



Baptist Churches
of NSW & ACT

Affiliation, Baptist Values and Marriage

Recommended Processes for Churches and Pastors

As followers of Jesus, we face the challenge and responsibility of engaging issues of contemporary life and ministry through the lens of our commitment to Scripture and our call to live in accordance with the ways of Jesus. When these matters are complex, this process is no easy task. This has been the context in which we have sought to prayerfully wrestle with the issues before us around affiliation, Baptist values and marriage.

This document is part of a much bigger process we have been engaged with as a movement since 2019. It outlines proposed processes for engaging relationally with and where necessary facilitating the disaffiliation of churches and the removal of accreditation or recognition of pastors who do not support the Association’s position on marriage.

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Background and Context

At the 2023 Annual Assembly, as an Association we continued to progress our discussion on affiliation, Baptist values and marriage.

Those discussions were framed by the *Reflections and Recommendations from Assembly Council* document presented to that Assembly¹ which contains significant background information around the process to that point.

The document, the recommended motions from Assembly Council (AC) within it, and amendments to those motions, were discussed at the 2023 Annual Assembly. A *Way Forward* motion (as amended) was agreed to by an 80% majority of Assembly. The following motion was resolved:

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.

The Process Since the 2023 Annual Assembly

The above resolution directed AC to progress a number of tasks and bring proposals back to our 2024 Annual Assembly. Key among these tasks was building the relational processes described in the resolution to engage with churches and pastors who do not support the Association's position on marriage. In order to move forward with this, Assembly Council appointed a subcommittee of Assembly Council² to do the initial drafting of the processes. A Consultative Group³ was also appointed to engage with a range of voices across the movement to 'road-test' the processes that were being drafted.

Drafting work done by the subcommittee was then considered by the full Assembly Council and went through various iterations of review and feedback with the Consultative Group. **The Processes for both churches and pastors contained in this document are the product of that work. They are separate, though related, processes. They come as recommendations for the way forward from Assembly Council to the 2024 Annual Assembly.**

Our Position Statement on Marriage

The following statement was adopted at our Assembly on 12 November 2022. It updated our existing statement on marriage that was previously contained in the Association's Values.

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.

¹ That document can be found [\[HERE\]](#).

² The subcommittee consisted of Rev Pete Davies, Pastor Allyson Beddoe, Andrei Mocanu, Rev Matthew J Kennedy, Rev Jamie Long and Rev Dr Steve Bartlett.

³ The Consultative Group was led by Rev Pete Davies, one of our most experienced denominational consultants. Pete is also pastor at Boambee Community Baptist Church and the Regional Minister for the North Coast/Mid-North Coast. The team working with Pete was Pastor Allyson Beddoe, Andrei Mocanu and Rev Tony Calman.

Some Reflections on how we understand our Position Statement on Marriage

Discussions since our 2023 Annual Assembly have continued to include questions and feedback around how we understand our Position Statement on Marriage and its outworking. Assembly Council believes it is important to continue to emphasise the following:

a) The Wording of “Lifelong Faithful Union”

Discussion has rightly occurred as to how this phrase relates to the reality of marriage breakdown, and of domestic and family violence, both within our churches and in the community more broadly.⁴

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 life, but God delights in bringing restoration and healing, including through His people, at such times.

AC also notes with ongoing concern the presence of domestic and family 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 permanently⁵.

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.

b) 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 that 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 and pastors 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.

Each of our churches and pastors have the responsibility and pastoral privilege of outworking our commonly held marriage ethic in a way that responds to their local context.

We also recognise that we have a responsibility to provide welcome, as Jesus would, to all people. This includes those for whom living out this ethic is particularly challenging personally, or who may not currently be living in alignment with it.

The Association is curating resources in this area from both pastoral and missional perspectives. These are expected to be available by the end of March 2024.

⁴ The phrase ‘lifelong faithful union’ was part of the statement on marriage previously in our Values and was carried into the updated Position Statement.

⁵ 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/>.

Why are these Processes only about the Marriage Position?

