



Baptist Churches
of NSW & ACT

Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT
Ministry & Learning Centre
Level 4, 5 Saunders Close
Macquarie Park NSW 2113

EMAIL hello@nswactbaptists.org.au

PHONE 02 9868 9200

www.nswactbaptists.org.au

ABN 24 941 624 663

Affiliation, Baptist Values and Marriage

Recommended Motions and Explanations from Assembly Council for presentation at the Ordinary Assembly on Saturday 12 November 2022

Preamble

Following Notices of Motion brought to our Assembly in 2019 and the report released in 2020 from our *Taskforce on Affiliation, Baptist Values and Same Sex Marriage*, 2 motions were discussed and resolved at a *Special Assembly in February 2021* concerning how churches and pastors might confirm support for the Basic Doctrines, Objects and Values of the Association.

The motions requested the Association's Assembly Council to come back to Assembly with recommended ways forward on these matters.

A key reality acknowledged following the Special Assembly is that the matters we are wrestling with as a movement are complex. They include the autonomy of the local church and how this interacts with being part of an Association, especially with respect to what we are to expect from one another regarding being able to support our shared beliefs and values, including our statements on marriage. They have highlighted questions around the function of our core values and how they interrelate with our beliefs and objects.

Aspects of these matters are also challenging with respect to pastoral care and mission. No matter our individual perspectives, we all live in the reality of people's personal journeys, and seek to know how to best love others as Jesus would and encourage others in the way of Jesus. While these motions themselves may not directly deal with these questions, they cannot be separated from them.

In all this complexity, the motions below reflect the view that it is appropriate and reasonable that we, as autonomous churches, have some agreed bases for associating and partnering with one another. This has long been the case in the Association in NSW & ACT. Churches and Pastors of the NSW & ACT Baptist Association are affiliated and accredited around an established body of beliefs and values. These provide a foundation for unity and partnership in the gospel. They also create a distinctive Baptist community within the wider culture in which we are called to minister. As we work towards our vision together, we need to wrestle with how to best maintain this unity and partnership in the gospel in a rapidly changing society.

In the light of all of the above, Assembly Council intends to bring the motions below for discussion and vote at our upcoming Assembly. The motions are presented in sections, to assist in navigating the various issues to be decided on. While they are necessarily interrelated, Council encourages Assembly members to consider each of them in turn. It is likely that the majority of them will be presented for discussion and decision individually.

Further explanation and background about each section is provided later in this document.

We recognise that people across our churches are processing and thinking through these matters which weigh on many who hold closely the vision of the gospel and our collective witness. We also recognise that aspects of these matters are particularly personal (and therefore impacting) for some people. We pray that as they are discussed and decided we will be very conscious of God's enabling strength and leading.

Assembly Council
October, 2022

PLEASE REFER PAGES 10-16 FOR FURTHER EXPLANATORY MATERIAL

The Recommended Motions

	Motion	Explanation
1	That Motions 2-22 below, and any amendments to them at this Assembly, be decided by a majority of at least two thirds.	See explanatory material below for further information.

Section A - In-Principle Motions regarding the Association's Position on Marriage

	Motion	Explanation
2	That the Association adopt the following Position on Marriage: <i>"Marriage is a covenant relationship ordained by God as a lifelong faithful union of one man and one woman. Sexual intimacy outside such a marriage relationship is incompatible with God's intention for us as his people".</i>	We currently have a concise definition of marriage in our Values, and a longer statement on Marriage and Sexuality which was approved by the 2004 Assembly. ¹ The aim here has been to adopt a Position Statement on Marriage that is as close to these existing statements as possible, that is concisely focused around marriage itself, and makes clear that the Association regards this as articulating the limits of biblical marriage. In a few places words have also been updated to reflect contemporary language.
3	That Affiliated Churches, Fellowships, Simple Churches, Newstart Church Plants and Churches Proceeding to Affiliation need to support the Association's Position on Marriage.	The Association comprises about 350 churches in these 5 different forms, in relationship together. Around 290 of these are Affiliated Churches.
4	That Accredited and Recognised Ministers need to support the Association's Position on Marriage.	

¹ These statements can be found at Appendix 2 of this document.

