



Baptist Churches  
of NSW & ACT

# Church Constitution Template

(minimalist version)

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## Introduction

This document was produced by offering guidelines for the preparation of Constitutions for churches moving towards Church Formation and affiliation with the Association of Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT. (It will also prove helpful to Churches reviewing the fit of their existing Constitution with their existing ministries and future plans).

In presenting these suggestions it will be noted that a number of assumptions are made, including:

- (a) A wide diversity of expressions of the faith of the Churches of the Baptist faith and order is to be found within the Association of Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT. (Therefore in several areas covered below a range of alternative options is presented);
- (b) Churches seeking affiliation with the Association of Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT must accept the provisions of the Baptist Union of NSW Incorporation Act 1919 (NSW). It follows that
  - i) Church government must be by the congregation;
  - ii) The church must adhere to the Statement of Beliefs set out in the Act of Incorporation and expanded by the 2003 Baptist Union of NSW Assembly.
- (c) The autonomy of the local Church in matters concerning its life and ministry;
- (d) The recognition that each Church is part of a wider Fellowship of Baptist Churches, including:
  - i) Opportunities of mutual help, encouragement and co-operation in the work of the Gospel, locally and worldwide by giving as per the Church Partnership Support Guidelines.
  - ii) The privilege of having leadership trained and equipped for beneficial ministry among Churches;
  - iii) Accountability to one another for our work in the Gospel for the glory of Christ Jesus our Lord;
  - iv) Responsibility to participate in the corporate ministries of the Association of Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT through prayer, financial support and encouragement.
- (e) Acceptance of historic Baptist principles for faith and conduct such as:

The Lordship of Christ, the supremacy of Scripture, the liberty of believers before God and ("a" to "d" above).

# SUGGESTED CONSTITUTION

## 1. NAME

The name of the Church shall be the ..... Baptist Church.

## 2. DOCTRINAL POSITION OF THIS CHURCH

This Church shall hold to the following evangelical doctrines set out in the Baptist Union of NSW Incorporation Act, 1919 (NSW) and amplified by the Statement of Beliefs affirmed at the 2003 Baptist Union of NSW Assembly:

- The nature and unity of the Godhead
- The deity and humanity of Christ
- The Holy Spirit
- The divine inspiration of the Scriptures
- The sinfulness of man
- Christ's atonement for the sin of man
- The work of the Holy Spirit in salvation
- The Church
- The baptism of believers only, and by immersion
- The communion
- The return of the Lord Jesus Christ
- The resurrection of the dead
- Rewards and punishments in a future state

## 3. GOVERNMENT

- The Church shall be affiliated with the Association of Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT
- The Church shall be governed in line with the principle of the autonomy of the local church and congregational government.
- The Church recognises and sustains the obligations of mutual counsel and co-operation which are common among Baptist Churches. Therefore the Church will be interdependent rather than independent.

## 4. OBJECTIVE

The Church adopts as its objective the desire to glorify God through:

- The inspiration and maintenance of active spiritual growth among its congregation by the regular assembling for public worship and the administration of the ordinances.
- The proclamation of the truths of the Bible by all means so that persons experience salvation.
- Teaching, training and discipling all who come to faith in the Lord Jesus so that they grow together in love, are loyal to each other and grow to maturity in Christ under the guidance of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

- Proclaiming the sole Lordship of Christ Jesus in the lives of the members of the congregation and seeking to fulfil His desires in the life of the community, nation and wider world. To assist those who are in need.

## **5. MEMBERSHIP**

### **5A. Eligibility for Membership** (*Select ONE of the following*)

- (a) Members shall be persons who give evidence of a sincere profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who have been baptised as believers by immersion and agree to hold to the doctrines set forth in this Constitution under the heading "Doctrinal Position of this Church".

OR

- (b) Members shall be persons who give evidence of a sincere profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who have been baptised as believers and agree to hold to the doctrines set forth in this Constitution under the heading "Doctrinal Position of this Church".

OR

- (c) Members shall be persons who give evidence of a sincere profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and agree to hold to the doctrines set forth in this Constitution under the heading "Doctrinal Position of this Church".

