
A History Of The Evangelical Presbyterian Church Of Australia

The History Committee of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church has prepared this history on our Church. Our Presbytery asked the committee to prepare it as an aid in remembering the Lord's grace to us, and of the great issues involved in our coming into being as a denomination.

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It is our prayer that the following history will be an aid in teaching us lessons from our past, and stirring us up to glorify the Lord. May it renew us in our love and service of Him who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. May it remind us of how the Lord has called His people out of darkness into His marvellous light.

As we reflect on our past may we pray and labour that His cause in our midst would be maintained. May we look to Him that His grace which has brought us thus far, will continue with us in the generations ahead. May the beauty of the Lord God be upon us and that we will neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge and service of the Lord.

T.D., A & A.J. Carins, & C. Coleborn

History Committee of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia

The Beginnings

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) was a reformation development out of various main line denominations in Australia, beginning in the early 1950's, and culminating in the institution of the EPC in 1961. It was originally constituted as the Reformed Evangelical Church. The name was changed because it was found that Australian society was not familiar with the term "reformed" in its historical and church connection. Many associated the word with reform or correctional schools for example.

The EPC began in a remarkable way. Groups of earnest Christian people in the states of Tasmania and Queensland, deeply moved in heart and mind, came together from such Churches as the Baptist, Brethren, Salvation Army, Congregational, Anglican, general Presbyterian and Methodist denominations. What caused them to come together, was their grief over the departure from fundamental Christian truths by their respective denominations. There was much spiritual compromise in those denominations. There was a tragic compromise of such truths as the Bible being our only rule of faith and practice; the sinfulness of man; the need of the new birth and faith in Christ, and other essential Protestant and historic Christian beliefs. These beliefs of our Christian mothers and fathers were either being ignored or abandoned by many, especially the leaders of those large denominations.

These groups of sincere believers sought to call their Churches to return to the basic Christian truths. They were frustrated in this though by their different denominations' courts generally not dealing fairly and properly with these pleas. Their cry for spiritual help and reform in their stand against the tide of humanism, modernism, and the liberal theology that was prevailing in the main line denominations at that time was largely ignored.

At a later date, after coming to the Reformed faith, Pastor McNeilly, one of the Church's first pastors, on a radio broadcast programme, "The Word of Truth", gave voice to these peoples' understanding of how a Church should treat the matter of Biblical and Christian beliefs. He said in part:

1 Tim 3:15. --- We are told that the Church of the Living God is the pillar and ground of the truth. Here we learn that the chief end of the Church is to preserve the truth. The Church exists to make known the truth of God's Word. Any Church that does not proclaim the truth is a mere system of man, and is not that divine society instituted by Christ. The Church exists to maintain, support, uphold, proclaim, and to be a citadel to the truth. The greatest curse that can come upon any people is to be given over to error, and for the land to be void of true ministers to cry, "Thus saith the Lord". The true prophet in the Bible was one who brought the Word of God to the people, and the false prophet was one who spake out of his own heart and who did not preach the truth. May God in His mercy give us a revival of truth. Not something that is brought about by humanism, not a revival of shallow evangelism that stirs peoples' emotions and produces great excitement and many decisions, for it has been proved in our day, that kind of evangelism is only "heat without light". It glorifies man and does much harm to the cause of Christ. Our need is a revival of truth, not new truth but the old truth as it is found in the inspired Word of God. For it is the truth that glorifies God and humbles the human heart and causes it to hope in God's mercy. May we see in our day a return to the old paths. Jer 6:16."

So it was that men and women from various denominational backgrounds but with a single desire to truly know and serve God, were distressed with the apostasy around them. As they found like-minded believers elsewhere, they enjoyed informal fellowship together. This led them to form first of all evangelical fellowships, and then, when they had come to the Reformed faith, the EPC.

The Establishment Of Fellowship Groups

Some of the men and women, who were sincerely seeking a better understanding of the Bible, the Lord and His ways, were forced out of their denominations. Others eventually withdrew from them. A loose network of fellowship developed between these people as they came in contact with one another. The folk in Tasmania came from Hobart, Launceston, Penguin, St. Marys, Taranna and Winnaleah. Those who enjoyed this fellowship were Arminian inclined, believing in man's ability and free will. They were man centred in their thinking, and viewed life and God from the perspective of self. They believed man was not so bad; he only needed a bit of help from the Lord to find happiness in life, and to get to heaven. They viewed Christ's work as only an incomplete work. It was up to man to finish it. Man could resist God and even change God's will. Whether we were saved or not, ultimately depended upon man. Some found their fellowship in existing para-church organizations such as "Ambassadors for Christ."

Those of the fellowship were also inclined to be Baptist, even those from a non-baptist background. That is, they believed that the community of God's people, the Church, was only made up of truly born again believers, who could be discerned. They did not agree that the Church of God is made up of believers and their children, and that the visible Church and community of God's people always were made up of the wheat and tares. They believed only in the baptism of adults professing repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus, and so had no real place for children in the Church. There was no appreciation for God's Covenant relationship with His people.

The fellowship groups also tended to see the Church as simply a local congregation, and that every member had a say in the running of the Church. The rule of the congregation was not by elders as it is in Presbyterian Churches.

Searching For The Truth Of God's Word

There were many struggles and discouragements that different ones went through. They were painful and confusing. For example, at one time when those who worked and prayed most earnestly for the extension of Christ's kingdom were at a low ebb spiritually, they invited an American "evangelist" who was a follower of Charles G. Finney, to visit them. They longed for a true revival - a revival of the truth of God's Word that would really help souls. They thought this man was the one to bring revival for them. Yet after a time of stirred up emotions and energy, and after twelve months of his doctrine and practice, it left them bewildered and fatigued and in a sort of hopeless state of legalism and despair. The Arminianism of it all almost led some to atheism; such was the bitter disappointment they found in what was presented as Biblical Christianity.

There was a real and deep hunger among many of these folk to grow in the "meat" of the Word of God, and to more fully love and serve the Lord. This led to a preparedness to honestly examine themselves and their doctrine and practices. For example, they observed that at evangelistic meetings, many could be brought to "make a decision" to become a Christian, but few of them went on to give any evidence of being a true child of God. Few continued in a credible profession of faith and a life that supported that profession. They found that all too often people who were pressured into decisions became even more hardened against the Lord afterwards. This grieved the fellowship people, for they wanted to see souls saved. They discussed and prayed over why this was so. They asked themselves, were they believing and doing something wrong?

The Discovery Of The "Doctrines Of Grace" Or The Reformed Faith

Things began to change in the late 1950's and early 1960's. Some of these fellowship believers, in their search to grow more in the knowledge and grace of the Lord Jesus, and to find answers to the questions which their Arminian theology could not give, came across the Westminster Confession of Faith, and various reformed writers and publications. The Banner of Truth Trust was at this time just beginning to publish such material. Sovereign Grace Publications were producing similar material in the U.S.A. Among the literature that greatly helped, were books such as B.B. Warfield's "The Plan of Salvation", A.Pink's "The Sovereignty of God", T. Watson's "A Body of Divinity", M. Luther's "The Bondage of the Will", Jonathan Edward's "The Religious Affections", etc. As the folk came into contact with such material, something wonderfully profound took place in many of their hearts and minds and lives!

As the fellowship people grew in the knowledge and appreciation of the Reformed faith, they found that their hungering souls were satisfied in this newfound appreciation of the wonder and greatness of the Lord. They marvelled in His perfect and finished work in Christ, and of the Scriptures as a rule of faith and life. They also realized something profound! They saw that in the past, they had been ensnared by a faith that had man at the centre, not God. This faith and practice had brought the work of God into disgrace and them into despair.

