reaffirming it, and codifying it; (d) the EDC has drawn attention to the biblical basis for its proposals in each of its eight annual reports and speeches to GANSW (2016–2023); for example, the EDC reports to GANSW in 2020 and 2021 both noted that “In drafting the overture [to amend the Code on elders], the committee sought to use a *form of words* which ... reflects” both “*the description of the office and functions of elders in the Scriptures*, the Church’s Supreme Standard” and “the GAA’s resolutions regarding eldership” (GANSW BB 2020, 96; GANSW BB 2021, 115; italics added); thus, the PCNSW Code on elders, including its use of NT elder texts to characterise PCNSW elders as biblical elders (Recital J), represents the mature judgment of the courts of the Church, and expresses the PCA’s doctrine of eldership as regulated by GANSW;
- L. The functional distinction between ministers and elders provides no argument against the application of NT elder texts to elders in PCNSW; for while the presbyterian tradition, in all its varied forms, has always distinguished between pastors / ministers and elders, or between Teaching Elders and Ruling Elders, and the PCA “observes a functional distinction between ministers of the word and sacraments, and elders” (GAA 2023 Min 30; cf. GAA 2019 Min 42; GANSW Dec. Act. 2020 (b)), this functional distinction has always been held in consistency with the application of NT elder texts to presbyterian elders: (a) the presbyterian tradition, as is already evident in Calvin and in the *SBD*, has commonly grounded the functional distinction between ministers and elders in 1 Timothy 5:17 (Calvin, *Institutes*, §4.3.8 and §4.11.1; *SBD* §6.3), which marks a distinction within the eldership between some “elders” who both “rule well” and “labour in the word and teaching” and other elders who “rule well” but don’t labour in teaching in the same way or to the same extent; the same authorities identify the “elders who rule well” in 1 Timothy 5:17 with the “governors” of Romans 12:8 and 1 Corinthians 12:28 and so indicate their understanding that the “governors” in those texts are one type of biblical elder (Calvin, *Institutes*, §§4.3.8; 4.11.1; 4.11.16; *SBD* §6.2–3); (b) the PCA has, from its inception, trusted responsibility for both the government and the official teaching ministry of the Church to its ministers and elders in a manner that reflects NT elder texts (esp. 1 Tim 3:2–5; 5:17; Titus 1:9; cf. 1 Tim 2:12; Rom 12:8; 1 Cor 12:28; 1 Thess 5:12); “the Formula” signed by both “ministers and elders at their ordination or induction” (Basis of Union VI) requires both to “assert, maintain, and defend the doctrine, worship, and government” of the Church, and so indicates that ministers and elders



share responsibility for the Church's government and official teaching, according to their overlapping but different functions; the PCA Ordination Vows (CPP §6.6 Vows ii., iv.), likewise, require both ministers and elders—in exactly the same terms—not only to “own and accept,” and to “firmly and constantly adhere” to the Church's doctrine and government, but to “assert, maintain, and defend” the same, and so indicate that although elders occupy a different “station” to ministers they nevertheless share responsibility for the Church's government and official teaching, just as NT elders are responsible for “rule” and authoritative “teaching” (esp. 1 Tim 3:2–5; 5:17; Tit 1:9; cf. 1 Tim 2:12; Rom 12:8; 1 Cor 12:28; 1 Thess 5:12); (c) the PCNSW Code assigns different but overlapping functions to ministers and elders in the Church's government and official teaching ministry (§4.01, 4.03; 4.06; GANSW Dec. Act. 2020 (d)–(e)), and in assigning functions specifically to elders the Code employs distinctive language from NT elder texts (Recital J); moreover, in relation to the responsibility of elders in the Church's official teaching ministry, both GAA and GANSW assign this responsibility to elders not only collectively, through their participation in the courts of the Church, but individually, since each elder must be “competent to teach,” and must actually “teach the Word of God” and “correct false teaching” in their congregational ministry “*according to their gifts*” (GAA 2023 Min 30.9 (b)(ii); italics added; PCNSW Code 4.03(c));