OR

- (d) Members shall be persons who give evidence of a sincere profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who agree to hold to the doctrines set forth in this Constitution under the heading "Doctrinal Position of this Church" except possibly for the doctrine of the baptism of believers only by immersion. Should a member not believe in the doctrine of the baptism of believers only by immersion then they must agree to this Church holding to this doctrine. Further, a member who does not personally believe in the doctrine of the "baptism of believers only, and by immersion" shall be restricted in the following three respects:

- (i) Voting in relation to the call or removal of a Pastor of this Church;
- (ii) Voting in relation to a property transaction by this Church;
- (iii) Being a delegate of this Church to an Assembly of the Association of Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT.

Note: 1. Individual Churches may decide to impose other restrictions on members who do not believe in "the baptism of believers only, and by immersion". These restrictions might include the holding of certain positions in the Church such as Church Secretary, Church Treasurer, Sunday School Superintendent, Deacon and/or Elder.

2. Churches wishing to allow people who do not hold to the Doctrine of the Baptism of Believers only by immersion to be Church Secretary, Church Treasurer, Deacons, Elders or Management Committee members will need to ensure that these positions do not involve any decision-making relating to property.

## **5B. Admission to Membership**

Applicants for membership shall apply to the Pastor or Church Secretary/Church Leadership. Applicants for membership shall be visited to discuss their testimony to faith in Jesus Christ, membership responsibilities, the Church Constitution and its various ministries. A report shall be presented to the Church following the visitation. Applicants may be admitted to membership upon majority vote at a properly constituted Church meeting.

Where the applicant for membership has been a member of another Baptist Church, letters of transfer and/or commendation shall be sought and shall be taken into account by the Church meeting when determining the application for membership at a properly constituted Church meeting.

Note: 1. It is recommended that all applicants for membership be visited as this gives opportunity for the strengthening of fellowship and the building of relationships.

## **5C. Responsibilities of Members**

- (a) To endeavour at all times, by God's grace, to remain true to their commitment to Christ.
- (b) To join regularly in the worship of the Church.
- (c) To lead a life worthy of Christ in love, humility and peace, endeavouring to build each other up.
- (d) To study the Scriptures.
- (e) To contribute regularly and wholeheartedly to the financial support of the Church.
- (f) To seek opportunity to use their gifts in the ministry of the Church.
- (g) To pray regularly for the people and ministry of the Church.

## **5D. Membership Roll**

A Members' Roll and an Absent Members' Roll shall be kept and reviewed annually.

## **5E. Removal from Membership.**

Members who for a period of six months fail to participate in the Worship of the Church without satisfactory explanation or fail to honour other responsibilities of membership shall receive special attention.

Where the failure to participate in the Worship of the Church relates to some reason other than removal from the district or where the member in question fails to honour other responsibilities of membership, every effort shall be made to restore such members to worship and fellowship (Matt. 18:15-17). Where these efforts fail, a recommendation may be brought to the Church that such members names be removed from the roll.

No member's name shall be transferred or removed from either the Members' Roll except by their request or the decision of a three-fourth's majority of the members present and voting at a properly constituted Church meeting.

## **5F. Offence and Dispute**

- (a) Where a member becomes an offence to the Church by reason of immoral or un-christian conduct, the Church will make every effort, in the spirit of love and meekness, to restore such a member to fellowship (Matt. 18:15 - 17). Where such efforts fail the Church may terminate or suspend for a specified time, his or her membership. Termination or suspension of membership shall be only on the decision of three-fourths majority of members present and voting at a properly constituted Church meeting.
- (b) In the event of a dispute arising either between the members, the Pastor(s) and the members, or the Church and the Association of Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT, such dispute may, after every effort has been made to resolve it within the Church or through the services of Ministry Support and Development may seek outside mediation
- (c) Matters of offence or dispute between members shall not be brought before the Church unless the parties have first complied with the direction of Matt. 18:15-17.

## **6. CHURCH OFFICERS**

Pastors, Church Secretary, Church Treasurer, Deacons and/or Elders, and/or Management Committee members may be appointed as the officers of the Church. Such officers shall comprise the diaconate/Church Leadership Team of the Church which shall attend to the affairs of the Church, within the framework of the Church's determined policy from time to time.

### **6A. Pastor(s)**

The Pastor(s) shall be a person whose credentials are acceptable to the Association of Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT and holds the doctrines set forth in this Constitution under the heading: "Doctrinal Position of this Church".

Pastors will be appointed upon a three-fourths majority or removed upon a simple majority vote of the members present and voting at a meeting of which notice has been given on the two Sundays preceding such meeting, the purpose of such meeting having been specified.