Those who experienced what followed from the "discovery", describe it as an amazing work of God's grace and a revival of truth that was to grip the soul with a "vision" of the glory and greatness and wonder of the Lord. It caused such a sense of human inability and unworthiness, that the Triune God in Christ became very precious and wonderful. Many felt as if they had never really known the Lord before. It was like a powerful, supernatural conversion, and a revolution took place in their faith and life. Their faith now became not only God centred, but encompassed more and more all of their life. Faith in God and salvation was not just one department of their life, and family, work and social activity all separate departments. Increasingly, Christ was seen as sovereign over all of life.

Most of these believers were persuaded through this Reformed literature of the great truths of the sovereignty of God and the Reformed faith. They believed that they had at last found the true "meat" and light of the Word. They found that they had at last a unified view of life and the world and of God, and the answers to their problems.

Many changed from an Arminian man-centred faith, to a Reformed God-centred faith. They felt they had been delivered from the bondage of a "works" syndrome. Previously they were uncertain of their salvation, peace and joy. Now, seeing these things were guaranteed by God in Christ, and dependent upon His works and power and not man's, they knew deep contentment in full assurance. They grew by leaps and bounds, as they studied the Word, and read of the great doctrines of grace as set forth by fathers in the faith of old.

Sharing The Truths Of God's Word

This "discovery" of truth, was wonderful to the people involved. They thus desired very much, not only to see lost souls saved, but also to share the knowledge and experience of those newly discovered truths. Truths, they were assured, that gave the Lord His right place. Absolute principles, given from on high in the Bible, that they believed were principles of faith and for our real life. They came to the profound conviction that these things of Divine revelation would bring true stability and happiness to the restless soul of man, and these alone. They thus sought to spread this knowledge to as many people as possible.

One of the ways they sought to give wider knowledge of these great truths, was the publication of theological papers called "Sputniks". The Russians had just put up their first space satellite to circle the earth, so these papers were meant to be launched into society for as wide a distribution as possible.

A Visit Of The Rev. E. Lee To Tasmania

About this time, a minister from the PCEA, the Rev. E. Lee visited Tasmania. He spoke at a Convention at Winnaleah on

the 14th of April 1960, and then going on to speak at a Convention at Ulverstone. He spoke on a subject increasingly important to the fellowship people, that of "The Church". Approximately 150 people attended the weekend Winnaleah convention.

The Rev. E. Lee wrote of what he saw happening.

"Recent movements in Tasmania toward the Reformed faith have gladdened the hearts of all to whom the faith of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin is precious. The writer is able to give first hand information on the quality and manifestation of the work. That it is the work of God there is no doubt. There has been a tremendous outburst of intellectual activity in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. It has stimulated and elevated their lives. Christians who have never read a book for years now have moderate-size libraries with which they appear to be very familiar. Young ladies, as well as housewives, are conversant with the Confession of Faith; Berkhof's Systematic Theology, and the works of the British Puritans. This especially amazed the writer. For the interest of ladies is usually centred in the realms of fashion and food, babies and household furnishings.

In addition to this outburst of sacred study, there is a spirit of love, and open mindedness that is rarely met with in Christian fellowship. Although under pressure from former friends and associates - for Calvinism is an offense to many - they exhibit no bitterness, only the desire to win them and interest them in the way of God more perfectly. Amongst themselves they are tenderhearted and share a concern for the welfare of each other. This latter attitude, so sorely lacking in our Churches today, was a characteristic feature of primitive Christianity. Behold how these Christians love one another was the verdict of the wondering pagans.

One is also impressed by the consecrated lives that these dear brethren live. And we out of the older Reformed movements might take a leaf out of their book. They spend their time, energies, and talents in seeking to know the will of God and the truth of the Scriptures. If you join their company, you will find their conversation is on a very high level. The Person of Christ, the sovereignty of God, the work of the Holy Spirit, the doctrines of the Church they discuss with earnestness and relish. Their time and money is not frittered away in frivolous and harmful amusements. They are in earnest. The revelation of God's sovereign majesty has come as a glorious light. The Bible is a new book.

One of the saddest features of the movement has been their disappointment with the worldliness of the brethren of the Reformed churches. They cannot understand how Christians, especially those who profess the truth which God gave to His Church at the Reformation, can waste money on tobacco, on the pursuit of worldly amusements, such as the patronage of the cinema, where a godless way of life is portrayed and encouraged. They wonder why Christians have an appetite for these things. In consequence those who have so much to teach them have repelled them.

Let me say, in conclusion, that these brethren were a challenge and an inspiration to the writer as he moved among them. They have all the enthusiasm of those who have discovered a wonderful treasure. Their zeal in spreading the truth is a reflection of this. Some have criticized them for being aggressive; and so, no doubt, there has been a lack of wisdom on some occasions. But maturity comes with time and reflection. And there are signs already that their zeal is being tempered with discretion, although it is by no means abating. May God grant to us all such an insight into His holiness and majesty and such an insight into the grace that receiveth sinners that we with awe and devotion shall carry our faith to every creature in this land."

Conference Meetings

A conference was held on the 2nd of July 1960, at the home of two believers deeply involved in this work of reformation, Viv and Audrey Connors, at 53 Station Road, St. Leonards, Launceston. The aim of the Conference was the amalgamation into an organized Church of the fellowship groups from Winnaleah, Penguin, Taranna and Hobart, (Taroona, Newtown, and Warrane). It was at first thought that the fellowship groups would establish "The Baptist Reformed Church of Tasmania", and have the Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 as its confessional basis. As time went by, and after further prayer, study and discussion, the conference moved to adopt the Westminster Confessional Standards. Those involved became convinced that these Standards and their view of the Church and Baptism etc. most consistently summarized the truth of the Scriptures on these subjects. Again, it was painful for some to honestly test their beliefs by Scripture and to change them.

The subject of infant baptism caused much heart searching for some. As we have noted, most of the people had adopted adult only or "believers'" baptism. It was decided that there would be a presentation of papers at a conference by several of the brethren. The papers would give the arguments for both sides. Mr. John Driscoll was appointed to present a paper on infant baptism.

The day for the gathering was a cold winter's day, and those present were gathered before a large open wood fire. Mr. Driscoll was aware, even before he delivered his paper in defense of infant baptism, that there was much opposition to his position. Some, in their zeal for the baptistic position, were somewhat mocking and saying in a prejudicial manner that

paedobaptism simply could not be correct. There was such antipathy to the position, and because it was threatening to cause a real division between those at the conference, Mr. Driscoll was loath to deliver his paper. He stood before the fire and said to the gathered brethren that it would be better if he threw his paper into the fire, than that it be the cause of unspiritual and ungodly division and behaviour. He stated though that he was convinced that the truth of the Word did teach infant baptism, but would yet remain silent on the matter if the others did not feel able to honestly consider the matter. His words and imminent action of burning his paper electrified the gathering. They realized that they must be like the Bereans of Acts 17:10-11 who, when they heard Paul speak of things they had not yet considered, tested them by the Scriptures. They realized that unless they walked humbly in prayer and with a teachable spirit, they could go astray. As they then humbly compared the two views with Scripture, prayed and debated the matter, most saw that there were things in the Bible about infant baptism they had never considered before.

The consequences of the above incident led a great majority to abandon their baptistic view of baptism, and to become paedobaptists. They saw that God indeed calls us to baptize our children.

Various speakers were used of the Lord to help the fellowship people towards the reformed faith. Mr. Lee was one such man. He spoke at various conferences. He spoke at a "Tasmanian Reformed Conference" in 1960 on the subject of "The Church". On a second visit to Winnaleah in January 1961, he spoke on "The Unity Of The Church", and explained Infant Baptism. Allison Carins, who attended this meeting observed, "It was a real eye-opener to us. I suppose it was hearing of the Covenant - quite new to us. It headed us into a Presbyterian rather than a Baptist direction."

