



Baptist Churches
of NSW & ACT

Church Constitution Template

Prepared by:

Association of Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT

ABN 24 941 624 663

www.nswactbaptists.org.au

Last Updated April 2019

Introduction

This document was produced by offering guidelines for the preparation of Constitutions for Fellowships 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 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 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 Denomination 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 (ie Decision-making)

- The Church shall be affiliated with the Association of Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT accepting its responsibility to support and share ministries undertaken by the Denomination.
- Recognising the headship of Jesus Christ and the leadership of the Holy Spirit, the Church shall be governed in line with the fundamental Baptist principle of the autonomy of the local church and congregational government. That is, the decision-making of this Church shall be vested in the body of believers who compose its membership.
- Notwithstanding this principle of autonomy, 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 as well as independent.

4. OBJECTIVE

The Church adopts as its objective (which it believes to be in harmony with the purpose of Christ's Church as declared in the New Testament) 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 through evangelistic and other missionary enterprise. To assist those who are in need in the belief that social action and evangelism are mutually our response to the Gospel.

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 NW & 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. Applicants for membership shall be visited by two members appointed by the Diaconate or the Church 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. In some instances letters of transfer and/or commendation may be ambiguous, even negative, and in these cases visitation allows for a first hand assessment of the faith and practice of applicants.
2. Most Church Constitutions provide for the Pastor to baptise believers at their own discretion. It is strongly recommended that Pastors and Churches consider baptism and Church Membership as a single step and applicants for baptism be encouraged to consider membership *at the same time*. Adequate teaching should be given. Some Churches receive persons baptised into membership in the one service.
3. It is important that new Christians receive adequate nurture and are given opportunity to go on to maturity in Christ.

5C. Responsibilities of Members

- (a) To endeavour at all times, by God's grace, to remain true to their commitment to Christ as expressed in their baptism.
- (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 through encouragement, counsel and comfort.
- (d) To study the Scriptures in private and in groups as the Lord gives opportunity.
- (e) To express their gratitude to God, and their responsibilities as His stewards by contributing regularly and wholeheartedly to the financial support of the Church and the wider work of the Denomination.
- (f) To seek opportunity to use their gifts in the ministry of the Church.
- (g) To pray regularly in private and where possible in fellowship for the people and ministry of the Church and the family of Churches.

5D. Membership Roll

A Members' Roll and an Absent Members' Roll shall be kept by the Church Secretary.

5E. Removal from Membership

The Diaconate, Eldership or other appropriate body will prayerfully review the Members Roll at least every two years.

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 removal from the District in which the Church is situated, then such members shall be transferred to an Absent Members Roll. 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 member's names be removed from the roll (or transferred to an Absent Members Roll).

No member's name shall be transferred or removed from either the Members' Roll or the Absent 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. Transfer of Membership

Any member in good standing may request that a letter of commendation be sent to another Baptist Church he or she wishes to join. The Deacons may process the request reporting their action to the next Church meeting for confirmation.

5G. 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, their 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, seek outside mediation.
- (b) 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.

Or

This church will actively pursue and maintain a culture of peace.

We acknowledge that there are times in the life of every group (and church) when people disagree with each other and some level of conflict arises.

In seeking to be fully committed disciples of Jesus Christ, the members of the church agree to undertake the process outlined in the churches Peace Making Policy to bring about forgiveness, peace and restoration with each other in times when conflict or disagreement arises.

A copy of the Churches Peace Making Policy can be found in Appendix B

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 of the Church which shall attend to the affairs of the Church, within the framework of the Church's determined Governance Policy from time to time.

Note:

It is increasingly recognised that appointment of Church officers in the New Testament varied from place to place in response to the setting and needs of each Church. Therefore a variety of options is presented here. Each Church may select the number and type of office which it believes best suits its particular situation.

A clear Governance Policy should be developed along with a clear Position Description for each Leadership and Governance role.

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".

Where more than one Pastor is appointed the Pastors shall comprise the Pastoral Team in which one shall be the Senior Pastor. (The Pastor or Senior Pastor shall normally be ex-officio President of all organisations, although this responsibility may be delegated to another member of the team or member of the Diaconate.) 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.

Note: Churches may include a quorum provision such as: "The quorum for a meeting to call or remove a Pastor shall be ...%.)