All *terms and conditions* of a call shall be conveyed to a Pastor in writing, having previously been clarified between both parties, together with full particulars of the Church and its development.

Acceptance shall be made in writing to the Church indicating acceptance of terms of call.

The tenure of office of a Pastor may be terminated by two months' notice in writing by either the Church or the Pastor.

When calling a Pastor a representative of the Church Leadership shall contact Ministry Support & Development Team of the Association of Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT to determine the recommended protocol for the calling of a pastor.

## **6B. Church Secretary / Public Officer**

A Public officer or Church Secretary should be elected from the church membership by the Church at the Annual Church Meeting.

The Church Secretary shall ensure that adequate records of all Church, Diaconate and Committee meetings are kept, conduct correspondence for the Church and generally deal with the business of the Church.

By means of an annual report and otherwise, he/she will ensure an adequate flow of information from the various Committees to the Church members.

The Church Secretary shall keep an up-to-date Members' Roll of the Church which shall be available for members to scrutinise.

## **6C. Church Treasurer**

A Church Treasurer should be elected from the church membership by the Church at the Annual Church Meeting.

The Church Treasurer shall receive all moneys for the Church and make such payments as may be directed. He/she shall keep a record of all financial transactions, keeping the Church informed through regular reporting.

A Treasurer's Financial Statement shall be presented to the Annual Church meeting covering the income and expenditure for the past year. Such statement shall be audited.

## **6D. Elders**

The Church may appoint Elders from the membership of the Church, who shall share with the Pastor(s) in the pastoral ministry of the Church.

Elders shall be responsible to the Church in co-operation with the Pastor(s) and shall:

- (a) Assist in shepherding those who are part of or associated with the Church, willingly and ably encouraging and building up such people and being an example to the Church in Christlike living;
- (b) Visit such people mentioned in "(a)";
- (c) Participate in the preaching and teaching ministry of the Church when they are recognised as having these gifts and are invited to do so by the Pastor(s).

The biblical material, especially 1 Timothy 3: 2 - 7, Titus 1:7 - 9 and 1 Peter 5: 1 - 4, shall assist the Church in appointing Elders. Only persons of known maturity, spirituality and gifts appropriate to the office shall be appointed upon three-fourths majority vote at the Annual Church Meeting and upon the unanimous nomination in writing of the Pastor(s) and existing Elder(s) or the Diaconate. Such nominees shall be over the age of 21 years and have been in membership in the Church for at least six months.

The term of office shall be one (or two or three) year(s) with eligibility for re-appointment.

Elders, while meeting separately, may from time to time meet with the Diaconate for mutual benefit.

## **6E. Deacons**

Members of the Church, who are over the age of 18 years and have been in membership for at least six months may be appointed to the office of Deacon by the church at the Annual Church Meeting.

The number of Deacons/ Church Leadership Team, in addition to the Church Secretary and Church Treasurer, to be appointed shall be determined prior to the Annual Meeting.

The Diaconate shall meet monthly and at other times as required. The Senior Pastor may be the chairman or a chairman may be appointed from among the Deacons.

"The quorum for Diaconate meetings shall be not less than ...% of elected members of the Diaconate".

The Deacons, as far as shall be in their power, shall attend and sustain all meetings connected with the Church, shall assist in visiting the sick, shall maintain discipline in the Church and shall be empowered to transact the routine business of the Church.

Note: Some Churches provide that: "All Deacons shall be elected for 12 months and shall be eligible for re-election. Other Churches provide that: "Each year, half the number of Deacons decided upon by the Church shall be elected for a term of two years. Those retiring from office after two years shall be eligible for re-election".

## **6F. Management Committee**

The Annual Church Meeting may elect a Management Committee including the Church Secretary and Church Treasurer to assist in the ministry and routine business of the Church.

## **7. CHURCH MEETINGS AND PROCEDURES**

### **7A. Meetings**

The Church shall meet at least twice yearly.

"The quorum for all Church Meetings shall be .....% of the Church membership

Extraordinary meetings may be convened by the Pastor(s), or upon requisition signed by 10% of the Church membership or a majority of the Diaconate/Church Leadership.

An Extraordinary Meeting may be called for a special purpose and only consider matters of which written notice has been given.