Mr. Viv Connors, as secretary of the Conference organizers, wrote a report on their behalf. In this report he gave expression of the thinking of the brethren at that time. He wrote:

"Owing to God's leading in bringing about circumstances which forced many of the Reformed conviction out of the dominant Churches, it was deemed necessary and proper that we meet together to worship God according to His Word and the doctrines of the historic Christian faith.

Our first meeting was on the 2nd July 1960, and it has been encouraging to see God at work over these eight months, both in our own midst and throughout the other centres.

Not being greatly concerned at numbers, we are concerned that every member of His body be thoroughly grounded in the Word of God and that each be ever conforming to the image of God, in knowledge, righteousness and holiness.

And so it is with great confidence that we face the New Year, believing that God is at work amongst His people, and that He will bring His Church out of the terrible error and confusion into which she has fallen. God has worked mightily in the past, and being the same God, will work mightily in this generation."

The "Conference" Christians, though dissenting from and objecting to the apostasy and liberalism of the mainline churches, and their objection to the leaven of Arminianism in much of the evangelical world, were concerned not to be sectarian in this revival of truth. From the beginning they sought to reach out to other reformed churches, and to have contact with them. This desire is expressed in an open letter of Mr. Morgan, of 19th of July 1960. He wrote: "Those who embrace the Reformed faith soon learn that a door to a vast store of exegetical and expository literature and learning is opened to them. They discover the reality of Romans 11:33, 'O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!' and find that it is greatly contrasted with the shallow Arminian, and Semi-Pelagian concept of God and His Word.

The realization that there are depths unfathomable, both of wisdom and knowledge of God must more and more bring our movement to consider the need of scholarship and learning. All lasting and well-founded Reformations and Revivals have been led by men of learning. It is here that great advantage will accrue to our movement by not turning it into a sectarian movement. The Reformed movement in Tasmania has reached such proportions that it is being closely watched by other Reformed Churches, who are ready to assist in any way possible. We already have the offer of assistance and fellowship of Professor Finlayson of the Free Church College, Edinburgh, during his visit to Australia next year. This we should regard as a privilege, for it has been said that Professor Finlayson is perhaps one of the greatest minds in all of Scotland.

However, it needs to be understood that the established Reformed Churches are not greatly interested in ministering within a sectarian movement, even though they may be Calvinistic. --- Furthermore we must understand that men within the established Reformed Church who possess a lively faith, and who would be able to greatly assist us, also, as true Calvinists, have a vision of an unrestricted working of the Holy Spirit of God in Reformation and Revival. The formation of a Baptist Reformed Church in Tasmania would place the movement largely on its own, and would lose the advantage of the offer of the scholarship, learning and assistance, which would otherwise be available to it.

In closing this letter, may I bring to you a verse of Scripture, Daniel 12:3, --- 'they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.' Herein is a gracious promise of an everlasting crown and reward to those who seek to turn the eyes of men to behold the perfect and all sufficient righteousness of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. May the Lord at this time grant us wisdom in all that we undertake in His name. May the organization ever seek to conform to, and all who compose it labour in, the will of our Lord who prayed, 'Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory.'"

Independent Baptists

Sadly, as time went on, some of the folk, who were sympathetic to the Baptist position, were not persuaded of the Biblical consistency of Covenant Theology and Presbyterian polity, and of a Reformed world and life view. At this time, the Rev. L. Lincolne felt unable to continue with the conference, and established a College (Geneva), and a congregation at Latrobe, Tasmania, based on the Reformed Baptist Confession.

Mr. Lincolne was previously principal of the World Evangelization Crusade (WEC) College in Launceston. (WEC was a College of a missionary society that had been founded by C.T. Studd). Quite a few students of this College became convinced of the Reformed faith after great battles within their own understanding and consciences. They debated and discussed with those who maintained Arminian type tenets the radical difference between a God-centred belief and a man-centred belief. It was obvious that the two could not be reconciled. This led to the division of the WEC College, and about 30 of the 50 students left because of their sympathy with the doctrines of grace - the Reformed faith. A number of these students eventually became members and office bearers in the EPC.

Presbyterian Convictions

Those of the Presbyterian persuasion continued the study and examination of the historic beliefs of the reformed faith. As they grew in knowledge they desired to make contact with other reformed denominations. They recognized that they needed to be a part of a visible organized reformed Church. They studied and communicated with various Reformed and Presbyterian denominations in Australia. After considering these Churches' profession, practice and history, they became convinced that basically the original Reformed Church of Scotland was the most consistent Biblically in its doctrines and practices.

Serious consideration was then given to joining a denomination that reflected that original position. One such denomination in Australia was the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, (PCEA), which was popularly known as "The Free Church". One of the officers of this Church, with whom there was discussion on joining, was the Rev. E. Lee.

Of the various Reformed Churches which existed in Australia of a British/Scottish background at this time, only three could be said to reflect in varying degrees the doctrine, practice and worship of the original Reformed Church of Scotland. They were the PCEA, The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, and the Reformed Presbyterian Church (of Ireland). Further information on these Churches was obtained, consideration given about becoming a part of them, and discussion with various office bearers held.

Discussions With Other Reformed Churches Of A Continental Background

The fellowship people recognized that God had also worked a great wonder at the time of the Reformation on the Continent of Europe as well as in Britain. They had studied and appreciated their Confessional Standards, and especially appreciated the Canons of Dort. In the Canons they could see the same issues with which they had had to wrestle. They were thankful to God for this Scriptural light on the issues raised in the Arminian/Reformed debate. The will and ability of man and the will and ability of God as spelt out by them was a great help to the people. Because there were churches in Australia that professed the historic reformed faith of the Continent, particularly that of the Netherlands they made contact with such churches. For example, they met with, and had discussions with a representative of the Reformed Churches of Australia. In November 1960 the Rev. D. Heenan, a Home Mission minister of the Reformed Churches, visited the fellowship centres in Tasmania. He was keen on the fellowship/conference people being integrated into an existing denomination. The Free Reformed Churches also offered union with this newly formed body of professing reformed people.

Both the Reformed Churches of Australia and the Free Reformed Churches were basically immigrant Churches from the Netherlands at that time. The denominations were established in Australia only after the Second World War. Union with them was not to be however, though it gave the fellowship folk a knowledge of and in different ways, an appreciation for, these Churches' history and Confessions.

Differences Of Conscience With Other Reformed Churches

There were cultural barriers between these Continental Churches and the fellowship people. These included matters such as smoking and the use of alcohol, and other aspects of life-style. Because many had just arrived from the Netherlands as part of the great wave of post war immigrants that came in the 1950's and 1960's from the Continent there was a language barrier too.

There were also doctrinal problems. For example, whilst there was some sympathy for the high view that these Reformed Churches had of their Covenant children, there were real problems with the commonly held view in the Reformed Churches of Australia of presumptive regeneration. This was Abraham Kuyper's view. It was also felt that these two Continental Reformed denominations had adopted a somewhat "Lutheran" approach to worship. That is, they permitted practices in the worship of the Church on the basis that God's Word did not forbid them. The fellowship people saw this as opposite to the historic Calvinistic and reformed understanding of the Bible, that only that for which we had a Biblical warrant could be brought into the worship of the Church. The Continental Churches for example, considered instrumental music in worship a thing indifferent. The fellowship people now saw it as contrary to Scripture, and the Reformed Confessions, even the Continental Confessions, (E.g. Heidelberg Catechism Question and Answer 96, and Belgic Confession Articles 7 and 25), and the original historical practice of the Reformed Churches on the Continent.