The context of these Processes, our Constitution, and the Affirmation of Ministry Guidelines

The Process for Churches is framed specifically to deal relationally with an affiliated church which may not be able to support the Association's Position Statement on Marriage, as is required by our Constitution. It is framed this way because that is what was required of Assembly Council in the *Way Forward* motion passed at the May 2023 Assembly. At a practical level it is also helpful because it is this Position Statement where attention is currently focused.

However, it should be noted (and this will be clear in the proposed constitutional changes that will be presented to the 2024 Annual Assembly) that our Constitution requires affiliated churches to support the Foundational Beliefs, the Objects, the Position Statements (of which the position on Marriage is one) and the Values of the Association.

This process could therefore also form a useful template for how AC might engage with a church which did not support another of the beliefs, objects, position statements or values required in the Constitution. Assembly Council wishes to note that this situation has been very rare in the past and trusts it will also be very rare in the future. It also notes that where this has occurred in the past, the church has withdrawn voluntarily, recognising that its beliefs or practices no longer align with those of the Association.

The Process for Pastors is also framed specifically to deal relationally with an accredited or recognised pastor who may not be able to support the Association's Position Statement on Marriage, as would be required by the Affirmation of Ministry Guidelines once the recommended updates to these are approved by Assembly. The reasons for this specificity are similar to those noted for the Process for Churches above.

Aspects of this process could again form a useful template for engaging with a pastor who did not support other of the Basic Doctrines, Objects, Position Statements or Values. AC notes this is a rare occurrence, and when it does happen the Affirmation Oversight Team has capacity to deal with the matter under the Affirmation of Ministry Guidelines.

Discerning Lack of Support

The *Way Forward* decision at our May 2023 Assembly (along with February 2021 and November 2022 Assemblies) means that affiliated churches and accredited/recognised ministers are required to support the Position Statement on Marriage. The assumption is that an affiliated church or accredited/recognised minister supports the statement, and that a church or pastor would initiate communication with Assembly Council or the Affirmation Oversight Team if, in their settled view, that were not the case.

Significant aspects of the processes outlined below would still be relevant to guide a respectful and relational engagement with such a church or pastor. However, these processes have been designed in view of a more complex situation, where it appears there are reasonable grounds to suggest that a church or pastor does not support the Position Statement, but they have not made this clear to Assembly Council or the Affirmation Oversight Team.

In the process of discerning that a church/pastor does not support the Position Statement on Marriage, AC and the AOT would be guided by the following principles.

- *A church is understood not to support the Association's Position Statement on Marriage when its teaching or practices are not consistent with it.*
- *A pastor is understood not to support the Association's Position Statement on Marriage when their professed views, teaching, or practices are not consistent with it.*

AC recognises the need for clarity and this document is designed to clarify the sorts of situations that would fall under these principles. These are identified as "prompts" and are detailed in the processes in the following sections of this document.

Relationality and Procedural Fairness

No process is perfect. However, a key priority in the recommended processes is that they live out their mandate of being relational. Relational does not mean that all parties will be in agreement with the outcome of the process or even all the aspects of the process itself. It does however mean that as far as possible relationships will be prioritised in the process. This is in alignment with our Value of being “Relationally Committed” as a movement, which includes “prioritising authentic relationships over programs and structures.”⁶

Prioritising relationality includes managing the attitudes and approaches of those involved in the relevant conversations and decisions. It also involves taking concrete steps to build relational preparation and engagement into the process itself, and to ensure procedural fairness. In this process, relationality and procedural fairness will include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Providing an unrushed and phased approach,
- Encouraging face-to-face meetings and meaningful discussion,
- Pointing to resources on how to approach potentially difficult conversations,
- Allowing adequate time for affiliated churches or accredited/recognised pastors to work through the issues,
- Allowing churches and pastors adequate time to respond to written communication at each step of the processes,
- Orienting the Association representatives involved in the process in the importance of its relational context,
- Ensuring pastoral support is available to church representatives, pastors and Association representatives throughout the process,
- Ensuring pastors can have a support person with them when in a meeting that is part of the process,
- Ensuring a review level is embedded in the process, through which the pastor or church may make final representations, so that all relevant aspects of the situation are properly considered,
- Ensuring decision makers in each step of the processes are aware of the importance of weighing the material presented in a balanced manner,
- Ensuring communication and relational engagement with Association staff continues as usual throughout the process (Association staff will not be involved in the process)⁷, and
- Ongoing prayerfulness by all involved.

