

As Baptist Churches in NSW, What Does it Mean to be ‘Affiliated’?

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Affiliate – Dictionary Definitions

Cambridge Dictionary:

Verb - ‘to cause a group to become part of or form a close relationship with another, usually larger, group, or organisation’.

Noun - ‘an organisation that is (officially) connected with or controlled by another, usually larger, organisation’.

For you and your church which aspects of these definitions best describe the relationship between the local Baptist Church and the Association? ‘part of’ or ‘close relationship’; ‘connected with’ or ‘controlled by’. Or are there other words that better describe the relationship between a local Baptist Church and the NSW & ACT Baptist Association?

What does Scripture say about an association of churches?

Scripture, especially the New Testament, has a lot to say about the church, mainly its local expression (Matt 18:15-17; Acts 6:1-7, 11:22, 14:27, 15:12, 22-23, 30-31, 1Cor 5:4, 7-12, 16; 2 Cor 2:6) but also its universal expression (Eph 1:22-23, 3:10, 21, 4:4, 5:23, 24, 25, 27, 32; 1 Cor 10:32, 11:22, 12:28; Col 1:18, 24). Erickson offers this definition of the church: ‘the whole body of those who through Christ’s death have been savingly reconciled to God and have received new life. It includes all such persons, whether in heaven or on earth. While it is universal in nature, it finds expression in local groupings of believers which display the same qualities as does the body of Christ as a whole’. (Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1983), 1034.

Is there a pattern of ‘association’ among local churches commanded in Scripture? Episcopalians (hierarchical of bishops that rule) and Presbyterians (elected elders meeting in hierarchy of governing assemblies that determine doctrine and behaviours) say ‘yes’, Baptists and Congregationalists say ‘no’.

While Baptists agree there is no command for a normative form of church governance during the period of the New Testament there is nevertheless¹, evidence of interchurch co-operation, encouragement, support, and advice.

For a detailed yet readable exploration of a theology of the church see Millard Erikson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2013), Part 11. For discussion focused more on various models of church governance see Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton

¹ Daniel L. Akin, “The Single-Elder-Led Church. The Bible’s Witness to a Congregational/Single-Elder-Led Polity”, in *Perspectives on Church Government. Five Views of Church Polity*, eds Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 31.

Norman (eds), *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman, 2004) and Steven B. Cowan ed., *Who Runs the Church? 4 Views on Church Government*, Counterpoint Series, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2004), Graeme Chatfield (ed), *Leadership and Baptist Church Governance*, (Macquarie Park, New South Wales: Morling Press, 2005)

Congregationalism

Key principles: Christ is the Head of the Church, His body. He has delegated His authority to the Church universal and the same authority to each gathered local church. The Church universal and local consists of people described as a 'a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's possession' (1 Peter 2:9). The Church is composed of priests with unrestricted access to God the Father through the intercession of the Holy Spirit and the mediatory work of Jesus Christ. Consequently, no person or institution may interpose between the Church and God. This leads Baptists to assert autonomy and self-government of every local church from all other authorities.

Nevertheless, while Baptists have formed associations, they maintain that affiliation with an association is a voluntary matter and the representatives of the church define the conditions / terms of the association.

Why did individual Baptist Congregations join (affiliate) in 'association' at various times?

England, Scotland, American Colonies

Seventeenth Century through late Eighteenth Century

Congregations associated with other congregations that agreed to a theologically based confession of faith in order that they could:

- Corporately defend themselves from the accusations of heresy (magisterial denominations) and/or treason (the state institution linked to a magisterial denomination).
- Encourage (Particular Baptists) / Require (General Baptists) one another to be faithful to their understanding of the Scriptures and behaviour expected of members of the churches.
- Provide financial assistance to pastors and churches where possible, by the end of the 18th century also overseas mission.

(Australia / New South Wales)

Nineteenth Century to mid Twentieth Century

(slogan: to do better together what we cannot do alone)

Congregations associated with other congregations based on a set of agreed purposes:

- Defending and promoting through preaching, mission, and publication a set of broadly evangelical beliefs where Baptism of believers was seen as a critical aspect of Baptist identity.
- Promoting systematic training and accreditation of Baptist pastors to protect the reputation of Baptists in the community
- By Mid-20th Century - to ensure churches complied with government regulations concerning registration of marriages and Property Trusts.