The Presbyterian Church Of Eastern Australia

After considerable help and encouragement from various office bearers of the PCEA the matter of joining them was contemplated. After some prayerful consideration and review of that Church's life and attitude to the reforming people, the fellowship's leaders did not feel able to proceed with an actual union with that denomination.

The PCEA on their part did not actively court and invite the fellowship to join them. The reason for this is somewhat difficult to precisely define. We can only try to point in the direction of the reasons. There was a perception on the part of some of the PCEA ministers that those who were to make up the EPC were like "new wine". They feared that this "new wine" would not go so well with the "old wine skins" of their denomination. It was thought an influx of highly motivated and zealous proponents for the Reformed faith could unsettle the PCEA denomination by not appreciating the particular ethos and history of the PCEA. The Rev. R. Ward, writing from a PCEA perspective for example, says: "Mr. Lee --- was --- cautious (about union with the PCEA), since he saw the zeal and enthusiasm of the (EPC) brethren as likely to be a disturbing factor in the PCEA." (See "Presbyterianism In Tasmania 1821-1977" page 55, and "The Bush Still Burns" page 392).

On the fellowship's part there was an appreciation for various ministers of the PCEA, and its history and witness. They never the less felt that many of the members of that denomination had grown up without any real appreciation of the grand soul-gripping truths of the reformed faith. In fact, they felt that many in the older Reformed denominations simply had a traditional faith. Those in the fellowship felt that, all too often, it seemed that they were speaking a somewhat different language of the faith with folk from these denominations. There was a definite difference of ethos between the fellowship and those denominations.

The Formation Of A New Denomination

Though there were these differences, the EPC really appreciated the Standards and history of the PCEA. They were grateful for the help given from various ministers of that denomination. Even in the matter of the formation of the EPC as a denomination, the leaders of the conference group that had come to a consistent Presbyterian and Westminster Confessional position acted upon the advice of PCEA ministers. They advised that the people formally petition the PCEA Presbytery based in Victoria, to ordain ministers and to constitute a separate Presbytery outside of the PCEA denomination.

So it was, that in April 1961, the Conference wrote to the PCEA, and addressed their letter to the "Synod" of that Church, seeking assistance in the formation of a Church of various congregations. It seems that the matter of assistance by the PCEA for the fledgling reformed movement was kept at a Southern PCEA Presbytery level. Mr. Lee especially was advising the conference brethren. The Revs. I. Graham and J. Harman also were involved.

For the Evangelical Presbyterian Church to be formally organized and constituted as a reformed Church would, among other things, require the ordination of several ministers.

Mr. M. Maxwell Bradshaw, Procurator of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, and a friend to the resurgence of

Reformed theology in that denomination and in Australia generally, assisted in the drawing up of a Constitution of the Church. Basically, the Constitution was the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, the Form of Presbyterian Church Government, and the Directory of Public Worship, as originally accepted by the Church of Scotland. The Church of Scotland in accepting them continued to maintain its earlier reformed confessions too, so this latter clause opened up an earlier Confessional heritage to the EPC. Further, the Constitution was to be the Constitution and Law of the Church of Scotland in the year 1843 "so far as applicable".

In August 1961, the Conference applied to the PCEA - via Mr. Lee, for three of its pastors to be regularly ordained. It was decided that because of the relative harmony of constitutions, several ministers of the PCEA would form themselves into a special Presbytery to ordain the EPC's first three ministers. These ministers could then constitute their own Presbytery and separate denomination. A meeting on the 12th August 1961, finalized arrangements, and also notified other Reformed Churches of their intention in a circularized declaration. From the beginning there was a desire to enjoy a true Biblical and Confessional reformed ecumenical relationship with other reformed churches. The people believed in the "catholicity" of the true church, and that it was not limited to the mere denomination. The Declaration of Intention reads as follows:

"On the 29th July 1961, the Pastors and Elders of our Reformed congregations met to finalize arrangements for the constitution of the 'Reformed Evangelical Church', and for the ordination of a Presbytery in Tasmania.

The Standards and Formularies of the Church shall be, The Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechism, the Form of Presbyterian Church Government, and the Directory of Public Worship as originally accepted by the Church of Scotland, which includes the original Calvinistic principle of things not commanded in Scripture, (either expressly, or by good and necessary consequence from its statements), being forbidden in worship.

As History has ever proved that unity in the Church is best maintained in the Unity of the Spirit and truth, and not necessarily in adopting the name of a visible organization of any older established denomination, - and believing that this unity in our ranks can be best maintained thus, we agreed to proceed to this position, which we believe to be the true scriptural one.

We have prayerfully considered, and do deeply appreciate the advice and assistance of mature Reformed brethren in the Faith concerning the principle of the ecumenicity of the Church, and believe that the way we have chosen is not inconsistent with this principle.

The ordination of our first members of Presbytery will be conducted by a (special) Presbytery from the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (Free Church).

It is our earnest desire to co-operate in the promulgation of the Reformed Faith in our land to the fullest possible extent with all who are militant for the Reformed Faith.

Praying that our generation shall see a Reformation that enthrones God, that establishes righteousness, unmask false religion, and strips sinners of vain confidence."

The document was signed by Charles L. Rodman, V. Connors, D.T. Carins, H. McNeilly, D.W. Cooper, A. G. Lefevre, Eric S. Turnbull, M. Logan, Peter Carins, M.R. Hingston, and T. Connors.

Various Reformed Churches were invited to send observers to the meeting to ordain ministers, and to constitute the EPC. For example, the Rev. W. R. McEwen, a friend of the Conference believers, and a minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Australia, was invited. He was unable to attend, and sent his apology. He also wrote in part: I have rejoiced at every report which I have received of the movement of God's Spirit in your island state and the way He has led you into the truth of His Holy Word and called you to stand for it. May He continue to lead and empower you in your faithful witness.

I believe that this fresh step will be fraught with momentous issues, and I pray that it may lead into greater blessing and wider service. No doubt it will be met with fresh opposition, and may mean misunderstanding and sacrifice. But you have already faced these before, and I am sure you will prove the Lord's grace sufficient again."

The three fellowships of Launceston, Penguin and Winnaleah, under supervision of acting elders, had drawn up letters or forms of call to Messrs. Charles Rodman, Eric Turnbull and Hugh McNeilly, to be their respective pastors. The three men were the first ministers of the EPC, and the three original congregations of the EPC were Launceston, Penguin and Winnaleah.

The Ordination Of The First Ministers Of The EPC

The historical scene was then set for the actual birth of the EPC. It took place on Thursday evening, the 28th. September, 1961, in "Chalmers Hall", Frederick Street, Launceston. This in many ways was most appropriate, for Chalmers Church was the original Free Church in Launceston. With a revival of the reformed faith, it was fitting that those Confessional Standards that the Free Church originally upheld, were once again, being established and advanced.

So it was that on the evening of the 28th. September, a congregation of about 200 met with hushed anticipation. In the climate of reverent and joyful thanks to Almighty God for His goodness, and for the wonder of His grace and the knowledge of His truth, the ordinations of Messrs. Rodman, Turnbull and McNeilly took place. The members of the special Presbytery who ordained these men, were Revs. E. Lee, I. Graham and J. Harman. The Rev. J. Harman's notes of the evening read:

"An ad hoc Presbytery of ministers of the PCEA, the Rev. I. L. Graham, Rev. J. A. Harman, and Rev. E. R.. Lee met in Chalmers Church Hall, Launceston. Mr. Viv Connors was appointed to make the announcement to the congregation gathered that the Presbytery was about to ordain Mr. C. Rodman, Mr. E. Turnbull, Mr. H. McNeilly as ministers, and called for objections against the life and doctrine of these men. No objections were lodged.