Section B - Motions to establish Association Position Statements

	Motion	Explanation
5	That the Association establish Association Position Statements, as agreed by Assembly from time to time, which are then included in the Association's Constitution.	
6	That the Association adopt the following Position Statement concerning Congregational Governance: <i>"Each local Baptist church is made up of all those who by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ have been born again and publicly acknowledged their allegiance to Jesus as Lord. Under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the local church has received Christ's authority to govern its worship, fellowship and service in accordance with scriptural principles, the whole church being finally responsible for its governance. Nevertheless, within each local church Christ has provided servant leaders, gifted through the Holy Spirit to build up the local church to maturity in Christ and engage in the ongoing mission of Christ. The local church identifies and appoints these servant leaders to positions of honour and responsibility, with delegated authority to act for the local church within parameters defined by the congregation."</i>	
7	That the Association adopt the following Position Statement concerning Local Church Autonomy and Healthy Association: <i>"Each local Baptist church is autonomous and subject to no external authority to determine its doctrine, worship, objects, and values as it has understood the scriptures to determine these matters. Nevertheless, Baptist churches usually choose to associate together to mutually discern the mind of Christ so that in a partnership of support and care based on shared convictions, objects and values, together we might more effectively engage in mission and represent Christ to the world in which we live and serve."</i>	
8	That the following statements be referred to collectively as Association Position Statements: a) Congregational Governance (as per Motion 6) b) Local Church Autonomy and Healthy Association (as per Motion 7) c) Marriage (as per Motion 2)	This motion is presented contingent on Motions 6, 7 and 2 above being passed.
9	That the reference to marriage be removed from our Values statements.	This motion is presented contingent on Motions 2, 5 and 8 above being passed.

Section C – Motions regarding Support for the Association’s Basic Doctrines, Position Statements, Objects and Values

	Motion	Explanation
10	<p>That Churches in relationship with our Association will support (where support means “approve of and not act contrary to”):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) the Basic Doctrines of the Association b) the Association Position Statements c) the Objects of the Association, and d) the Values of the Association. <p>In this motion Churches are defined to include Affiliated Churches, Fellowships, Simple Churches, Newstart Church Plants and Churches Proceeding to Affiliation.</p>	<p>See Appendix 1 for details of changes made to this recommendation following feedback from the Association Forum.</p> <p>The <i>Objects</i> are the objects of the Association, not of each member church, therefore the important thing is for churches to support them <i>as the Objects of the Association</i>.</p> <p><i>Values</i> are generally statements of culture. Each church might have their own values. The important thing is that they are not inconsistent with the Association’s Values.</p> <p>The term ‘<i>support</i>’ should be understood in the context of the further explanatory section below entitled “Mission Context, Pastoral Care and Welcome”.</p>
11	<p>That Accredited and Recognised Ministers of the Association will support (where support means “approve of and not act contrary to”):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) the Basic Doctrines of the Association b) the Association Position Statements c) the Objects of the Association, and d) the Values of the Association. 	<p>Under our Guidelines for Accreditation and Recognition, candidates are required to respond to the Statement of Beliefs prior to their Accreditation or Recognition and advise the Affirmation Oversight Team in the future of any change to that response. It is not proposed to make any change to this requirement.</p>
12	<p>That the tabled Assembly Council policy with respect to applying Section 17.5(a) of the Constitution be noted.</p>	<p>See Appendix 3 for this policy.</p>

Section D – Motions regarding a process for Churches to Confirm Support for the Association’s Basic Doctrines, Position Statements, Objects and Values

	Motion	Explanation
13	<p>That the Churches of our Association confirm support for the Association’s Basic Doctrines, Position Statements, Objects and Values at the following intervals:</p> <p>a) Affiliated Churches, Fellowships and Simple Churches - once every 5 years</p> <p>b) Churches in the process of becoming affiliated - as part of entering the process towards affiliation, then every 5 years thereafter</p> <p>c) Approved Newstart Church Plants – as part of their approval as a Newstart plant, then every 5 years thereafter</p>	<p>The confirmations would be signed off by each Church according to the decision-making process of the individual Church. In practice this could mean either by the Church leadership or by resolution of the Church meeting.</p> <p>These confirmations would be given in the form adopted by Assembly Council and signed by two persons, who state that they are authorised to do so by their church and how that authority has been given.</p> <p>NB: With respect to Churches in the process of becoming affiliated, it would be highly unlikely that a church would be in that process for more than 5 years.</p>
14	<p>That Assembly adopt constitutional changes to give effect to Motion 13, and that after such changes become effective a transitional period of 18 months be given for Churches to confirm their support.</p> <p>In this motion Churches are defined to include Affiliated Churches, Fellowships, Simple Churches, Newstart Church Plants and Churches Proceeding to Affiliation.</p>	
15	<p>If after the initial transitional period of 18 months or at the end of the calendar year in each subsequent 5 year period, a church, church plant or fellowship has not confirmed its support for the Association’s Basic Doctrines, Position Statements, Objects and Values:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In the case of an Affiliated church, that church forgoes the ability to send voting delegates to Baptist Assemblies. 2. In the case of a Newstart Church Plant, Church Proceeding to Affiliation or a Fellowship, the process of moving towards Affiliation status is be paused. 3. In the case of a Simple Church, that church forgoes the ability to be represented on the Association’s Simple Church Steering Group. 	<p>Assembly Council would connect at least annually with any church who had not confirmed by the appointed time to 'check in' and see if any questions of alignment had been resolved, and whether any assistance is required to do so.</p> <p>The intention is for churches in this 'non-delegate/paused status' to resolve the question of their alignment, but it is recognised that for some churches this may take time.</p>