Reflection on the Nature of Affiliation

At various times during our discussions on this issue across the movement it has been raised that it would be helpful to do further theological reflection on the matter of affiliation. Work has been done on this by a small group consisting of Rev Dr Andrew Sloane, Rev Dr Graeme Chatfield and coordinated by Dr Nicole Starling. This resource will be available by the end of March 2024.

Prayerfulness

We acknowledge our profound need to be prayerful for these processes and everyone involved in them. Please pray that as these processes are considered, then discussed and decided on at our 2024 Annual Assembly, that we might know the mind of Christ and glorify Him in our words and actions together.

“Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”

Romans 12:10-12

⁶ Clause 6.1(c)(iii) in our Constitution.

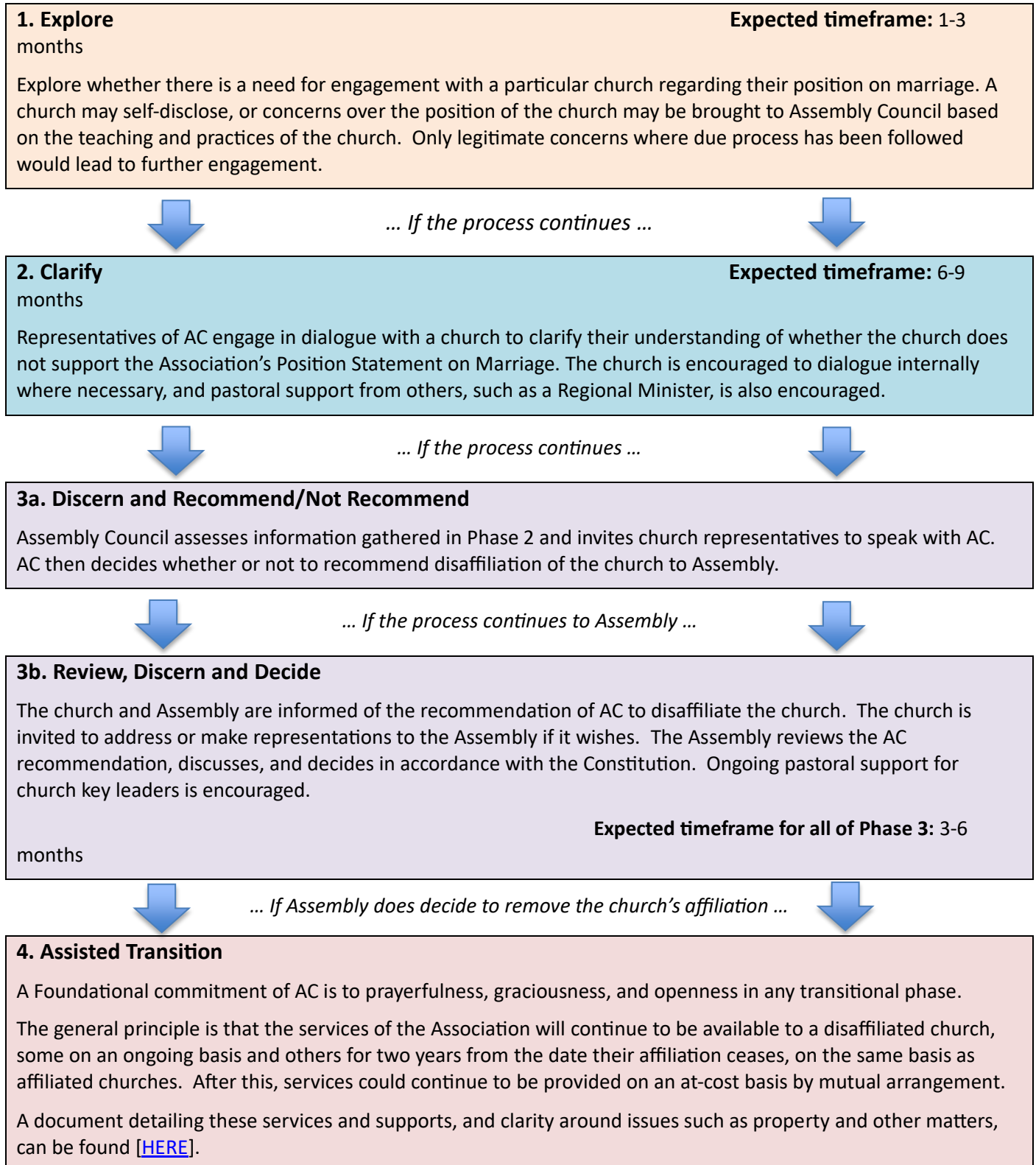
⁷ Other than if an Association staffperson assists the process with logistics and administration.