- M. The diversity of views in the presbyterian tradition on a number of questions of Church government, including on the number of offices and their precise inter-relations and specific functions, provides no argument against the application of NT elder texts to elders in PCNSW; for while the PCA “has not thus far, required a uniform or exclusive view of the duties and functions of eldership but has allowed a variety of practice” (GANSW Dec. Act. 2020 (a) relying on GAA 2016 min 68), this non-exclusive and non-uniform variety is held in consistency with several substantive positive affirmations, namely, that PCA elders: “occupy a pastoral office”; exercise “spiritual oversight” and “government” in the Church; “teach the Word of God”; “must be competent to teach according to their gifts,” and; “must ... be competent to teach and to lead” (GAA 2019 Min 42; GAA 2023 Min 30; CPP; GANSW Dec. Act. 2020 (c)–(d); PCNSW Code §4.01–03), all of which positive affirmations reflect NT elder texts (Recitals H and J); moreover, WCF 1.6 also provides no argument against the application of biblical elder texts to PCNSW elders, for the Confession affirms only that “there are *some circumstances* concerning the ... government of the Church .... which are to be ordered in the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word,” and these “circumstances,” as the parallel with “the worship of God” shows, are not the central elements of the Church's government, including the offices “instituted” by Christ and expressly regulated by his Word (WCF 30.1; *Form*, Preface, §3–6; *SBD* §2.3; 2.6–7; 6.3), but more peripheral matters not expressly addressed in the Word of God;
- N. The Scriptures present a consistent pattern of male eldership and so teach, by their example, that elders are men: in the OT, both the Hebrew and the Greek translations consistently use the masculine forms of the word “elder” to refer to Israel's elders (from Exod 3:16, 18 onwards), and several texts specify that elders were “men” (Num 11:16, 24–26; Deut 29:10; Judg 8:14; Ruth 4:2; 1 Kings 20:11 LXX; Ezek 8:11; cf. Exod 18:21, 25); in the NT: Jewish elders are always described using the masculine form of the word “elder,” and named Jewish elders are always men (Mark 14:53; Luke 23:30; John 3:1; Acts 5:34; 23:1, 6); further, the “elders” who hold office in the Church are always described using the masculine form of the word “elder” (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6, 22–23; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; 1 Tim 5:17, 19; Tit 1:5; Jas 5:14; 1 Pet 5:1, 5); by contrast, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments never employ the feminine forms of the word “elder” for a person holding office, and provide no example of a woman holding the office of elder;
- O. The Scriptures teach more directly, by precept, that elders must be men, and so confirm that the consistent biblical pattern of male only eldership is no mere description, but a positive example to emulate; for, in both 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9, the apostle Paul rules that elders must be men, and does so in two ways: (a) he requires that an elder / overseer “must be ... the husband of one wife” (1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:6); the apostle here employs the regular and ordinary words for “man” and “woman,” such that the phrase can also be translated “a man of one woman” (ESV mg.); this apostolic requirement is neither gender inclusive nor interchangeable with its opposite, since Paul applies the same requirement to the “deacons” in 1 Timothy 3:8–10 and 12, whom he

distinguishes from certain “women” (1 Tim 3:11), thus indicating that the phrase “man of one woman” applies specifically to men; the same specificity is evident from the fact that later in the same letter Paul applies the female equivalent of the phrase to certain “widows,” who must have been “the wife of one husband” or “woman of one man” (1 Tim 5:9); (b) he also indicates that an elder / overseer is qualified for the office by his faithful leadership of his household (1 Tim 3:4–5; Tit 1:6); since Paul elsewhere specifically charges husbands and fathers with this responsibility (Eph 5:21–33; 6:4; Col 3:18–19, 21), he confirms that elders / overseers must be men;