	Motion	Explanation
16	<p>If a church, church plant or fellowship responds that it does not support the confirmations:</p> <p>a) In the case of an Affiliated church, the Assembly Council would work with that church to assist it in withdrawing from the Association.</p> <p>b) In the case of a Newstart Church Plant, Church Proceeding to Affiliation or a Fellowship, the process of moving towards Affiliation status would be stopped and the Association would work with that church to assist it in exiting from its relationship with the Association.</p> <p>c) In the case of a Simple Church, the Association would work with that church to assist it in exiting from the Simple Church network.</p>	<p>The process would be automatic if a church comes back and says they do not confirm support – ie withdrawal of affiliation does not come back to Assembly for decision, though it should be reported to Assembly through the AC report.</p> <p>If a church does have to withdraw, our Values have much to say about how this should take place – with grace and respect, place for dialogue and prayer, and honouring the contribution of that church to the movement overall.</p> <p>In the future should a church that withdrew from the Association due to this process wish to again support the confirmations and rejoin, the process of re-affiliation would be expedited to provide easy reconnection with the movement.</p>

Section E – Motions regarding a process for Ministers to Confirm Support for the Association’s Basic Doctrines, Position Statements, Objects and Values

	Motion	Explanation
17	That Accredited and Recognised Ministers of our Association confirm support for the Association’s Basic Doctrines, Position Statements, Objects and Values every 5 years as part of the Continuing Ministry Development (CMD) process.	<p>The Special Assembly motions required these confirmations to be made annually. Assembly Council feels this frequency is unnecessary and also too onerous to administer (we have well over 500 pastors who are either Accredited or Recognised), and that the timeframe should match that of the process for churches. It notes too that this is the frequency required for other requirements of pastors such as the Working with Children Check.</p> <p>Under our Guidelines for Accreditation and Recognition, candidates are also required to respond to the Statement of Beliefs prior to their Accreditation or Recognition, and advise the Affirmation Oversight Team in the future of any change to that response. It is not proposed to make any change to that requirement.</p>
18	That the Affirmation of Ministry Guidelines be amended to give effect to Motion 17, and that after such changes become effective a transitional period of 18 months be given for Accredited and Recognised Ministers to indicate their support through the CMD process.	

	Motion	Explanation
19	If after the initial transitional period of 18 months or at the end of the calendar year in each subsequent 5 year period an Accredited or Recognised Minister has not confirmed their support for the Association's Basic Doctrines, Position Statements, Objects and Values, their ability to vote at Assemblies of the Association as Accredited Ministers is forgone.	Assembly Council would connect at least annually with any Accredited or Recognised Minister who had not resolved their support for the confirmations to 'check in' and see if any questions of alignment had been resolved, and whether any assistance is required to do so.
20	If an Accredited or Recognised Minister indicated they were unable to support the confirmations, their Accreditation or Recognition by the Association will cease.	The Assembly Council/Association would provide appropriate support to the minister during this process.
21	That unaccredited ministers of affiliated churches who wish to register and vote at an Assembly under the provisions of Section 8.2c(ii) of the Constitution confirm support for the Association's Basic Doctrines, Position Statements, Objects and Values in order to finalise their Assembly registration.	<p>S8.2c the section in the constitution that outlines who the members of Assembly are (ie. who can vote at assemblies).</p> <p>S8.2c(ii) says that members of Assembly include "the principal or lead minister from each affiliated church or other minister appointed by the church (whether or not that person is an accredited minister)".</p> <p>It is designed to ensure that at least one pastor from each affiliated church is able to vote at an Assembly, whether or not they are accredited.</p> <p>It is appropriate that unaccredited ministers who wish to exercise voting capacity at assemblies <i>as ministers</i> in the same way as accredited ministers, should be asked to respond to the confirmations in the same way as accredited ministers.</p> <p>Note that nothing in Section E prevents a minister (accredited or otherwise) of an affiliated church being appointed to represent their church as a <i>delegate</i>, rather than being a member of Assembly as a <i>minister</i>.</p>

Section F – Motion with respect to Nominees for Assembly Council or Morling College Council