The Rev. E.R. Lee conducted the service and preached from Ephesians 4:11.

The Rev. I. J. Graham presided over and carried out the ordination. First, the statement was read, the questions asked and answered and the Formula signed, and then the three were solemnly set aside to the work of the ministry. The Rev. J. A. Harman addressed the new ministers from the opening verses of 2 Timothy 4, especially the words: 'make full proof of thy ministry.'"

The Constitution Of The New Church

The following evening, the 29th September 1961, the newly ordained ministers met and constituted themselves a Presbytery, formally adopting the Constitution previously prepared and agreed upon.

On the Lord's Day of the 1st of October, 1961, it was with thankfulness and joy in the Launceston, Penguin and Winnaleah congregations that their new ministers were inducted and their recently called elders ordained. The minister at Launceston was the Rev. C.L. Rodman, with elders V. Connors and D. Cooper. The minister at Penguin was the Rev. E. Turnbull, with elders M. Logan, T. Connors and M. Hingston. At Winnaleah, the minister was the Rev. H. McNeilly, with elders D.T. Carins, G. Lefevre and T.D. (Peter) Carins.

Establishment Of Other Early Congregations And Preaching Stations

TARANNA - In October 1961, a fellowship group from around the area of Taranna on the Tasman Peninsula, sought membership as a congregation of the Church. In November 1961 they were invited to join the Church after answering various questions. Their pastor, John Lyons, was accepted as a student for the ministry. Mr. Terry Kingston was the elder. The Rev. John Lyons served in this congregation for some years. This congregation continued the EPC witness in this area until it joined the Southern Presbyterian Church in 1986.

HOBART - After some time of discussion and consultation, on the 25th January, 1962, a fellowship based in Hobart formally applied to join the Church. Mr. E. Tomlin and Mr. Athol Liddall were elders. Mr. Raeburn Cameron-Smith applied in February 1962 to be received, and was accepted as a student for the ministry. After licensing by the Presbytery of the EPC, the Hobart congregation called Mr. Cameron-Smith to be their minister. He and this congregation seceded in 1986 to form the Southern Presbyterian Church.

ROCKHAMPTON - Contact with a group of believers in Rockhampton, Queensland, began with a visit by Mr. H. McNeilly of Winnaleah in May 1960. He preached several times in a Brethren Assembly on the doctrines of grace. Interested folk from various Baptist and Church of Christ churches attended these meetings. As a result, a number of people, including Thomas and Gladys Jones and their adult children, and Noel and Joan Greatbatch began to come to the knowledge of the Reformed Faith. From October to December 1961, the Presbytery of the new denomination released the Rev. E. Turnbull so he could conduct a three months teaching ministry in Rockhampton.

In November 1961 the Rockhampton families, with some others, expressed their desire to become a congregation of the new denomination. They requested that a student pastor of the Church, Mr. Philip Burley, be released to go and minister among them for a time. Eventually, in May 1962, Mr. and Mrs. Burley travelled to Rockhampton from Winnaleah, where they were living at the time. In February 1963, the fellowship group in Rockhampton was received as a congregation of the Church. Mr. N. Greatbatch was ordained as an elder. The Rev. Charles Rodman visited Queensland for this event

and ministered in Brisbane for a time as well. Mr. Burley continued his theological studies, assisting the Rockhampton congregation at the same time.

He completed his studies and was ordained as a minister of the gospel and inducted as the first pastor of the Rockhampton congregation on the 13th June 1967. Pastor Burley served the Rockhampton congregation until the end of 1978, when he accepted a call to become the minister of the Winnaleah congregation.

BRISBANE - In August 1962, Mr. G. Lincoln wrote to the Presbytery of the EPC in Tasmania, notifying them that there was a small group of believers in Brisbane Queensland, who were worshipping with the Reformed Churches of Australia in the suburb of Toowong. These believers were of the conviction that they would be more at home spiritually with the EPC, and would do all they could to establish an EPC congregation in Brisbane. Those in Brisbane who at this date were interested, were Garnet and Mavis Lincoln, Mrs. B. Burley and Deidre Donald. Soon, several individuals and families from Tasmania and elsewhere joined those already committed to the EPC in Brisbane. Among others, there were George and Verna Barton, Malcolm and Ann Walker, Bill and Hazel Hutcheon, and Peter and Denise Torlach and families.

After times of growth and decline and encouragement and discouragement, the fellowship was constituted a congregation of the EPC in 1972. The elders were Arthur Hurse, Murray Logan and Peter Torlach together with John West who was a student minister of the church. The Rev. P Burley was the interim Moderator. Merv Hurse was Deacon. The congregation's first minister was the Rev. Chris Coleborn who, after serving the congregation as a student pastor for several years, was called by the congregation, and was ordained and inducted on the 27th May 1978.

He served the congregation until 1995, when he accepted the call to engage in Church extension work, and the establishment of a new congregation in Cohuna, Victoria.

In February 1963, there were three ministers with congregations at Launceston, Penguin and Winnaleah. There were student ministers at Hobart, Taranna, and Rockhampton, with St. Marys and Brisbane as preaching stations.

Testing And Trials Of The New Church

Since the constitution of the EPC, and its growth out of a remarkable revival of truth, it has had various griefs and trials.

A controversy arose between the EPC and the PCEA. Various ministers, including the PCEA lecturers at their theological college, promoted a certain view of how we offer or present Christ and the gospel to unbelievers. The EPC were of a strongly held conviction, that by the PCEA allowing the doctrine of "the well-meant offer" such as advanced by Murray and Stonehouse's work, "The Free Offer of the Gospel", as well as "common grace," they were liable to modify the distinctives of the Reformed faith. They believed that it would eventually lead to a turning away from the consistency and strength of the Reformed faith.

It was not that the EPC did not believe that the gospel should be preached to all men. It did believe that, and did do that. The EPC believed in the "free offer of the gospel" to all. It did not believe, however, that in encouraging men and women to come to faith in Christ that we should preach and say such things to all men as "God loved and died for them". They did not believe that we could assure all, head for head, that Christ longed for their salvation as is taught and practised by those who hold to the "well meant offer" of the gospel. To hold such things, the EPC believed, was to compromise the distinctives of the reformed faith. It did not allow for the great truth of God's sovereignty in election and reprobation. It made God changeable, in that He loved all men in this life, yet in eternity withdrew His love and made them objects of His just hatred in hell. It made God to have unfulfilled desires within Himself that could never be satisfied. It struck, in EPC eyes, at the very nature and perfection of the unchangeable and all sufficient God and His perfect and complete work of salvation in Christ Jesus.

This controversy led to various on-going difficulties and disruption. In 1964 most of the Penguin congregation left the EPC and was received by the PCEA. At the same time a serious division in the Winnaleah congregation occurred. Later the Burnie congregation of the EPC replaced the Penguin congregation as the EPC's witness and work on the northwest coast of Tasmania.

The Winnaleah congregation suffered much spiritual distress and heartache during this time of controversy. A

considerable number of members, out of the convictions they held at the time, withdrew from the EPC. A number however, continued to maintain services, catechism classes, Bible studies and local school religious instruction. With only one elder remaining, the Presbytery arranged help by appointing Pastor Rodman and elders from the Launceston congregation to assist that congregation in its functioning. A student minister, Chris Coleborn helped in the care of the congregation, by supplying one-week each month from 1972 until he went to Brisbane in 1975. The congregation consolidated, with additional office-bearers being called, and the payment on the building and land being completed.

