

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

RATIONALE

The Ordinary Visitation process is an important means through which Presbyteries may:

- Promote fruitful gospel ministry that glorifies God and impacts his world;
- Encourage pastoral leaders who sometimes serve in difficult environments; and
- Provide needed guidance to Sessions, Committees of Management, congregations and their ministries.

Ministry and Mission has developed a new Ordinary Visitation process to cultivate healthy leadership teams, healthy congregations, and a healthy denomination. The Presbytery members who conduct these visitations are servants of the gospel who seek God's best for every congregation that they visit and for all of the leaders of those congregations. They do this to promote God's gospel mission through his church to his world.

This new Visitation Schedule, along with all the Visitation Schedule Documents (6) designed to support it, have been approved by the Ministry and Mission Committee to be implemented within PCNSW congregations.

VISITATION COMMITTEES

Presbyteries are responsible for conducting Ordinary Visitations through Visitation Committees. The Ordinary Visitation process will operate with the greatest integrity when those who evaluate the ministries of fellow shepherds (ministers and elders) are respected within their Presbytery as active and faithful shepherds in their own right. For this reason, Visitation Committees should normally be comprised of eligible ministers and elders who are serving actively on the Session of a pastoral charge within the relevant Presbytery.

Each Presbytery will be responsible for ensuring that Visitation Committees are comprised of members who satisfy the following eligibility criteria:

- Demonstrate the character and competencies of a biblical elder, in accordance with 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9;
- Have cultivated or contributed to healthy PCNSW leadership teams and healthy PCNSW congregations in their own context over the last three years;
- Are regarded by their Presbytery as mature and competent to provide advice; and
- Have completed the training required by the Ministry and Mission Committee in order to be qualified to participate in the conduct of visitations.

It is recommended that Presbyteries appoint eligible members for terms of three years with potential for reappointment for additional three year terms by vote of Presbytery if they continue to satisfy the eligibility criteria established above. It is further recommended that, as far as possible, members appointed by Presbyteries to serve on a Visitation Committee be released from other duties, such as Interim Moderatorships, so they can give their full attention to Ordinary Visitations.

Presbytery visitations should be conducted by Visitation Committees of no less than three eligible members. Every Presbytery should endeavour to maintain a pool of eligible members large enough to constitute *at least* two independent Visitation Committees. These Visitation Committees will be responsible for conducting Ordinary Visitations across the Presbytery, and if required, Special Visitations (Special Visitations should be conducted by a different Visitation Committee if this follows an Ordinary Visitation). This means that every Presbytery should aim to set aside a pool of *at least* six members for the

particular work of Ordinary and Special Visitations. As a rough guide, each Presbytery should aim to set aside a pool of eligible members as large as half the total number of pastoral charges and home mission stations in that Presbytery.

Visitation Committees may form and disband around each Ordinary Visitation, drawing on the pool of eligible members available to serve at that time. Alternatively, they may form and then continue to serve as a functioning Committee through multiple Ordinary Visitations.

Visitation Committees should normally be comprised of a diverse mix of eligible members. This includes a mix of ministers and elders, representation across different PCNSW churches, and complementary skills.

Visitation Committees should not include members of the same congregation/s they are visiting as part of the Ordinary Visitation process.

Each Visitation Committee should be led by a Visitation Convener who will provide overall leadership for a scheduled Ordinary Visitation. The Visitation Convener will be appointed by the Presbytery and will normally be the spokesperson for the Committee, unless a delegate is appointed. Visitation Conveners may appoint an Acting Visitation Convener for a stated period or a particular function. The role of Visitation Convener may also rotate among eligible members over time. For the purpose of this Explanatory Statement, the term "Visitation Convener" shall include any person properly appointed to act in that capacity.

Under the new Ordinary Visitation process (see further the next section), each member of a Visitation Committee will visit the relevant congregation/s once at the time of the site-visit. The Visitation Convener however, will normally visit the congregation/s three times:

- To oversee the conduct of the Survey;
- To conduct the site-visit with the rest of the Visitation Committee; and
- To read the pastoral letter distributed to the congregation/s at the end of the Ordinary Visitation

Where a Presbytery has difficulty recruiting and appointing a sufficiently large pool of eligible members (for example, because the Presbytery has few pastoral charges and/or eligible members), it may appoint to a Visitation Committee other ministers or elders who are active members of a relevant Session but not members of the Presbytery. The Presbytery could also appoint active members of a relevant Session from other PCNSW Presbyteries. In such cases, these active ministers or elders must comply with all the prior-stated eligibility criteria and be appointed according to the prior process (including a formal vote by the Presbytery).