Corporately financing:

- theological education, mission (at home and overseas) and publications.
- By Mid-20th Century adding retired minister's support, aged care, aide, speaking to issues of justice and ethics.
- Engaging governments to speak into policy debates, and support churches with the increasing complexity of compliance (government and non-government)

Late Twentieth Century to the Present

Later 20th Century

Within the broader association, smaller sub-groups associated around more explicitly defined theological statements (e.g. London Confession of 1689) or experiences (Charismatic / Pentecostal groups) or specific/ particular theological issues (e.g. inerrancy, justice, view of the second coming) while remaining in the association.

Present

Taken from the Association Website and Constitution (2017).

Congregations 'voluntarily serving together with a common purpose (objects), values, vision and goal'.

The Purpose (Objects) and Values of the association- (to affiliate with the association implies a local congregation voluntarily agrees with these purposes and values) are copied from the current Constitution:

5. OBJECTS The Association exists to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ in word, deed and sign, through interdependent partnerships by:

5.1 promoting fellowship and cooperation among its members, affiliated churches and affiliated groups

5.2 facilitating the provision of resources for healthy churches, pastors and other church leaders

5.3 establishing and maintaining places of worship for effective ministry and mission

5.4 educating, training and accrediting Baptist ministers

5.5 fostering collaborative ministries, projects and missional activities in NSW, the ACT and globally

5.6 articulating a public voice on behalf of the Baptist movement in NSW, the ACT and globally, and

5.7 encouraging the public worship of God in accordance with the foundational beliefs.²

The Values

6. VALUES

6.1 Core values

The core values of the Association include a common life that is:

(a) Christ centred (i) enjoying a dynamic relationship with Jesus (ii) relying on the Bible as foundational to shaping our understanding of Christ, our faith and the world (iii) being led and empowered by the Spirit of Christ to live a life of worship (iv) believing God is able to do more than we ask or imagine.

(b) Mission shaped (i) committed to the announcement and demonstration of the universal reign of God through Christ (ii) motivated by love for God and others (iii) seeing people, communities and societies transformed (iv) biasing our resources toward mission, both locally and globally.

(c) Relationally committed (i) serving each other and working together, honouring the varied expressions of our faith and practice and our cultural diversity (ii) actively promoting healthy unity through mutual collaboration, transparency and accountability (iii) prioritising authentic relationships over programs and structures (iv) honouring marriage as an institution created by God as the foundation for a lifelong faithful union of a man and a woman (v) actively working to establish and maintain just relationships and systems in our churches, communities and world.

(d) People empowering (i) nurturing a disciple making culture that encourages, shapes and releases every person to glorify God in all of their life (ii) investing strategically in the identification, development and empowerment of leaders (iii) respecting our heritage whilst championing further innovation.

(e) Partnership oriented (i) recognising and celebrating God at work both within and beyond our movement (ii) partnering with like-minded bodies in the mission of God both locally and globally (iii) evidenced by mutual respect, healthy dialogue, and where appropriate resource sharing and the development of common goals.

² Section 4 of the Constitution Foundational Beliefs include both the Basic doctrines set out in the Incorporation Act 1919 and the Statement of beliefs adopted by the Assembly in 1979.

6.2 Operational values

The operational values of the Association include:

(a) Good governance which - (i) reflects our core values (ii) encourages empowerment and accountability of decision makers at appropriate levels (iii) fosters a culture of transparency in its processes and reporting, and (iv) minimises bureaucracy and permits decisions to be made in a timely manner.

(b) Godly conduct in meetings, including a preference for: (i) decision making by consensus (ii) personal conduct when speaking or delivering a report or statement characterised by respect and dignity, and (iii) avoiding unnecessary repetition, unbecoming language and any breach of agreed procedures.

(c) Effective conflict resolution, noting that: (i) ministering together in community may occasionally give rise to conflict; the Bible commands Christians to make every effort to live at peace and to resolve disputes in private or within the Christian community (ii) conflict impacts upon the Association and its witness for Christ (iii) biblically based dispute resolution procedures aim to bring glory to God, allow us to grow to be more like Christ, and assist us to resolve the dispute and achieve reconciliation.

The Vision

By working together our movement of churches inspires greater accountability of ministry leaders, harnesses a greater potential to impact the world around us and provides a more professional and influential response to key issues that affect Baptist churches and our community.

This combined expression also allows for support and development services to be accessed by all member churches, church leaders and attendees. Our belief is that we can have a greater positive impact on the world around us when we partner together.

The Goal is for 1000 healthy churches in this generation.

Is there anything in the purpose (objects), values, vision and goal that you would change to strengthen the Association?

Is there anything in the current purpose (objects), values, vision and goals that you think restricts churches from joining the Association?