

Text of message Outcomes from The Gathering Incorporating the Annual Assembly dated 12 May 2023



Hi Friends,

Friday and Saturday 5-6 May was The Gathering, incorporating the Annual Assembly. Almost 500 people were part of The Gathering on at least one of those days, either at the Macquarie Park main venue or at a regional venue. Thanks to everyone who was part of this time together!

There was much presented, discussed and decided over these 2 days.

Significantly, Assembly resolved to approve the appointment of Rev Dr Tim McBride as the new Principal of Morling College. Tim will take up this position in July this year, following the conclusion of the principalship of Rev Dr Ross Clifford who will have led the College for over 26 years.

The following people were elected to various positions:

To Assembly Council:

Dr Catherine Casey, Matthew W Kennedy and Dr Edwina Murphy

To Morling College Council:

Helen Blanch, Rev Dr Graeme Chatfield and Dr William Peirson

To the Baptist Property Trust:

Judith Carpenter and Mike Williams

We thank each of these people for being willing to serve and pray God's blessing on them as they commence in their roles.

10 Accreditation Candidates were approved to proceed to Accreditation.

Changes to our Association's Constitution were voted in and confirmed:

1. A procedural change to clarify the process of dealing with vacancies on the 2 Association Councils (Assembly Council and Morling College Council).
2. A change to provide a minimum 30% representation on both Association Councils by both women and men. This change is effective now but will be relevant from the next elections at our 2024 Annual Assembly.
3. Inclusion in our Constitution of the 3 Position Statements (Marriage, Congregational Government and Local Church Autonomy/Healthy Association) that were passed by the November 2022 Assembly.

The Association team presented the 2023-25 Strategic Plan, representing the next phase of living out our Gen1K goal to be 1000 healthy churches in a generation. Over these next 3 years we desire in particular to focus on *developing leadership, mobilising healthy churches and partnering together in ministry*. The [summary of the strategic plan](#) was enthusiastically approved by Assembly. Steve Bartlett noted that the plan also includes [10 high-level Outcomes](#) which are being adopted to help us steward well our resources towards the plan's objectives over the next 3 years. [Three inspiring videos](#) shown at the Assembly regarding these forward directions and what they could mean for local churches are available for viewing and download. Pastors and leaders can [contact the Association](#) to engage with any of these initiatives as they may be helpful for your church.

The assembly also dealt with a number of AGM matters including receiving the Annual Report, the financial statements and approving the Church Partnership Support Budget goal of \$1550,000. This is an increase of \$50,000 from the previous year's budget. It was encouraging to hear how a \$100,000 matching grant opportunity provided by a generous donor for increased individual church contributions to the budget was able to be fully accessed last year.

A further matching grant opportunity exists in 2023 of \$200,000 towards the Gen1K priorities of our new strategic plan, for both individual donations and for contributions by a church that are over and above their contributions in 2022. An offering for the Gen1K Vision was taken at Assembly and contributions can still be made online [HERE](#). All these offerings will also be able to access the matching grant.

On Saturday significant time was given to the ongoing challenging matters of Affiliation, Baptist Values and Marriage. [A way forward recommended by Assembly Council](#) in its paper released prior to Assembly was presented, following its significant processes of listening, discussion and reflection since the November Assembly. There were also significant [motions proposed to Assembly by Canberra Baptist and Newtown/Chatswood Baptist Churches](#).

After considerable discussion, Assembly Council's recommended way forward motion was amended, and then resolved by Assembly with a majority of 80%. The motion as passed was:

That Assembly Council:

- 1. communicate to the churches at least 4 months prior to the 2024 Annual Assembly a relational process for engaging with and where necessary facilitating the withdrawal of already affiliated Churches and removal of already Accredited (and/or Recognised) Pastors who do not support the Association's position on Marriage; and,*
- 2. bring to a vote of that assembly any amendments to the constitution and the affirmation of ministry guidelines required for implementing this process. Any changes to other policy documents integral to this process should also be reported at this Assembly*

This process will clarify any potential ongoing relationship between such a church or pastor and the Association where they are unable to continue to be affiliated or accredited with the Association.

Assembly Council will now move forward with this process in the months ahead. The first steps, in light of the listening processes so far undertaken, will be to identify the various matters that need to be worked through in such a relational process, and then to address these.

With respect to the motions brought by Canberra and Newtown/Chatswood churches:

- Newtown/Chatswood withdrew its motion following the resolution above being passed by Assembly

- Canberra Baptist had decided to lay its recission motions on the table, so they were not discussed.
- Assembly voted, on the recommendation of Assembly Council, to lay on the table for 12 months the 2 motions for constitutional change proposed by Canberra Baptist.

Much preparation and prayer by many people occurred in the leadup to our Assembly, for which we are thankful. To have the above way forward resolved brings clarity about the next steps, and the fact that those next steps were agreed to by such a strong majority is an answer to prayer. It is also important we continue to acknowledge that for some of us, the decisions taken will have been difficult. Let's continue to be in prayer for one another at this time.

As we continue this journey together, the words of Gal 5:13, as shared in our devotion on the Saturday of Assembly, are as relevant as ever for each of us:

“You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.”

In Christ,

Steve Bartlett, Director of Ministries

Jamie Long, Assembly Council Chair