NEW VISITATION PROCESS¹

Prior to the commencement of the visitation process, the Visitation Convener will order a **current** Presbytery Visitation Schedule that includes the latest versions of all Visitation Schedule Documents from the Ministry and Mission Department.

The visitation process begins formally when the Visitation Convener:

¹ A one-page summary of the new Ordinary Visitation process is found in the Appendix.

- Arranges with the Session:
 - The Sunday on which attenders of the congregation/s will complete the Presbytery Visitation Survey (using the PCNSW Church Health Survey)², usually giving approximately 4 weeks notice to allow the Session to inform the congregation/s about the purpose and conduct of the visitation and prepare them for the visitation.
 - The Sunday on which the visitation site-visit will be conducted. This Sunday should be scheduled approximately four months after the Presbytery Visitation Survey is conducted.
- Emails to the Session Visitation Schedule Documents 1 to 6. That is:
 - This Explanatory Statement
 - A current Presbytery Visitation Survey (supplied by Ministry and Mission);
 - A sample report for the Presbytery Visitation Survey;
 - The Self-Assessment Report (for completion by Session);
 - The Report of Ordinary Visitation (for completion by the Visitation Committee); and
 - The Progress Report (for regular completion by the Moderator)

4 months before the site-visit, on the Sunday when the Presbytery Visitation Survey is conducted, the:

- Visitation Convener will visit each congregation in the pastoral charge or home mission station subject to the Ordinary Visitation and be introduced to each congregation by a representative of Session. The Visitation Convener will explain to the congregation the nature and purpose of the Ordinary Visitation and the process that will be followed.
- Visitation Convener will oversee the completion of the Presbytery Visitation Survey by attenders, usually immediately after each congregation's worship service. The Visitation Convener will be responsible for printing, distributing, supervising, collecting and delivering the Presbytery Visitation Surveys to the Superintendent, Ministry and Mission Committee, Presbyterian Church Offices, PO Box 2196, Strawberry Hills, NSW 2012 within one week of the conduct of the Survey.
- Session will provide to the Visitation Convener for examination and, where relevant, attestation:
 - Completed and current Forms F and S (or their electronic equivalent);
 - Updated copies of the rolls of communicants and adherents;
 - The marriage register and baptismal roll;
 - The minute books of the Session and Committee of Management; and
 - Any other records requested by the Visitation Convener.

3 months before the site-visit, the:

- Superintendent, Ministry and Mission, will deliver to Session and the Visitation Convener a copy of the results for the Presbytery Visitation Survey.
- Visitation Convener will:
 - Outline the expectations for the Session's Self-Assessment Report; and
 - Identify, by name, the people appointed by the Presbytery to the Visitation Committee who will conduct the site-visit and prepare the Report of Ordinary Visitation for the Presbytery.

² To complete a PCNSW Church Health Survey outside of the Ordinary Visitation Process, and at no charge to your local church, contact Lara Rutledge at lrutledge@pcnsw.org.au or call 0403 597 272.

1 month before the site-visit:

- Session will submit to the Visitation Convener its Self-Assessment Report, comprising its reflections on (i) key results from the Presbytery Visitation Survey and (ii) other relevant documents submitted to the Visitation Convener. This Report should also document the actions the Moderator/Minister, the Session (and other pastoral staff), and the Committee of Management will take to promote a healthy leadership team, healthy congregation, and fruitful gospel ministry that glorifies God and impacts His world. These actions should be framed as S.M.A.R.T.³ goals, and be staggered over the following periods of time: 3 months, 6 months, 12 months, and then 2 years from the date when the Report of the Ordinary Visitation is expected to be received by the Presbytery.
- Session will organise meeting times during the site-visit between members of the Visitation Committee and the following groups:
 - Approximately 2 hours with the Moderator/Minister and his wife⁴;
 - Approximately 2 hours with the Session (and other pastoral staff - usually without the Moderator);
 - Approximately 1 hour with the Committee of Management (usually without the Moderator); and
 - Approximately 1 hour with other representative leaders and ordinary members of the wider congregation/s in sufficient number to allow the Visitation Committee to engage with leaders of all of the congregation's ministries.
 - If time pressures make it difficult to schedule all these meetings on the same day, the Visitation Convener may arrange for the meeting with the Moderator/Minister and his wife to be scheduled at another convenient time that same weekend.
- The Visitation Convener will distribute the Self-Assessment Report and other key information to the Visitation Committee.
- The Visitation Committee will develop a plan for the site-visit. It is recommended that the Visitation Committee develop at least 3-5 open-ended discussion questions for each of the above groups to invite relevant individuals to share their perceptions in relation to key issues the Visitation Committee believes it should investigate further. In its meetings with the Moderator/Minister and his wife, the Session (and other pastoral staff), the Committee of Management and the congregation, the Visitation Committee should allow members of each group the opportunity to raise further issues they believe warrant attention by the Committee. The purpose of the site-visit, with respect to the wider ordinary visitation process, is to:
 - Observe in person a normal worship service and the relational dynamics between and among the Moderator/Minister, the Session (and other pastoral staff), the Committee of Management, and the congregation/s;
 - Develop a positive relationship with pastoral leaders and ordinary members of the congregation and encourage them by providing another opportunity (beyond the Survey and Self-Assessment Report) for them to share their views about, and their recommendations for, their church;