	Motion	Explanation
22	That to be eligible to hold the role of a member of either Assembly Council or Morling College Council, a person needs to confirm their support for the Association's Basic Doctrines, Position Statements, Objects and Values.	<p>It is already current practice under the Association's constitution (S9.1) that to be eligible to hold the role of a council member a person must have signed a declaration that they 'subscribe to' the Basic Doctrines, Objects and Values and have provided a statement as to their response to the Statement of Beliefs.</p> <p>This motion is in order to provide consistency with what is required of churches and ministers in Sections D-E above.</p>

Further Background to the Recommended Motions

Following Notices of Motion brought to our Assembly in 2019 and the report released in 2020 from our **Taskforce on Affiliation, Baptist Values and Same Sex Marriage**, motions were discussed and resolved at a **Special Assembly in February 2021** concerning how churches and ministers might confirm support for the Basic Doctrines, Objects and Values of the Association². These motions requested Assembly Council to come back to assembly with recommended ways forward on these matters.

The 2 motions passed at our Special Assembly were:

Motion 1: With Regard to Churches

That Assembly affirm in principle that continued support for the basic doctrines, objects and core values of the Association should be an ongoing requirement for Affiliation, and request that the Assembly Council bring to a future Assembly recommendations on:

1. *Any Constitutional amendments necessary to make that explicit,*
2. *A process for churches to give periodic reaffirmation of the basic doctrines, objects, and core values (no less frequently than 5 yearly), and*
3. *A suitable process to apply Section 17.5 (a) of the Constitution in circumstances where a church no longer meets such requirements.*

Motion 2: With Regard to Ministers

Assembly affirms that accredited ministers are required to subscribe to the basic doctrines, objects and values of the Association as defined in the Constitution and requests that Assembly Council bring to the next Ordinary Assembly a proposal to require annual confirmation of this as part of Continuing Ministerial Development.

It was noted informally at the Special Assembly that Assembly Council would consider the situation of Recognised Ministers in the light of Motion 2 and include them in the recommendations brought as well.

Complexity

A key reality acknowledged following the Special Assembly is that the matters we are wrestling with as a movement are multifaceted and include at least:

1. The autonomy of the local church and how this interacts with being part of an association, especially with respect to what we require fellow affiliated churches and accredited ministers to 'affirm', 'support' or 'subscribe to',
2. The appropriate function and use of our core values and how these interrelate with our beliefs and objects, and
3. What we are to expect from one another regarding being able to support our Association's value regarding marriage.

² See Appendix 4.

Recognising this complexity, Assembly Council has sought to reflect on these and their associated issues systematically. In doing so it gratefully acknowledges the contribution of Taskforce 1³, which assisted the Council in the earlier stages of thinking through key aspects of these matters.

The recent process and updating of the recommended motions

In August a draft version of these Recommendations was released for prayerful consideration by our movement. An Association Forum took place on Saturday 3 September, to which anyone in regular attendance at one of our churches was invited to participate. The Forum had 2 main purposes. The first was to give space for input and reflection on 2 key areas of Baptist distinctives identified throughout the process (the place of common affirmations of faith or practice in Baptist life, and freedom of conscience). The second was to present the draft recommendations, take clarifying questions, and provide opportunity for discussion and feedback. Approximately 180 people participated in the Forum, either in person or online.

The feedback from the Forum was considered by Assembly Council. This has resulted in a number of updates being made to what are now the recommended motions. The main substantive change that has been made is with respect to the wording of the confirmations which would be responded to by churches and ministers. The '2-tiered' confirmation process proposed in the draft recommendations which required 'affirmation' of the 1919 Statement and the Association Position Statements, and 'support' of the Objects, Values and Statement of Beliefs has been replaced with a single process of confirming 'support'. Further, this revised form of the confirmations does not refer to the Statement of Belief. Minor drafting errors have also been corrected. Further details of these changes and the reasons for them are explained at **Appendix 1** to this document.

The structure of the motions and how they are presented

The motions are presented in this document in sections, to assist in navigating the various issues to be decided on.

It is likely that the majority of the motions will be presented at Assembly for discussion and decision individually, with some potentially in logical, small groupings.

Motion 1 is procedural – to **adopt a higher voting majority** for all the following motions and any amendments to them at the Assembly. Assembly Council considers that given the nature of the motions and the discussion around the issues they address, it is necessary for them to be decided by greater than a simple majority at Assembly. Feedback to this effect has also been received at and subsequent to the Forum.

Note by way of comparison that a two thirds majority is required in the Association's constitution for the appointment of the Director of Ministries and the Principal of Morling College. In addition, we have a history of using this higher majority in complex matters in the past, eg. for some motions in the processing of the discussion on Women in Ministry at the Assembly in 1997.