Notice of all Church Meetings including Extraordinary Meetings shall be given on at least the two Sundays at services prior to the meeting.

An Annual Church Meeting shall be called each year to receive reports and conduct elections as herein prescribed, such meeting to be within two months of the end of the Church Financial year.

The Church Meeting shall be a meeting of those persons on the Members' Roll. Church meetings may allow non-members to attend and participate in all matters except voting.



## **7B. Procedure**

All questions affecting the management and general interests of the Church shall normally be submitted to the Diaconate/Church Leadership before presentation to the Church.

The vote of the Church shall be taken ordinarily on the voices or by a show of hands, but all voting for the election of officers will be by ballot or as determined by the meeting. The Chairman may only exercise one vote.

## **8. CHURCH ORGANISATIONS**

The (senior) Pastor may, at his discretion, *preside* at all meetings of the Church, Diaconate and Church organisation.

*All organisations* associated with the Church shall formulate and present, for approval to the Diaconate, guidelines governing their operations.

The *leader* of Church organisations shall be elected by the Church at the Annual Church Meeting, upon nomination from the respective organisations, provided that any Church member may submit a nomination. A closing date for nominations should be set.

*All organisations* shall submit to the Diaconate the names of all appointees to their various offices other than those elected at the Annual Church meeting. The Diaconate shall then submit a report to a Church meeting that shall have the right to discuss and confirm appointments. (Some Churches have found it helpful to have a Co-Ordinating Council.)

A *Church Co-Ordinating Council* representative of the Church organisations and Committees may be appointed and shall meet as required. The object of this council is to ensure that all activities of the Church and its organisations function in harmony and with maximum efficiency for the life of the Church. The Church meeting shall determine annually the number of representatives each organisation shall have on the Council.

The Church meeting may appoint groups for specific functions to assist in the general operation of the Church's ministry. Such groups shall report to the Church in co-operation with the Co-ordinating Council.

## **9. SUNDRY**

### **9A. Ordinances**

#### (a) Baptism

The Pastor may baptise any believer upon application at his/her discretion, or alternatively a member of the pastoral team, Diaconate, Eldership or member of the Church may baptise any believer upon approval of the Pastoral Team.

#### (b) The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper shall be observed regularly. All believers in the Lord Jesus Christ shall be invited to take part in the Supper. Church members absent from the Lord's Table for six consecutive months shall be visited.

## **9B. The Trustees**

The Trustees of all Church properties shall be the Baptist Churches of NSW Property Trust. All decisions regarding such properties must be done in accordance to the requirements of the Trust.

## **9C. Property**

Church buildings and properties shall not be used or occupied by people or organisations for any purpose except where previous consent has been obtained from the Church Secretary, who may give such consent in accordance with the decisions and guidelines laid down by the Church.

## **9D. Insurance**

Insurance shall be effected on all Church buildings and property in accordance with the requirements of the Association of Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT.

## **9E. Auditors**

Auditors shall be appointed at the Annual Church meeting and shall audit the financial records of the Church for presentation at the Annual Church meeting (including all organisations).

## **9F. Application of Church Assets and Income**

The assets and income of the church shall be applied solely in the furtherance of its charitable purpose and the advancement of religion and no portion shall be distributed directly or indirectly to the Members except as bona fide reimbursement of expenses incurred on behalf of the church.

## **9G. Church Dissolution**

In the event of the church being dissolved, the amount that remains after such dissolution and the satisfaction of all debts and liabilities shall: a) in the case of property held in trust pursuant to the Baptist Churches of NSW Property Trust Act 1984, be dealt with in accordance with that Act and in particular Section 29 which said trusts provide that no portion shall be distributed directly or indirectly to the members of the Church: b) in all other cases be transferred to the Association of Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT or to any other organisation with similar purposes and which has rules prohibiting the distribution of its assets and income to its members and which is exempt from income tax.

## **10. ALTERATIONS TO CONSTITUTION**

No alteration shall be made to the Constitution except by a three-fourths' majority of members present and eligible to vote at a meeting convened for the purpose.

"The quorum for such a meeting shall be .. % of the membership"

Any proposed change to the Constitution shall be given in writing as a Notice of Motion and shall be distributed to all members not less than one month before the date of such meeting.

The Association of Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT shall be notified of any changes to this Constitution by the Church Secretary within 14 days of any decision being made by the Church.