³ SMART goals are Specific rather than general, Measurable rather than vague, Achievable given current resources, Relevant and consistent with other goals and contextual issues, and Time-bound so that required outcomes are matched with deadlines.

⁴ In situations where the pastoral charge might be vacant and also where the Moderator/Minister is not appointed by the Ministry and Mission Committee to pastor the congregation of which he is the Moderator/Minister, the Moderator's/Minister's wife need not be expected to participate, however opportunity should be provided to her should she wish to have some input into the visitation process.

- Explore hypotheses developed by the Visitation Committee in relation to emerging strengths and opportunities for development within the leadership teams (Moderator/Minister, Session (and other pastoral staff) and Committee of Management) and wider congregation/s;
- Evaluate the appropriateness of the recommendations/goals provided by the Session in their Self-Assessment Report; and
- Develop and refine formal recommendations/goals for the Report of Ordinary Visitation.

During the site-visit (usually on a Sunday), members of the Visitation Committee will:

- Be introduced to the congregation during Sunday services.
- Meet with the Moderator/Minister and his wife, the Session (and other pastoral staff - usually without the Moderator), the Committee of Management (usually without the Moderator), and other representative leaders and ordinary members of the congregation.
- Inspect all physical assets owned by the church during daylight, accompanied by a member of the Committee of Management.

1 month after the site-visit:

- The Visitation Convener will draft, and the Visitation Committee will complete, the Report of Ordinary Visitation.
- The Visitation Convener will also draft a pastoral letter for distribution to the wider congregation/s.
- The Visitation Convener will submit a copy of the draft Report of Ordinary Visitation and draft pastoral letter to the Moderator/Minister, the Session (and other pastoral staff), and the Committee of Management for their consideration and report back to the Visitation Convener within two weeks of the date of writing so that any errors in fact (but not analysis) might be corrected.
- If the Report of Ordinary Visitation is objected to by the Moderator/Minister, the Session (and other pastoral staff), or the Committee of Management, a face-to-face meeting between the Moderator/Minister and Visitation Convener should be arranged to promote clear communication and mutual understanding. If substantial objections still remain after this face-to-face meeting, a Special Visitation conducted by a different Visitation Committee should be considered by the Presbytery immediately after this Ordinary Visitation.

If matters are discovered during the course of an Ordinary Visitation that seem to require closer inspection, a Special Visitation should be considered immediately after the Ordinary Visitation.

If a Special Visitation is to be conducted following an Ordinary Visitation, the Visitation Committee should be, as far as possible, comprised of eligible members who were not involved in the prior Ordinary Visitation. Other specialist personnel may also be invited by the Presbytery to serve as expert observers in this process, such as staff from (or people recommended by) Ministry and Mission, or other 'neutral' pastoral leaders from neighbouring Presbyteries. All information collected during the Ordinary Visitation process should be made available to the Special Visitation Committee.

2 months after the site-visit:

- After considering feedback from the Moderator/Minister, Session (and other pastoral staff) and/or Committee of Management, the Visitation Convener will

submit a copy of the final Report of Ordinary Visitation and pastoral letter to the Presbytery with recommendations.

- The Presbytery Clerk will then send the Report together with the resulting resolutions of the Presbytery (including the pastoral letter) to the Moderator/Minister, the Session (and other pastoral staff) and the Superintendent of Ministry and Mission.
- Session will present to the congregation/s at least a summary of the results from the Presbytery Visitation Survey and other relevant required documents, and at least a summary of the required actions that the Moderator/Minister, Session (and other pastoral staff) and Committee of Management will be taking over the next 3 months, 6 months, 12 months and 2 years.
- On the same occasion as the Session presents the above, the Visitation Convener, or his delegate, will read the pastoral letter distributed to attenders in the congregation/s on behalf of the Presbytery.