³ The members of Taskforce 1 were Rev Tim Blencowe, Meighan Heard, Rev Beth Jackson, Rev Jonny Lam (Chair), Rev Dr Tim McBride, Rev Steve Rodda, Rev Chris Thornhill, Rev Jess Wiles and Rev Dr Steve Bartlett (ex-officio)

Further Explanatory Material regarding the Recommended Motions

Section A - In-Principle Motions regarding the Association's Position on Marriage

Throughout this process the question about how our **position on marriage** functions within the life of our Association has been a key matter requiring clarification. This was a significant factor relating to the motions passed at the February 2021 Assembly and is the purpose of Section A. Assembly Council's desire is to present this matter openly and clearly up front, with in-principle motions for consideration first by Assembly.

The Council regards this as responding out of necessity to what has become a very significant social issue for discussion in the wider community and within the church, rather than an 'elevation' of this particular issue above other matters of discipleship practice.

A note on the wording of "lifelong faithful union" in the Position on Marriage

This phrase is part of the current definition of marriage in our Values. Some discussion has occurred as to how this relates to our position on marriage and divorce as an Association, including in respect of Accredited and Recognised ministers.

The Association takes the position that divorce, and marriage to a divorced person, is not an automatic bar to accredited or recognised ministry. Situations of this nature are assessed by the Affirmation Oversight Team (AOT) on a case-by-case basis. The principles used by the AOT to reflect on what response should be made regarding the accreditation or recognition of a minister involved in divorce are set out in a Guidelines document. This is available from the Affirmation Oversight Team at the Association.

In terms of how this relates to the position on marriage, Assembly Council notes that our position is an ideal that can be committed to, even if it is not perfectly lived out. As imperfect people we all fail in many ways at various times and God's grace is sufficient for us in these times as we come to him in repentance and faith.

We are also impacted by wrongs done to us in various ways in life⁴, but God delights in bringing restoration and healing, including through His people, at such times.

Mission Context, Pastoral Care and Welcome

Commitment to marriage as defined above means that as an Association we do not affirm sexual relationships outside of such marriage, including (but not limited to) same sex marriage relationships. However we can make this commitment while at the same time recognising we often live with pastoral and missional complexity in its outworking in local church life.

There is nothing new about this reality, nor is such complexity confined to this particular area of discipleship. Churches across our movement find themselves in different missional contexts and are challenged by the unique personal journeys of those in their congregations, those coming into their congregations, and their surrounding community.

⁴ In particular, we note with ongoing concern the presence of domestic violence and abuse in our communities, including at times our church communities. Our commitment to the ideal of lifelong marriage does not include encouraging people to remain in violent or abusive relationships. In these circumstances separation is often necessary as a matter of safety, either temporarily or permanently. The Association as part of our national Baptist movement continues to make available resources on responding to domestic and family violence and encourages them to be accessed at <https://www.baptist.org.au/safer-spaces-toolkit/>.

Each of our churches has responsibility to outwork our commonly held marriage ethic in a way that responds to its local context.

We also recognise that we have a responsibility to provide welcome, as Christ Jesus would, towards all people, including those for whom living out this ethic is particularly challenging personally.

Section B - Motions to establish Association Position Statements

The place of the Marriage Statement

Currently our statement on marriage sits within our Values statements. The reflection of Taskforce 1 and the Assembly Council is that it does not naturally fit with the rest of our Values and would be better articulated elsewhere.

The functioning of key Baptist distinctives in our associational life

A further reflection of Taskforce 1 which was noted by Assembly Council is that there is very little in our statements regarding Baptist Distinctives – less so than almost all other Australian state Baptist Associations. Yet at the same time, in practice some of these distinctives already function as boundaries with respect to Affiliation. For example, to be recommended by Assembly Council for Affiliation, a church's constitution must clearly embed principles of Congregational Government. Also in the Affiliation preparation process, the Association works with churches to ensure that the principles of local church autonomy and healthy association are understood and committed to. While conscious of not wanting the process of making confirmations overly complex, the Council senses that if we are going to require support by churches of our Marriage Statement, it would seem inappropriate not to also require support of these core Baptist principles.

Taskforce 1 also noted that a positive promotion of Baptist Distinctives and their articulation somewhere in our Association's life (eg on our website) would be valuable. This can be developed in the times ahead.

Association Position Statements

In the light of the above points, the recommended way forward is to include a category of "Association Position Statements" that would need to be supported. These would include a statement on Congregational Government, one on Local Church Autonomy and Healthy Association, and another on Marriage. The Association Position Statements would be put in the Association's Constitution alongside the Basic Doctrines and the Statement of Beliefs as part of our Foundational Beliefs, meaning any changes to them down the track would need to be the result of discernment and decision by a future Annual Assembly.