- P. The apostle Paul further teaches that elders / overseers must be men by precept when he prohibits women from “teaching” or “exercising authority” over men (1 Tim 2:12); Paul’s language here anticipates his requirement, in the immediate context, that elders / overseers must be “able to teach” and “rule” (1 Tim 3:2, 4–5; cf. 5:17; Tit 1:9; 1 Thess 5:12; Rom 12:8; 1 Cor 12:28); the linguistic and conceptual parallels tie the two texts together and indicate that they are mutually interpretive; thus Paul prohibits to women in 1 Timothy 2:12 that which he requires of elders / overseers in 1 Timothy 3:2, 4–5; this observation confirms both that the kind of authority and teaching prohibited to women in 1 Timothy 2:12 is the official and authoritative ministry of ruling and teaching, and that the elders / overseers charged with this authority and teaching are to be men; further, although modern scholarship has attempted to limit the contemporary application of 1 Timothy 2:12, especially by claiming that Paul’s command addresses a particular problem of female false teachers in Ephesus, such arguments are unpersuasive for several reasons: (a) Paul clearly grounds his command in God’s good order, established at creation, and in the events of the Fall (1 Tim 2:13–14); (b) the context further indicates that his command is a universal and enduring regulation for the Church in all ages (Recital Q); (c) Paul’s syntax indicates that either “teach” and “exercise authority” are both negative, or both positive, and the word he uses for “teach” is positive throughout his letters to Timothy and Titus, thus; (d) Paul does not merely prohibit women from teaching falsely (contrast 1 Tim 1:3; 6:3) or from “domineering” men, but from teaching and exercising authority over men in the manner that properly belongs to the elders / overseers; (e) although there were false teachers in Ephesus, the only false teachers Paul names are not women but men (1 Tim 1:20; 2 Tim 2:17–18) and thus the claim that 1 Timothy 2:12 specifically addresses female false teachers in Ephesus is speculative; (f) in sum: recent scholarship provides no compelling reason to abandon the plain reading of the text, which has been common in the Church for nearly two millennia;
- Q. The apostle Paul presents his regulations for the office of elder / overseer (1 Tim 3:1–7 and Tit 1:5–9), and his associated instructions regarding teaching and authority (1 Tim 2:12), as universal and enduring regulations for the Church: in 1 Timothy the regulations come at the heart of an identifiable section of the letter which deals with universal and enduring realities (1 Tim 2:1–3:16): his instructions concern the “one God” (1 Tim 2:5), the “one mediator” (1 Tim 2:5), “all people” (1 Tim 2:1, 4, 6) and “every place” (1 Tim 2:8); they concern teaching grounded in creation and the Fall (1 Tim 2:13–15); they flow from Paul’s own appointment as apostle to “the nations” (1 Tim 2:7); Paul concludes the whole section by underlining the God-given necessity of these instructions for the Church—they prescribe “how one *ought to behave* in the household of God” (1 Tim 3:15); moreover, Paul introduces the regulations with the formula “the saying is trustworthy” (1 Tim 3:1a), which he otherwise reserves for summaries of the universal and enduring gospel (1 Tim 1:15; 4:8–10; 2 Tim 2:11–13; Tit 3:5–8); he circumscribes the list itself with two references to what “an overseer *must be* ...,” twice underlining the God-given necessity of the entire list (1 Tim 3:2, 3:7); in Titus, similarly, Paul’s command to “appoint elders in every town” (Tit 1:5) is grounded in the eternal purpose of God “who never lies,” and flows from Paul’s own apostolic commission—“the command of God our Saviour ... for the sake of the faith of God’s elect” (Tit 1:1–3); Paul again draws attention to the prescriptive nature of his command with the phrase “an overseer *must be* ...” (1:7), and grounds this divine necessity in the eschatological mission of the church to stand for the truth amidst false teaching until “the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ” (Tit 2:13; cf. 1:10–16; 2:1, 3–4, 7–8, 11–14);
- R. The biblical requirement that elders must be men is consistent with the wider teaching of Scripture regarding men and women, since Scripture, taken as a whole, teaches that men and women are: (a) equally created in the image of God (Gen 1:26–28), equally fallen in sin (Rom 3:23), and equally redeemed by Christ, being co-heirs of the gracious gift of life (Gal 3:28; 1 Pet 3:7); (b)