After the final report and resultant resolutions are delivered to the Session:

- The Moderator/Minister will report to the Visitation Convener using the Ordinary Visitation Progress Report all progress made on specified actions as they become due (i.e. within 3 months, 6 months, 12 months and two years from the date of the Report), along with an updated timetable for the completion of all outstanding specified recommendations/actions.
- It is recommended that Presbytery Clerks email the Ordinary Visitation Progress Report to all members every quarter, with the expectation that relevant members will return a compliant Progress Report to their designated Visitation Convener within a two-week deadline. Moderators/Ministers will record all required actions from their Report of Ordinary Visitation and Presbytery resolutions the first time they complete the Progress Report, but every quarter thereafter they will merely update their actual or estimated completion dates, and provide relevant comments to account for outstanding action/s.
- If the Moderator/Minister, the Session (and other pastoral staff) and/or the Committee of Management fail to comply with any required actions specified in the Report of Ordinary Visitation or instruction from the Presbytery, Presbytery should consider their response in light of the following non-exhaustive range of options (ranked in order of severity):
 - The Moderator/Minister is asked to explain their situation personally to the Visitation Convener
 - The Moderator/Minister is asked to explain their situation publicly to the whole Presbytery
 - The Presbytery appoints assessor elders to the Session
 - The Presbytery conducts a Special Visitation to examine the operation of the Moderator/Minister, Session (and other pastoral staff) and/or the Committee of Management, having regard to the provisions of The Code II 1.13, 1.15 and 1.42, and relevant procedural advice from the Clerk of Assembly (as required)
 - The Moderator, the Session and/or the Committee of Management risk being the subject of disciplinary action

COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

Comments on, and questions relating to, this process can be directed to Bruce Meller (bmeller@pcnsw.org.au) or Jonathan Pratt (Jpratt@Christcollege.edu.au).

APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF THE NEW ORDINARY VISITATION PROCESS

Timeframe	Responsibility	Key Tasks
Start of process	Visitation Convener	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Order a current Presbytery Visitation Schedule and Survey Arrange a date for the Survey in approximately 4 weeks Arrange a date for the site-visit approximately 4 months after the Survey Email all Visitation Schedule Documents (6) to the Session
4 months before the site-visit	Visitation Convener	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visit each congregation and be introduced by a representative from the Session Explain the nature, purpose and process for the Ordinary Visitation to each congregation Oversee the completion of the Survey
	Session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide all required visitation documents to the Visitation Convener
3 months before the site-visit	Superintendent of M&M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver Survey results to the Session and Visitation Convener
	Visitation Convener	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outline expectations for the Self-Assessment Report Identify the other members of the Visitation Committee
1 month before the site-visit	Session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submit the completed Self-Assessment Report Organise required group meetings for the site-visit
	Visitation Convener	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distribute the Self-Assessment Report and other key documents among the Visitation Committee
	Visitation Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the key issues to investigate further during the site-visit Develop a plan for the site-visit, including discussion questions for each group
Site-visit	Visitation Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visit and be introduced to each congregation Meet with all relevant groups Inspect all physical assets with a member of the Committee of Management
1 month after the site-visit	Visitation Convener	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft the Report of Ordinary Visitation with the Visitation Committee Draft a pastoral letter for the congregation/s Submit a copy of the draft Report of Ordinary Visitation and the draft pastoral letter to the Moderator/Minister, the Session (and other pastoral staff), and the Committee for Management for their consideration
2 months after the site-visit	Visitation Convener	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submit the final Report of Ordinary Visitation and pastoral letter to the Presbytery with recommendations Visit each congregation and read the pastoral letter distributed to all attenders on behalf of the Presbytery
	Presbytery Clerk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Send the Report of Ordinary Visitation, pastoral letter and Presbytery resolutions to the Moderator/Minister, the Session (and other pastoral staff), and the Superintendent of Ministry and Mission
	Session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present a summary of the Survey results and other relevant detail to the congregation/s Present a summary of the actions to be taken over the next 2 years to the congregation/s
After the Session receives the Report and resolutions	Moderator/Minister	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report to the Visitation Convener on progress against specified actions as they become due, and an updated timetable for the completion of all outstanding actions