The place of our Values

If the statement on marriage is removed from our Values and instead expressed as a Position Statement as outlined above, we can then more easily clarify the intended place and function of our Values. We consider our Values to be an important expression of who we are as an Association, and they articulate the agreed motivated direction of our hearts. They should function to guide our behaviour together and shape our culture. Individual member churches may well have their own values but those shouldn't be inconsistent with the Values of the Association.

Section C – Motions regarding Support for the Association’s Basic Doctrines, Position Statements, Objects and Values

The motions passed at the February 2021 Special Assembly included the question of affirming our agreed understanding of marriage within the wider context of what we should anticipate being able to affirm together generally as churches and accredited/recognised ministers. They directed Assembly Council to bring recommendations back to Assembly regarding how we might put into practice the periodic affirming of our beliefs, values and objects. Sections C-F of the motions provide a way forward in this. They also seek to recognise the complexity of the conversation we are having around what it means to affirm things together as Baptists.

Section C establishes the *principle* of expecting churches and ministers to support the Basic Doctrines, Position Statements, Objects and Values of the Association.

Sections D-F outline a *process* by which churches and ministers would ‘periodically reaffirm’ these as required by point 2 of Motion 1 passed at the Special Assembly.

Withdrawal of a Church’s Affiliation

The last part of Motion 1 passed at the Special Assembly effectively asked Assembly Council to recommend a suitable process to apply the section of our Constitution (Section 17.5a) that deals with the withdrawal of a church’s affiliation, to the situation where a church was no longer able to affirm the basic doctrines, object and values of the Association.

This process is covered in part by the motions in Section D.

In addition, the question of how to apply Section 17.5a more generally was already under consideration by Assembly Council at the time of the February 2021 Special Assembly. In April 2021 it approved a governance policy on this matter (updated in October 2022) which can be found at Appendix 2. Assembly Council therefore believes it would be appropriate for Assembly to simply note the Council policy that is already in place.

Section D – Motions regarding a process for Churches to Confirm Support for the Association’s Basic Doctrines, Position Statements, Objects and Values

A clarifying note regarding churches entering into affiliation with the Association

Section 17.1 of our Association Constitution states, in part:

“A church located within NSW or the ACT is qualified to become an affiliated church of the Association by Assembly if it:

- (a) supports the foundational beliefs, the objects and the values of the Association as set out in this constitution”*

Note that the Foundational Beliefs comprise both the Basic Doctrines and the Statement of Beliefs (see Appendix 4).

It is not proposed to make any changes to this section of the Constitution. Churches entering into affiliation with the Association will continue to be required to support the Statement of Beliefs as per the Constitution, as they form part of the Foundational Beliefs. However the Statement of Beliefs will not form part of the ongoing confirmation process for churches under the motions outlined in Section D.

Section E – Motions regarding a process for Ministers to Confirm Support for the Association’s Basic Doctrines, Position Statements, Objects and Values

Motion 2 passed at the Special Assembly required Assembly Council to bring a process for Accredited and Recognised ministers to respond to similar confirmations as churches, within the mechanism of the Continuing Ministerial Development (CMD) process. CMD is the ongoing professional development process for ministers which is administered by the Association’s Affirmation Oversight Team.

As far as possible these recommendations have been drafted both to mirror the requirements for churches, and to work within the existing processes of Accreditation/Recognition.

Resources to Assist Leaders and Churches

Working through how to think about and lead through these issues is challenging for all of us. The following resources may be helpful:

1. The Association will be providing equipping for church leaders specifically on how to helpfully process challenging conversations such as this one in a Baptist way in their context.
2. Morling College is available to provide equipping for churches and leaders on how to faithfully work through these issues of marriage and sexuality from a theological perspective, and also how to live out our position on marriage while also welcoming all people as Jesus would.
3. A list of helpful resources will also be prepared.

FAQs

Q: Are these motions the proposed changes to our constitution?

A: No. Constitutional wording changes have not yet been considered. Any required constitutional changes would be drafted after the motions, in their final form, are adopted by Assembly.

Q: Does the process outlined in Section D mean that all members of Association Baptist Churches would need to indicate support for the confirmations?

A: No. The principle of local church autonomy means that it is not the place of the Association to determine this. Each church will have its own processes to clarify the relationship of its members to its own statements of faith and the like.

Q: What would be some of the practical implications if a church had its affiliation withdrawn?