mutually inter-dependent, since “in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman” (1 Cor 11:11–12); (c) set in good, ordered relationships from the beginning, since “Adam was formed first, then Eve” (1 Tim 2:13 with Gen 2:7, 18–25; cf. 1 Cor 11:8–9), such that; (d) in marriage, “the husband is head of the wife even as Christ is head of the church” (Eph 5:23 with 1:22; cf. 1 Cor 11:3), and husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church (Eph 5:25; Col 3:19; 1 Pet 3:7), even as wives are to submit to their husbands in the Lord (Eph 5:22; Col 3:18; Tit 2:5; 1 Pet 3:1–6), and; (e) in the church: under the old covenant, the office of priest was assigned exclusively to men (Exod 29:4, 8–9, 29–30), and; under the new covenant, Jesus appointed twelve men as his apostles (Matt 10:2–4 // Mark 3:13–19 // Luke 6:12–16) and, further; the apostle Paul teaches that while a “woman” (CSB) or “wife” (NIV, ESV) may “pray or prophesy” (1 Cor 11:5, 13) in church, when it comes to the authoritative act of weighing prophecy, “women should keep silent in the churches” and “should be in submission,” which command Paul grounds in “the Law” of God, the common practice of “all the churches,” and “a command of the Lord” himself (1 Cor 14:26–40); thus, taken as a whole, the teaching of Scripture regarding men and women provides a framework in which the full equality of men and women before God is compatible with ordered relationships in both the family and the church;

- S. Presbyterian churches, from the Reformation onwards, exclusively assigned the office of elder to biblically qualified men, and the PCA assigned the office of elder to biblically qualified men from its inception in 1901 until 1967; moreover, since 1977, the General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Churches of Queensland (PCQ), Victoria (PCV), South Australia (PCSA), Western Australia (PCWA), and Tasmania (PCTas) have all ruled, in various ways and at various times, that only biblically qualified men may be ordained as elders; PCQ and PCTas enacted this by declaration of the Assembly; PCV, PCSA, and PCWA have all achieved the same result by adding the rule to their respective Codes via Barrier Act procedure; these rules are now the practised doctrine of the Church in all the aforementioned States, and the unity and integrity of the PCA is best served by consistent practice regarding the eldership;
- T. The Presbyterian Church of America (Book of Common Order §7.2), the International Presbyterian Church in the UK and Europe (Book of Common Order §5.2), and Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand (Book of Church Order §7.2), among many other Reformed and Presbyterian Churches around the world, assign the office of elder to biblically qualified men; while there are also Presbyterian Churches that ordain women as elders (e.g. the Church of Scotland; the Presbyterian Church (USA); the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand), for GANSW to rule that only men may be ordained as elders would in no way be unusual or idiosyncratic within the worldwide family of Reformed and Presbyterian churches, but would, in fact, bring PCNSW into closer alignment with those Presbyterian Churches which share our fundamental commitments to Scripture, to the WCF, and to vital gospel-centred ministry, and may open up future opportunities for co-operation in the global mission of the gospel;
- U. Male only eldership does not imply any inferiority of dignity, worth, or value of non-elders in relation to elders, or of women in relation to men, since the Bible’s teaching regarding ordered relationships between elders and congregation members (1 Tim 5:17; Eph 4:11–12; 1 Thess 5:12–13; Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:1–5), and between husbands and wives (Eph 5:22–33; Col 3:18–19; 1 Cor 11:2–16; 1 Pet 3:1–7), is fully compatible with the Bible’s teaching regarding the full equality of men and women before God (Recital R);
- V. Male only eldership does not diminish the ministry of non-elders in God’s kingdom, since God gifts every member of the body of Christ—women as well as men—for the common good (1 Cor 12:7), and churches flourish when each person is equipped and encouraged to play their part in the church’s life and ministry (Rom 12:3–8; 1 Cor 12:12–26; Eph 4:15–16; 1 Pet 4:10–11); more specifically, male only eldership does not preclude a teaching ministry for non-elders, women as well as men, for while the Scriptures assign responsibility for the church’s official teaching to the pastors / elders / overseers of the church (Eph 4:11–12; 1 Tim 3:2; 5:17–18 [with 2:12]; Tit 1:9), and the PCNSW Code assigns different but overlapping functions to ministers and elders in the Church’s official teaching ministry (Recital L), the Scriptures also encourage all Christians, men and women, to teach each other so that the body of Christ might grow to maturity in him (Rom 15:14; Col 3:16; Eph 4:15–16; Heb 5:12); in specific reference to women, the Scriptures: (a) encourage older women “to teach [younger women] what is good” (Tit 2:3); (b) provide positive