When calling a Pastor -

- (a) Pastorate Committee appointed by the Church shall call for nominations. Members of the congregation may make recommendations for discussion within the Committee by submitting a name, together with reasons supporting the recommendation, in writing to the Committee.
- (b) The Committee may advise Ministry Support & Development of the vacancy and seek advice and assistance from the appropriate denominational officer.
- (c) Should more than one name come before the Committee, discussion will continue until agreement is reached regarding the approach to one person.
- (d) The Committee shall communicate privately with this nominee and/or with the appropriate Denominational officer, to ascertain their willingness to allow their name to be placed before the Church.
- (e) Should this nominee be willing, the name shall be submitted to the Church. Only one name shall be before the Church at any one time.
- (f) In the event of an adverse vote, or a call or approach not being accepted, the above procedure shall be repeated until successful.

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. (Churches should note that the terms of the call will generally be as recommended by the Baptist Union of NSW and should be extended without stating any length of tenure.)

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.

6B. Church Secretary

A Church Secretary should be elected by the Church at the Annual Church Meeting. The Church Secretary will be a member of the Diaconate by virtue of office. Eligibility requirements and mode of election as for deacons will apply in relation to the Church Secretary.

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, they 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 and Absent Members' Roll of the Church which shall be available for members to scrutinise.

Unsuccessful nominees for Secretary may, if they consent, be included in the ballot for Deacons.

6C. Church Treasurer

A Church Treasurer should be elected by the Church at the Annual Church Meeting. The Church Treasurer will be a member of the Diaconate by virtue of office. Eligibility requirements and mode of election as for Deacons will apply in relation to the Treasurer.

The Church Treasurer shall receive all moneys for the Church and make such payments as may be directed. They 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.

Unsuccessful nominees for Treasurer may, if they consent, be included in the ballot for deacons.

6D. Elders

(Please Note: Some Churches make no provision for Elders in their Constitution)

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, in addition to the Church Secretary and Church Treasurer, to be appointed shall be determined at the members' meeting prior to the Annual Meeting. Nominees shall give evidence of spiritual maturity and fulfil the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3: 8 -13.

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.

Note: Churches may choose to have a quorum provision such as: "the quorum for Diaconate meetings shall be not less than ...% of elected members of the Diaconate".

Nominations for the office of Deacon shall be invited from the members two Sundays prior to the Annual Church Meeting. All such nominations should be in writing, signed by the nominator and nominee and in the hands of the Church Secretary not later than the Sunday preceding the Annual Meeting. Vacancies during the year may be filled in similar manner, after two Sundays' notice of such election has been given. The names obtaining the highest number of votes shall be deemed elected.

Note: Some Church constitutions provide: "Where the number of nominations does not exceed the number of vacancies, then each nominee must obtain at least ...% of the formal vote in order to be elected."

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

The "meeting" is a Church meeting. The expression "Business meeting" detracts from the essential nature of the meeting. This is not meant to put a wall between matters which must be attended to, but to emphasise the spiritual nature of the meeting.

7A. Meetings

The Church shall meet quarterly.

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. 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 which will close on 30 June each year.

When there is no (senior) Pastor, or in their absence, an Elder or one of the Diaconate or a member of the Pastoral Team a Church member shall be elected to preside. Alternatively, for special reasons in consultation with Ministry Support and Development, an outside chairman may be appointed. Such a chairman shall be a member in good standing in a Church affiliated with the Association of Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT. The Church Meeting shall be a meeting of those persons on the Members' Roll and the Absent Members' Roll.

Note: 1. Non-Church members may be invited to be present at and to take part in the whole or any part of a Church Meeting, without right to vote.

2. Some churches emphasise the 'family' nature of the meeting.

3. Some Church Constitutions have a quorum provision: "The quorum for all Church Meetings shall be 25% of the Church membership, (or as determined by each Annual Church Meeting), recorded on the Members' Roll at the end of the last financial year. If a quorum is not present within 30 minutes of the appointed starting time of the meeting, the meeting shall stand adjourned usually to the same day, time and place in the next week. Notice of the adjourned meeting will be given at the intervening services. Such meeting will be competent to deal with the matters adjourned notwithstanding the absence of a quorum."

It should be noted that members under 18 years of age may not vote on matters relating to property transactions.

7B. Procedure

All questions affecting the management and general interests of the Church shall normally be submitted to the Diaconate 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 mentioned herein 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 their 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 their 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.

(c) 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.

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. The Ministry

The ministry of the Church shall be supported and expenses met by voluntary contributions. Cheques shall be signed on behalf of the Church by two of the Diaconate, one of whom shall normally be the Church Treasurer.

9F. 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).

9G. 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.

9H. 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.

Note: Some Church constitutions provide: "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 to the Diaconate and shall be distributed by the Secretary 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.