A: For example, a church would no longer be able to be insured through Baptist Insurance. With respect to ongoing participation in the Redress Scheme, Assembly Council has determined that withdrawing churches could apply to still remain part of the Association’s Participating Group in the Scheme. With respect to property, while ever the church remained Baptist, in accordance with the Property Trust Act, its property would still be able to be held on trust for it by the Property Trust.

Appendix 1

Further detail of the changes made to the Draft Recommendations after the Forum

A number of changes have been made to the recommendations following feedback received at and after the Forum Day on 3 September.

Some of these involved the correction of minor drafting errors and providing better clarity of wording in places.

The substantive change that has been made is with respect to the wording of the confirmations. The '2-tiered' confirmation process which required 'affirmation' of the 1919 Statement and the Association Position Statements, and 'support' of the Objects, Values and Statement of Beliefs has been replaced with a single process of confirming 'support'. Further, this revised form of the confirmations does not refer to the Statement of Belief.

It is clear that, for a number of us, requiring 'affirmation' of the Position Statements and 'support' of the Statement of Beliefs seemed to denote the former as more important theologically than the core beliefs articulated in the Statement. While this is not the intention, it could be seen to be the effect. In addition, seeing the Position Statements in a category with the 1919 Basic Doctrines is problematic for some.

The thinking behind gathering all the elements of the confirmations under the verb 'support', is that the differing nature of each element speaks for itself. The 1919 Doctrines are supported as one would support statements of faith – acknowledging our beliefs align with them. The Position Statements are supported, their role being to help define how we understand ourselves as a Baptist Association. The Objects and Values are supported by each member church for what they are – the Objects and Values of the Association itself, rather than each member church.

It is noted also that the Statement of Beliefs was not part of the motions passed at the Special Assembly. This statement is more detailed and in the minds of some of us, is in need of nuancing in a few areas. Assembly Council holds open the possibility of reviewing and streamlining the Statement of Beliefs in the future, in a way that would then allow it to better fit as part of the confirmation process. It also recognises (as previously noted in the Draft Recommendations document) the perceived inadequacy of the 1919 Basic Doctrines - particularly the absence of any reference to the Trinity. The Council believes this could be looked at in the times ahead and this addition made if agreed by a future Assembly, acknowledging the fact that it sits within our Incorporation Act and changing it would take some time.

Appendix 2

Current Association Statements on Marriage

The following Statement is a sub-point of our core value of being *Relationally Committed*:

- "honouring marriage as an institution created by God as the foundation for a lifelong faithful union of a man and a woman"

The following Statement on marriage and human sexuality was passed at the 2004 Annual Assembly:

God created male and female and together they were created in the image of God. Men and women were created equal to but different from one another. Marriage is a covenant relationship ordained by God between two people of the opposite sex. Sexual activity outside marriage between a man and a woman is immoral and counter to God's intention for us as a people.

Appendix 3

Policy of Assembly Council with respect to the Council exercising its responsibility under Clause 17.5 of the Association Constitution – Disaffiliation of Churches

1. As per the Constitution (Clause 17.5), if AC comes to the conclusion that an affiliated church has a person in pastoral or other leadership who is engaging in unethical conduct, and after 3 months the church refuses to remove that person from leadership, then AC will (and is required to) recommend to the next Assembly that that church be disaffiliated.
2. In respect of any other matter that arises causing Assembly Council to question the appropriateness of an affiliated church to retain its affiliation, the Constitution delegates to AC the decision to recommend disaffiliation to Assembly. It is the only body that may make such a recommendation [Clause 17.5(a)].
3. Principles that AC would employ to process such a decision include:
 - a) AC will approach the matter prayerfully and in a spirit of reconciliation and graciousness.
 - b) AC will approach the matter in a manner consistent with Matthew 18 and any relevant provisions of Clause 25 of the Constitution (Conflict Management).
 - c) AC will look to Clause 17.1 “Qualifications for Affiliation” as a key guide as to the sorts of matters to be considered in any decision to recommend disaffiliation of a church
 - d) There may be other matters that, because of their seriousness, may also be considered by AC at its discretion as warranting a decision to recommend disaffiliation.
 - e) With respect to a situation where AC is seeking to discern whether a church no longer supports the Association’s Basic Doctrines, Association Position Statements, Objects or Values, AC would look for this to be evidenced by the church’s public stance and/or teaching, where such public stance or teaching is by its own admission its clear and settled position.
 - f) AC will ensure that before making any decision to recommend disaffiliation, sincere dialogue is held with the church on more than 1 occasion, and that the church has opportunity to set out its position with AC and discuss it with AC or the subgroup it appoints for the purposes of such dialogue.
4. While AC may make a recommendation to Assembly regarding disaffiliation of a church, the decision to withdraw affiliation of a church can only be made by Assembly. The exception to this is where a church itself has confirmed through the 5-yearly process that it does not support the Basic Doctrines, Position Statements, Values and Objects of the Association.