It is one of the evidences of God's grace and work in the midst of the EPC they believe, that it pleased the Lord, after fifteen years, to heal the division that took place in 1964. The Rev. P. Burley accepted a call to be the pastor of the congregation, and was inducted as its pastor on the 15th January, 1979. Pastor Burley is now the longest serving and senior minister in the EPC.

Establishment And Consolidation 1964-98

Following the disruption and division in 1964, the Church established its position on the Free Offer of the Gospel, and set about consolidating and building up the Church and its witness in the world.

The Rev. C. Rodman, who carried out a prolific correspondence with a great many individuals, Churches and organizations, both in Australia and overseas, achieved much of this. Mrs. Marge House, as secretary in the Launceston congregation, gave invaluable help until 1975. In that year she retired, and went to live on the North West Coast, where she became a member of the Burnie EPC congregation. This faithful servant was called to her Saviour's presence on 2nd April, 1998. Mr. Rodman travelled in several states and overseas making many contacts in the Reformed world.

Submissions

As part of the EPC's witness to the State and society around us, it made submissions to various branches of Government on such issues as Sabbath Day Observance, Gambling, Morals in Education and Victimless Crimes. Mr. Rodman also wrote a booklet, "Why Is Lawlessness Increasing?" which was widely distributed to hundreds of members of States and Federal Parliaments, Magistrates, School Principals and others in authority all over Australia, and also overseas. In these ways the Church sought to be a witness and salt in society.

Outreach In Australia And Overseas Christian Work

Over the years assistance has been given by the Church to missionary enterprises such as the Chinese Translation Society (formerly The Reformation Translation Fellowship), The Trinitarian Bible Society, The Presbyterian Church of Uganda and children's homes there through Help A Child Foundation, the Middle Eastern Reformed Fellowship and others.

Also over the years, apart from the above, help has been given by our congregations to missionary work in Africa, Irian Jaya, Vanuatu, and Europe. Deacons' Courts of the EPC have, either directly in Christ's name, or through other Christian organizations, given material relief to those suffering as the result of disasters or other special material needs, such as Vietnamese and other refugees in Australia. Donations of Christian literature have been made to various public libraries and overseas Churches and Christian organizations.

The Church has sponsored over the years, visits by our pastors to various cities and towns in Australia as well as in overseas countries, to promote and encourage the spread and promotion of the doctrines of grace. Pastor Rodman visited North America and Britain in 1974. Pastors Burley and Coleborn visited various conservative Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in the U.S.A. in 1990, where both spoke at an international conference of Reformed Churches. They visited the U.S.A. again in 1993 for a similar visit.

The EPC over the years has sought and maintained contact with a considerable number of other conservative Reformed and Presbyterian Churches all over the world, as well as in Australia. They believe in the "catholicity" of the true faith of Christ Jesus, and recognize true Churches of Christ throughout Australia and overseas, and seek to foster fellowship with them. For example, the Church maintains correspondence with various reformed churches and works within Australia and overseas. It has also hosted on several occasions a Reformed Conference in Victoria. Ministers and other officebearers and Christians from various professing reformed denominations have attended and spoken at this conference.

There have been at various times, "beach missions" for children, and witnessing by tract distribution in house and

hospital visitation. There has been protest and witness against anti-Christian activities, such as when tracts about the true message of Christ were distributed outside of the Theatre where the so-called rock opera, "Jesus Christ Superstar" was being staged.

Family and young people's camps and studies have been regularly held, not only to edify our own members, but also to invite and encourage non-believers to come under the sound of the gospel.

Tertiary students of the EPC have been involved in varsity fellowships, and EPC pastors have ministered to such groups.

From 1959 until 1975, the Winnaleah congregation, and supported by the Church from 1961, maintained a radio broadcast on 7SD (Scottsdale, Tasmania). A gospel message was sent out each Lord's Day morning, as a means of witness and outreach over much of northern Tasmania, and even into parts of Victoria. Until 1961 the programme was called "The Gospel in Message and Song", and until 1975 it was called "The Word of Truth." Increasing costs made it very difficult to continue the programme.

Christian Literature

Rockhampton congregation, with a gift of \$800.00 set up a bookshop (possibly the first Reformed Bookshop in Australia) in the 1960's. This bookshop distributed and sold many thousands of dollars of Reformed literature all over Australia and so helped in the spread of the knowledge of the Reformed faith. It catered for a very extensive clientele, far beyond the boundaries of the EPC denomination. This bookshop also helped establish bookshops in other EPC congregations to assist their outreach.

Church Magazine And Other Publications

A Church magazine was published by the denomination on a quarterly basis from 1972 to 1976. After several attempts to begin publication once again, a final effort of a committee of the Presbytery, and the new editor, Rev. Chris Connors, resulted in a magazine, The Evangelical Presbyterian, being published twice a year, and having a small but worldwide circulation.

The Church has also published various other booklets on a variety of subjects. Some have been reprints of earlier publications, such as G. Whitfield's, "The Method of Grace"; some have been theological and/or historical, dealing with our distinctives, such as particular grace and biblically regulated worship.

In 1998 a Website was established in which the EPC seek to witness to the fact that they exist and to promote and encourage the spread of the reformed faith - the faith they believe that is most Biblically consistent.

Precentors And The Singing Of The Psalms

Precentors of various congregations have met on various occasions to discuss the psalmody of the Church. Such matters as uniformity of the selection of Psalm tunes, how to encourage the learning of the Psalms for singing, and new tunes have been discussed.

Members of the various congregations have regularly met to practise the singing of the psalms, both new tunes and part-singing. Often the congregations meet to fellowship in simply singing the psalms as a means of grace together. The Launceston congregation produced a cassette tape of a selection of the Psalms, sung by a number from that congregation. The tape was very successful, being appreciated not only within the denomination, but elsewhere in Australia and overseas. The EPC that came from basically a non-Psalms singing background, has grown greatly in its understanding and ability to appreciate and sing the songs of Zion.

Ordination Of New Ministers

Six new ministers were ordained and inducted into congregations during the period 1964 to 1997. They were the Rev. R. Cameron-Smith on the 28th November 1964 into the Hobart congregation; the Rev. J. Lyons on the 8th May 1965 into the Taranna congregation; the Rev. P. Burley on the 13th June 1967 in Rockhampton; the Rev. A.I. Morgan on the 2nd of August 1975 to serve the Church as a professor in the theological training of students for the ministry, (Mr. Morgan was living in Launceston); the Rev. C. Coleborn on the 27th May 1978 into the Brisbane congregation and the Rev. R.A. Fisk on the 11th August 1978 into the Burnie congregation.

In December 1991 the Rev. Brian Dole and his congregation was received into the EPC.

This congregation was called the Covenant Presbyterian Church and was based in Penrith, (a western Sydney suburb). It had originally been a congregation of the PCEA.

In 1995, two new ministers were ordained, after being trained by the Presbytery and, under Presbytery's supervision, at the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the U.S.A. The Rev. Chris Connors was ordained and inducted into the Launceston congregation on the 24th March 1995, and the Rev. David Higgs was ordained and inducted into the Brisbane congregation on the 22nd April 1995.

Further Preaching Stations

During this period four new preaching stations were established. They were at Chinchilla, Cairns and Townsville in Queensland and Burnie in Tasmania. Sadly, the preaching station at St. Marys in Tasmania lapsed.

CHINCHILLA - In December 1971, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur and Jenelle Hurse withdrew from the Presbyterian Church of Australia over its serious departure from the Reformed faith. They became members of the Brisbane congregation in 1972.

Mr. Hurse was called as an elder to assist the work of the Brisbane congregation, even though he lived three hundred and fifty kilometers from Brisbane. He had been an experienced elder in the Presbyterian Church of Australia before he and his family had left that denomination.