examples of women prophesying and teaching not only women and children, but also men (Exod 15:20; Judg 4:4–5; 2 Kgs 22:14; 2 Chron 34:22; Isa 8:3; Prov 31:1, 26; Luke 2:36; Acts 2:17 [with Joel 2:28]; 18:26), including announcing the resurrection to the apostles (Matt 28:7–10; Mark 16:7; Luke 24:9–10, 22–24; John 20:17–18), and; (c) the apostle Paul provides for women to “pray and prophesy” in church (1 Cor 11:5, 13), and thus; (d) the “silence” or “quietness” Paul commands women to observe in gathered worship (1 Cor 14:34–35; 1 Tim 2:11–12) does not prohibit every kind of speech, but refers to a quiet and submissive stance towards those in authority (cf. 1 Tim 2:2), which stance is a Christian virtue enjoined on all believers (Rom 13:1–7; 1 Pet 2:13–17); thus while the Scriptures charge male elders with the government and official teaching ministry of the church, they also affirm the significance of the ministry of all of God’s people, and specifically provide for non-elders—women as well as men—to exercise teaching ministries for the sake of the life and mission of the Church;

- W. Male only eldership provides opportunity for the growth of God’s Church, and the strengthening of its gospel witness; for while male elders might, tragically and sinfully, misuse their authority to abuse those under their care, such misuse of biblical teaching is no argument against its proper use; on the contrary, the NT elder texts, and biblical teaching generally, require elders, and all those in authority, to lead like Christ himself in godly, selfless, sacrificial, gentle, loving service, protecting those under their care and promoting their welfare and maturity in Christ which, when faithfully enacted, promotes the gospel and brings glory to God (Mark 10:35–45; Acts 20:28; 1 Tim 3:1–7; Tit 1:5–9; Eph 5:23, 25–33; 1 Pet 3:7; 5:1–4);
- X. GANSW, together with PCNSW presbyteries, sessions, and congregations, have had good opportunity to consider the biblical arguments both for and against male only eldership since: (a) GANSW 2021 commissioned the EDC to write a discussion paper ... “on ‘Healthy complementarian church life and ministry, including a critical examination of the case for and against male only elders’,” (GANSW 2021 Min 63 (3)(a)), and; (b) GANSW 2022 resolved to “Send the Healthy Complementarianism paper to presbyteries and sessions for their consideration, and encourage ministers and elders to circulate the paper widely among men and women, to foster discussion in the church about healthy, biblical relationships between men and women, and encourage all interested parties to submit responses ...” (GANSW 2022 Min 82 (3)); moreover, GAA and GANSW, through their various committees, are proactively pursuing policies to: (a) strengthen healthy biblical relationships between men and women in PCA / PCNSW congregations, and; (b) further allow for the participation of appropriately qualified women in the courts of the Church; faithfulness in this matter best serves the health and witness of the Church;
- Y. It is competent for GANSW to rule that PCNSW elders must be men for, insofar as the question of the sex of elders is a matter of doctrine: (a) GAA has “supreme powers” with respect to “[the] doctrine” of the Church (CPP, Art. 2.1 (a)), and this includes power to clarify and strengthen the Church’s doctrine by declaring its understanding of the entailments of the doctrine stated in the WCF (read in the light of the Dec. Stat.), including by making explicit what is only implicit in the WCF (read in the light of the Dec. Stat.); (b) GAA 2019 exercised this power in relation to the Church’s doctrine of marriage by declaring a statement on “Sex, Gender, and Marriage” and resolving to include the statement in CPP (GAA 2019 Min 89(3)–(4); CPP §5.3); this statement clarifies and strengthens the Church’s doctrine of marriage (principally found in WCF 24) by declaring its entailments, and by making explicit what is only implicit in the WCF; (c) GAA 2019 and 2023 exercised this same power in relation to the doctrine of eldership by declaring a statement on eldership and resolving to include the statement in CPP (Recital G); this statement also clarifies and strengthens the Church’s doctrine of office (principally found in WCF 30–31) by declaring its entailments, and by making explicit what is only implicit in the WCF, for example, that “elders occupy a pastoral office” and “must be competent to teach according to their gifts”; (d) in relation to such declarations, the question of whether the doctrine declared is “controversial” in the Church is irrelevant, since the GAA has “supreme power” to clarify and strengthen the Church’s doctrine, always within the constraints of the Church’s Supreme and Subordinate Standards, in the terms laid out in the Basis of Union; (e) by extension, it would be competent for GAA to declare further entailments of its doctrine of office, making explicit what is only implicit in the WCF (read in the light of the Dec. Stat.), including to determine the question of the sex of elders, without this constituting a “restatement” of the Church’s doctrine in the sense indicated in