Assembly Council
October 2022

Foundational Beliefs, Objects and Core Values as per the Association Constitution

4. FOUNDATIONAL BELIEFS

4.1 Basic doctrines

The Incorporation Act sets out the following doctrines as the basis upon which the Association is founded:

- (a) The sinfulness of man
- (b) The Deity of Jesus Christ
- (c) His atonement for the sin of man
- (d) The need of the Holy Spirit for conversion
- (e) The divine inspiration of the Scripture
- (f) The resurrection of the dead
- (g) Rewards and punishment in a future state
- (h) The baptism of believers only by immersion.

4.2 Statement of beliefs

The Association has adopted the following as a statement of beliefs:

(a) THE NATURE AND UNITY OF THE GODHEAD

There is one God Who is eternal personal Spirit. He is infinite in power, wisdom, holiness and love. God is Triune in essential being and revealed to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

(b) THE DEITY AND HUMANITY OF CHRIST

Jesus Christ as the second Person of the Godhead is eternally one with God the Father of whose person and glory Jesus is the accurate expression. To become human He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, so that two whole and perfect natures, the nature of God and human nature, were united in one Person; truly God and truly human.

(c) THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit as the third Person of the Trinity is eternally one with the Father and the Son yet He is sent by Them to achieve the divine purpose in the world and in the Church.

(d) THE DIVINE INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

The Scriptures, consisting of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, are the infallible Word of God. They were written by holy people of God inspired by the Holy Spirit and have supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.

(e) THE SINFULNESS OF PEOPLE

People were made in the image of God and for fellowship with God. By transgression of God's command humankind fell from fellowship with God and their nature was corrupted. As a consequence all people are spiritually dead under Satan's dominion and control and subject to God's wrath and condemnation. Therefore, apart from God's grace, people are helpless and

hopeless.

(f) CHRIST'S ATONEMENT FOR HUMAN SIN

In order to redeem people from the guilt, penalty and power of sin, Jesus Christ became human and died a sacrificial death as our representative substitute. By His resurrection, God's acceptance of His atoning death was demonstrated. This atonement is sufficient for the whole world, but effective only in those who receive it. The sinner is justified and reconciled to God, not through any personal merit, but solely on the basis of God's gracious gift of salvation in Jesus Christ received through faith.

(g) THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN SALVATION

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is necessary for the acceptance of God's provision of salvation. The Holy Spirit convinces sinners of their sinfulness, leads them to personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and so brings them to spiritual birth as God's children and to fellowship in Christ. Working within the life of believers the Holy Spirit makes real the presence of Christ, witnesses to their relationship with God, leads into all truth, bestows gifts for effective service and produces graces for holy living.

(h) THE CHURCH

The Church is the body of people whom God has separated from the world through faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. All regenerate persons are members of the universal Church of God which takes local form wherever groups of believers unite for worship, fellowship and service in accordance with scriptural principles. All believers are called to a priestly ministry in the offering of spiritual sacrifices and sent into the world to be witnesses. God calls individuals to positions of oversight and leadership or to special ministries. The Church recognises such by ordaining pastors, commissioning missionaries, appointing deacons and other leaders, following New Testament practice.

(i) THE BAPTISM OF BELIEVERS ONLY BY IMMERSION

Baptism is an ordinance of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a public declaration of a person's faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. In accordance with New Testament Scripture it should be administered only by total immersion which symbolises the believer's identification with Christ in death, burial and resurrection, the remission of sins and the believer's dedication to God to live and walk in newness of life.

(j) THE COMMUNION

The Lord's Supper is an ordinance of the Lord Jesus Christ instituted by Him to be celebrated with the elements of bread and wine by believers in Christ until the end of the age. It commemorates and declares our thanks for the Lord's substitutionary death. The celebration of the ordinance expresses our fellowship with, and in, the Lord Jesus Christ as members of the Body of which He is the Head.

(k) THE RETURN OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

At the end of this age, according to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in His glory to the earth. The full consummation of the Kingdom of God awaits His return.

(l) THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

At the end of the age, there is to be a resurrection both of the righteous and the unrighteous. After death people's bodies return to dust, but their

spirits return immediately to God - the righteous to be with Him and the unrighteous to be reserved for the judgment.

(m) REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS IN A FUTURE STATE

God has appointed a day of final judgment for the world. At that time Jesus Christ will judge every person and each will receive reward or punishment according to their deeds. Those judged righteous, in their resurrected and glorified bodies, will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord. The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment.

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.

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.