Their home was established as a preaching station, and for many years they have faithfully served the cause of Christ and the Reformed faith through maintaining a regular preaching station in the Chinchilla district and also a Christian Book Shop in their home. They have distributed much literature in their district. They have further witnessed to the Lord and His sovereign grace by running bookstalls at local agricultural shows for many years.

The Chinchilla preaching station is under the care of the Brisbane Session.

TOWNSVILLE - In 1973 a preaching station was established in this northern city when David and Margaret Lowcock and Bevin and Jan Jones and their families separated from the pre-union Presbyterian Church because of its falling away from the historic Reformed faith. Previously, Mr. Lowcock was an elder in this Church. The preaching station was under the care of the Rockhampton Session. The witness of the EPC in Townsville ceased when these two families moved to other congregations of the Church.

CAIRNS - In the late 1970's a preaching station was established in the tropical north Queensland city of Cairns. Several families originally made up this congregation. They included Allan and Jessie Carswell and Gavin and Raewyn Roberts and their children. Several other families eventually joined. Though some families moved to other congregations of the EPC, the work continues there. Gavin and Raewyn Roberts continue to maintain Lord's Day services there and thus be a witness to the reformed faith in that northern city.

BURNIE - In April 1970 Burnie became a preaching station under the care of the Launceston Session. Student pastor Chris Coleborn assisted this work with a weekly visit once a month from 1972 to 1975. Rita and Rex Ling, John and Jess Driscoll, Nick and Ina Kleyn, Albert and Mary Bosveld and Aadrian and Dorothy Bosveld and their families eventually formed a congregation of the Church with Mr. John Driscoll as an elder. Mr. Tony Fisk was ordained and inducted into the congregation on the 11th August, 1978.

The Rev. R.A. Fisk came from South Africa, and having heard of our Church and its witness, visited Australia and our congregations before applying to be a minister of the Church. After ministering in Burnie, he ministered in Taranna and is now pastor of the Rockhampton EPC congregation.

After being without a minister for some years, and being unable to call its own officers, with ill health and members

moving away, the congregation was reduced to a Preaching Station of the Church, under the pastoral oversight of the Launceston congregation from January 1st 1996.

PENRITH - Contact was made with the Covenant Presbyterian Church (CPC) of Penrith in Sydney in 1981. The Rev. Brian Dole was invited to address EPC folk at various congregational camps in Rockhampton, Brisbane and Tasmania. Some EPC families and officebearers also worshipped with the CPC in Penrith when travelling through Sydney. Various members of the CPC also visited EPC congregations and worshipped with them. At such times there was unofficial and informal discussion about our denominations and their positions on various matters, as well as edifying fellowship.

Commencing in 1987, official discussion was entered into with regard to our relationship as Churches. In 1988 the matter of the union of the two denominations was also officially raised then for the first time. There were further meetings and prayerful discussion and the examination of all issues on which there may have been differences. A remarkable oneness of faith and practice was evident.

There was an EPC Presbyterial visitation to the CPC in Penrith to meet with the congregation, and a detailed report on the meetings between the EPC and CPC was sent to all Sessions of the EPC for their information. The Sessions were asked to indicate if they had any serious reservations regarding union with the CPC. Various matters and questions were raised by some Sessions. These were raised with the CPC. The Rev. B. Dole and his Session gave written explanations and answers to the Sessions on these matters to their satisfaction.

Finally, with the resolution of all matters of difference to the mutual satisfaction of both Churches, the union of the EPC and the CPC was effected in December 1991.

The CPC had been constituted out of a conservative, confessional congregation of the PCEA. Pastor Dole had trained as a student of the PCEA in the Free Church of Scotland's Theological Hall in Edinburgh, Scotland in the 1970's. Upon his return he became the minister of the PCEA congregation in western Sydney. After a time difficulties arose in Pastor Dole's congregation when an elder would not uphold the worship and doctrines of the Presbyterian faith. The majority of the Session, after discussion with the elder, opposed his actions, and he was stood down. When the higher courts of the PCEA would not support the Session's stand Pastor Dole resigned from the ministry of the PCEA and, in sympathy, also many of the congregation. A new congregation, called the Covenant Presbyterian Church, seeking to be faithful to the doctrine, practice and discipline of the historic Scottish Reformed Church, was then formed.

COHUNA - The work of the EPC in Cohuna and the state of Victoria commenced with Noel and Christine Taylor, together with their young family, coming to the knowledge of the doctrines of grace. Noel came from a Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist background. Christine (nee Jongsma) came from a Dutch Reformed background. Whilst attending the Church where Christine and her family worshiped, Noel came in contact with the doctrines of grace. He was persuaded of the Biblical consistency of the Reformed faith after Bible study and prayer and the reading of such books as Arthur Pink's *Sovereignty of God*, L. Boettner's *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* and J.I. Packer's *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*.

Having read of the EPC through the magazine, *The Standard Bearer*, they made contact with the EPC in Brisbane. There was correspondence between them and the pastor of the Brisbane congregation on the reformed faith and membership of a Reformed Church. After several visits by the family to Brisbane, Noel and Christine and their then five young children were welcomed into membership. They received taped sermons from Brisbane, and each Lord's Day conducted two worship services in their home. Officers of the Church made regular pastoral visits to their home, and almost each year they travelled to either Brisbane or another congregation of the EPC for fellowship.

In 1994/5 the EPC, after much prayerful investigation of several centres for Church extension work, decided on Cohuna as such a work. The work was officially launched at the beginning of 1996 when the Rev. Chris Coleborn was commissioned as the home missionary for that work. He had moved to live in the Cohuna district in December 1995. The work would not have proceeded had not another family, John and Marjan De Jong, at considerable cost and effort, willingly made their home in Cohuna for the express purpose of helping to build this congregation. In 1997 Joe and Gail Henderson and family, also sacrificing various material and social benefits, moved to Cohuna to be a part of that Church planting work. Since then several local people and a family have become regular worshippers of this mission congregation.

Collegiate Of Theology

Shortly after the establishment of the EPC, a Theological College called "The John Knox Theological College", was set up in association with the PCEA. Three EPC students, Messrs. P. Burley, R. Cameron-Smith, & J. Lyons, were attending for six months in the year. As a result of the theological controversy that arose between the PCEA and the EPC over the matter of particular grace and the manner in which the offer of the gospel is made, the college ceased to exist.

The Presbytery of the EPC established a Collegiate for the training of students for the ministry in 1972. The first student, Mr. Chris Coleborn, having commenced theological studies at the Reformed Theological College in Geelong, completed his studies under this body. Some tutors from other Reformed Churches, such as the Rev. W. R. McEwen of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, assisted in this training. Practical work was also set, with students assisting in the work of various congregations. Mr. John West, Mr. Peter Morgan and Mr. John Coles were for a time students also.

Because of short-term difficulties in the EPC fully training its own ministers, it has sought the assistance of the Protestant Reformed Churches in training several of its prospective pastors. Mr. Mark Shand and his family are undergoing theological training over three years in the U.S.A. at present.

Church Property and Buildings

The congregations of the EPC further consolidated by purchasing places of worship. For example, in June, 1962, Hobart congregation appealed for financial assistance in the purchase of a Church property. In August 1962, the Winnaleah congregation was making arrangements to purchase a Church building for removal from Hobart to Winnaleah. Launceston, Taranna, Rockhampton and Burnie also were able to purchase property and places of worship to assist in the work of the ministry. Some of these purchases were possible through interest-free or very low interest loans from members of the different congregations and many hours of voluntary labour.

Further Times Of Testing

To the sorrow of the EPC, in 1986 Hobart and Taranna congregations and part of Launceston congregation seceded from the Church, together with some ministers. They were not happy to continue under the Practice of the EPC among other matters. A larger and separate history of this sad schism has been published.