Section III of the Basis of Union; (f) GAA 1967 opened the eldership to women by declaration rather than by Barrier Act procedure (GAA 1967 Min 131(2)), thus demonstrating that GAA did not consider its declaration to constitute a “restatement” of the Church’s doctrine; (g) GAA 1997 confirmed this decision when it declared that “the ordination of women to the eldership” is “an issue of government,” further clarifying that “the issue is not one of the doctrine of the Church as found in the Westminster Confession of Faith (read in the light of the Declaratory Statement), but of government of the Church as found in the Form of Presbyterian Church Government” (GAA 1997 Min 59); this declaration clarifies that the sex of elders is not part of the Church’s doctrine explicitly professed in the WCF (read in the light of the Dec. Stat.), such that determinations on the matter do not constitute “restatements” of the Church’s doctrine; (h) moreover, the GAA’s “supreme power” over the doctrine of the Church “is not exclusive power,” and it is competent for GANSW to exercise a concurrent power to enact the Church’s doctrine of the eldership, including determining the qualifications and duties of elders in PCNSW, provided such determinations “do not contradict any determination made by the GAA and further provided that any such statement is subject to revision and, if necessary, replacement by the GAA ...” (GAA 2019 Code Committee Report anent the Eldership, p. 7); (i) for GANSW to rule that elders must be men would not constitute a “restatement” of the Church’s doctrine any more than the opposite change did so in 1967; indeed, since male only eldership was the practised doctrine of the presbyterian tradition in Scotland in all its forms until the 20th century, and of all the colonial presbyterian churches, and of the PCA from its inception in 1901, when the Basis of Union was adopted, and until 1967, a reversion to that practised doctrine cannot rightly be considered a change of the PCA’s doctrine of the eldership in the sense indicated in Section III of the Basis of Union; (j) similarly, the determinations of the State Assemblies of the Presbyterian Churches of Queensland, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia, and Western Australia, that elders must be men, have also not been judged by GAA to constitute a “restatement” of the Church’s doctrine; (k) yet further, the determinations of many PCNSW sessions that elders in particular PCNSW congregations must be men have also not been judged by GAA to constitute a “restatement” of the Church’s doctrine; (l) in sum, for GANSW to rule that elders must be men, reverting the the practised doctrine of the Church in the period 1901–1967 would be, with respect to the doctrine of the Church, an expression of GANSW’s concurrent power to enact the Church’s doctrine of eldership; such a decision would not be inconsistent with the Church’s Subordinate Standard or with the GAA’s declared doctrine of the eldership; such a decision would also be entirely consistent with the Church’s doctrine of the eldership as enacted by all the other State Assemblies and as practised by the Church in all the other States; most importantly, such a decision would be entirely consistent with the Church’s Supreme Standard, the Word of God, and is, indeed, required by it;