Some families withdrew from the EPC in 1990. They did so over non-founded accusations of doctrinal error made against various officers of the Church by a supplying minister, the Rev G. Bancroft from America.

In spite of the trials the EPC has undergone and in spite of its limitations and shortcomings, God by His sovereign and gracious Spirit has been pleased to use, we believe, the great truths of His Word to raise it up as a denomination of His universal true Church. We further believe that by those truths extolling Him and His grace, as expressed in the Westminster Confessional Standards and the Government of the Church, He will preserve it as an ongoing true Church of Christ in the earth.

Looking To The Future

The EPC continues on with congregations in Burnie, Launceston, and Winnaleah in Tasmania, and in Brisbane and Rockhampton, and with preaching stations in Cairns and Chinchilla in Queensland, Penrith (Sydney) congregation in N.S.W. and the Cohuna Mission Congregation in Victoria. The EPC has a full time student for the ministry who, Lord willing, will be able to serve our Church by the year 2000.

Christian Education And Schools

The EPC is committed to the Christian education of its Covenant youth, and to that end seeks the establishment of Christian schools and schooling.

Launceston

Christian education was, over many years, strongly supported in Launceston, but it was not until 1981, that a small school, Presbyterian Covenant School, was established. The underneath hall of the Launceston Church building was used for its classes. The first teacher was Mrs. Leoni Duff, ably assisted by Mrs. Marg Miller, a former infant teacher.

Mrs. Duff was succeeded by Mr. John Steel. Though the school faced difficulties in staffing and finances, it was so important to the congregation, that through these and other difficulties, they faithfully sacrificed and maintained the school for 12 years. The congregation's children generally now attend other local Christian Schools, or are home schooled.

Winnaleah

After several years preparation, including re-building the former Presbyterian Church building at Herrick, (land and building being donated by the late Elder Tom Peters), the Herrick Presbyterian Covenant School was opened in February, 1991. It commenced with 4 students. The teacher Mr. Alex Carins, (also an elder in the congregation) has continued from that time as the teacher.

The Lord has greatly blessed this work for the education of the Covenant children of the Winnaleah congregation. It has given them a view of life from a Christian reformed perspective. Over the years, though there have been hardships at times, the Lord has wonderfully provided for all the needs. Volunteers carry out extra-curricular activities and help in monitoring lessons. As at 1999, there were 18 full-time students, in grades 1-11, with 2 part-time. A further three are expected to start later this year. Recently the school building has been extended with the completion of a new classroom.

The history of the present school building shows in a heart-warming way, the Covenant faithfulness of the Lord over the generations. The original weatherboard section was originally built as a Presbyterian Church's place of worship. It was built at Springfield (near Scottsdale) in 1880. It was used for the worship of God until the 1940's. Remarkably, during these earlier years the pioneering Beattie grandparents and family of Mr. Peter Carins, an elder of the Winnaleah EPC, worshipped in this building. In addition, Mrs. Peter Carins' great-grandfather, the Rev. Thomas Cunningham, who faithfully subscribed to the reformed faith as set out in the Westminster Confessional Standards, was the minister who led the worship and preached the Word in this little building. (Mr. & Mrs. Peter Carins' son Alex, is the teacher of the school, and their grandchildren attend the school as students).

Further, the little township of Herrick, near Winnaleah, where the old Springfield Church building now is, is where another elder of the Winnaleah EPC ancestors worshipped. In the 1930's Mr. Tom Peters and his mother Mrs. Mary Peters and grandmother Mrs. Elizabeth Jones, were faithful members of the Presbyterian Church, and worshipped at services held in a hall in this little town. In 1952 the old Springfield Church building was moved to Herrick to the present site on Tom Peter's land, becoming the Presbyterian Church's place of worship. With the decline of the Presbyterian Church through liberal theology, the Church lost support from the believers in the area, and the Church building fell into disuse.

Mr. Peters eventually purchased it for use as a barn. In 1990 he donated the land and building to be used for a Christian school - the present Christian School of the Winnaleah Congregation. Mr. Tom Peter's son David is an elder in the Winnaleah EPC, and his children also attend the school. David and his brother Andrew also serve on the School Board. So it is that over five and six generations this little building has seen believers and their Covenant children worship the Lord.

Though we acknowledge that there is no virtue in a building, yet in this instance this humble little building, in God's Providence, speaks to those families and that congregation, of a faith of all ages, and an unchangeable Saviour.

Other Congregations

Other congregations of the EPC have formed Associations within their membership that are working towards the establishment of Christian Schools and the Christian education of their covenant children. Most families in the Church either send their children to local Christian Schools, or home school their children. It is the prayer of the EPC that some of its members will consider serving the Lord in the Church by training to be teachers. Often the establishment of a school cannot proceed because of lack of a teacher.

Additional Care Of The Covenant Children

The Church from its earliest days has strongly promoted and taught the importance of family worship in the home. This is generally a well-established practice in all families of the Church. Usually a psalm is sung, perhaps a catechism learnt or revised, prayer offered and the Scriptures read and where necessary commented upon and applied to the daily lives and

needs of the family.

Catechism classes for all ages are held weekly in all the congregations.

Most congregations hold youth meetings, under the supervision of the Session, on a regular basis for Bible teaching and fellowship. Congregational and inter-congregational camps for the young people of the denomination, under the supervision of the Presbytery, are held every year or so. Family camps are held in several of the congregations each year as well.

There are special publications for the youth of the Church. After a humble start of a monthly newsletter, the Church now produces The Children's Courier on a quarterly basis. Another magazine, The Burning Bush is also produced quarterly for the older youth.

The Communion Of The Saints

With such small beginnings numerically, the EPC members have enjoyed close fellowship with those in other congregations, even though separated by great distances. Whenever possible individuals and families have visited one another in the congregations. Originally it was only between the congregations in Queensland and Tasmania, but now includes our Penrith congregation in N.S.W. and Cohuna in Victoria.

Most of the congregations publish a regular congregational newsletter, and there is a regular exchange of these between all the congregations, in addition to a flow of fellowship maintained by correspondence and telephone calls. In this way the members, even of the smallest and most isolated congregation are able to keep in touch with the rest of this body of Christ, and thus are able to share and care for one another as members of that body.

In the wider sphere, the EPC, through its Presbytery Contact Committee, corresponds with various other reformed denominations and individuals, both within Australia and overseas. The Church sends magazines and other Church publications to many people throughout the world. With the advent of the Internet, there is not only an exchange of correspondence by e-mail, but the Church also has a Website.

Second And Third Generations

The EPC has been in existence as a denomination for nearly forty years now, and a strongly committed young and new generation is arising, to follow in the footsteps of the original members. It is the prayer of the older members that the succeeding generations by God's grace will not forget their heritage. They pray that the Lord would enable them to truly enter into, and wholeheartedly embrace, the heritage that they had to obtain and learn in such a difficult and hard, but amazing way.

Faithful By God's Grace

The EPC members believe the Lord, in His providence, raised them up, as He does His true Church everywhere. While they are small and struggling in various ways, they rest in the Lord and His grace for the present and future. They are quietly but sincerely seeking to be a ground and pillar of truth and to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. They seek to lift up the Lord Jesus as God's supreme revelation to us, and as the only hope for mankind. They are aware their distinctives may mean, in the spiritual and social climate of the day, that they remain a small denomination, but are content, if that is the Lord's will, to accept that smallness. Yet they seek to be large on vision and depth, and to be salt and light and leaven to all around them. They seek to encourage and to be encouraged by all who love the Lord in sincerity and truth, particularly those who profess the historic Reformed faith.