- Z. It is competent for GANSW to rule that PCNSW elders must be men for, insofar as the question of the sex of elders is a matter of government: (a) the Articles of Agreement grant “supreme powers” to the GAA with respect to “doctrine,” “worship,” and “discipline,” but conspicuously omit reference to the “government” of the Church (CPP Art. 2.1), which is mentioned with the other three heads in the Scheme of Union; (b) the Articles of Agreement further rule that “the autonomy of the State Assemblies shall not be further interfered with than is necessary to give effect to the Basis of Union and the Articles of Agreement” (CPP Art. 10.1), thus; (c) while GAA remains supreme in all matters of Church government because all matters of Church government are informed by doctrine and have doctrinal entailments, and are often related to matters of worship and discipline, the Articles of Agreement leave the regulation of the government of the Church to the State Assemblies, except in cases where the GAA has exercised its supreme powers, and therefore; (d) it is competent for the State Assemblies to regulate the government of the Church in the States assuming, always, that such regulations are not inconsistent with the Church’s Supreme and Subordinate Standards, or with any determination of the GAA, and allowing, always, that future determinations of the GAA may over-ride any such regulation by a State Assembly; (e) consistent with this, when GAA 1967 opened the eldership to women it did not require the State Assemblies to mandate the ordination of women, but only declared that, according its understanding of the doctrine of the Church at that time, “the Eldership is a service within the Church which can be performed appropriately by men and women” (GAA 1967 Min 131(2)); this left the State Assemblies free to rule on the question one way or the other, as is evident from the fact that the various State Assemblies have ruled in favour of male only eldership,

beginning with PCQ in 1984; (f) GAA 1997 confirmed that GAA has left the matter to the regulation of the State Assemblies by its ruling that the issue of the sex of elders is a matter not of doctrine but of government; (g) in sum, for GANSW to rule that elders must be men, reverting to the practised doctrine of the Church in the period 1901–1967 would, with respect to the government of the Church, be an expression of GANSW's constitutional right to regulate the Church's government in PCNSW.

NOW THEREFORE the Special Committee on Elders and Deacons humbly overtures the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in the State of New South Wales to take these premises into consideration and amend Chapter 4 of The Code Part II as follows;

(1) Insert the word “man” into The Code 4.02 (c), such that it reads:

“An elder must...

(c) be a mature Christian man, who demonstrates exemplary Christ-like character as defined by the Scriptures (1 Tim. 3:1–7; Tit. 1:5–9), and over 21 years of age;”

(2) Insert below The Code 4.02 (g) a new paragraph which reads:

“Notwithstanding (c) above, female elders ordained prior to dd.mm.yyyy [insert date this rule change is enacted] continue to hold the office of elder with all rights and privileges of eldership according to The Code of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in the State of NSW preserved.”

so that the whole of rule 4.02 reads:

4.02 Qualification of Elders. An elder must:

- (a) have a living faith in Christ;
- (b) hold firmly to the truths of the faith as stated in the confession of the Church;
- (c) be a mature Christian man, who demonstrates exemplary Christ-like character as defined by the Scriptures (1 Tim. 3:1–7; Tit. 1:5–9), and over 21 years of age;
- (d) be a communicant member of the congregation who consistently attends worship, participates in the congregation's life, and contributes to its funds;
- (e) be competent to teach and to lead;
- (f) be willing and able to take the vows required of elders, and to serve as an elder;
- (g) comply with all requirements of the Conduct Protocol Unit.

Notwithstanding (c) above, female elders ordained prior to dd.mm.yyyy [insert date this rule change is enacted] continue to hold the office of elder with all rights and privileges of eldership according to The Code of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in the State of NSW preserved.

Or to do otherwise as the Assembly in its wisdom may deem fit.

**Dr Murray Smith and Mrs Fiona Wright were appointed to state the Overture.**