Process for Churches

Summary

A process for Assembly Council (AC) and representatives to engage with relevant affiliated churches to clarify if they do not support the Association's Position Statement on Marriage and, where necessary, to make recommendations to Assembly regarding disaffiliation and, if Assembly does disaffiliate a church, work with the church to transition out of affiliation.

Key Phases



The Process and its Phases

The process has been divided into four Phases. Each phase has a clear purpose, timeframe and steps involved. It should be noted that the actual timeframe in any particular case will depend on a number of factors and in the interests of being relational and responsive it is not possible to give a precise time for each phase – hence a time range has been used.

Phases 1-3 each conclude with a decision of either Assembly Council Representatives (Phase 2), Assembly Council (Phases 1 & 3a) or Assembly (Phase 3b) which determines whether or not the process moves to the next Phase.

Assembly Council considers that this process captures the spirit of Section 25 (Conflict Resolution) of the Association's Constitution but is bespoke to this situation and more detailed.⁸

Phase 1: Explore

The purpose of this phase is to provide a clear and respectful basis upon which Assembly Council would begin to consider whether a church does not support the Association's Position Statement on Marriage.

Estimated timeframe: 1-3 months

Main Steps in this Phase

1. AC becomes aware that it needs to consider whether a particular church supports the Association's position on marriage.
 - **Scenario 1:** A church self-discloses publicly, or to Assembly Council, information which suggests it may not support the Position Statement.
 - **Scenario 2:** Another church/pastor notifies AC that a church may not support the Position Statement, after they have already met or genuinely attempted to meet with that church to discuss the matter.⁹
2. AC assesses and decides whether there is need to clarify the situation by moving into Phase 2.

Commentary

It is noted that Scenario 2 contains within it the potential for interpersonal conflict. With even the best of intentions, difficult conversations where there is a potential divergence of views can become a place for conflict to spike. It is therefore very important that a person or church seeking to engage another church over these matters takes time to reflect on how to conduct such a conversation respectfully, graciously and transparently.

A short video as well as pointers to other Christian peacemaking resources, will be available to help equip a church representative who is considering broaching such a conversation with another church.

Assembly Council strongly encourages any church or individual who wishes to engage a church in such a conversation to avail themselves of these resources prior to having that conversation.

What would Prompt a move into Phase 2?

Phase 2 would commence if Assembly Council determined there was sufficient indication that a church may **not support** the Position Statement on Marriage. Examples of sufficient indication include one or more of the following.

1. Self-disclosure by the church to Assembly Council that it does not support the Association's position or has taken a position that is not consistent with it.
2. Public statements that indicate a position not consistent with the Association's position, such as in published documents, social media, or other media.
3. Decisions of the church's members meeting to take a position that is not consistent with the Association's position.

⁸ AC intends to bring to Assembly a proposed change to S25 of the Constitution, to the effect that the general conflict resolution process outlined there can be replaced with a more specific process in particular situations as approved by Assembly. This would then become one of those particular situations.

⁹ This principle is taken from Matthew 18, where the first step in seeking to engage with a brother or sister with whom we have an issue is to speak with the person directly before taking matters further.

4. Retaining in leadership a person who is sexually active outside of marriage as per the Association's definition.
5. Supporting the pastor or other representatives of the church in conducting affirming/blessing ceremonies for relationships outside of marriage as per the Association's definition.
6. Public teaching within the church, affirmed by the leadership of the church, that is not consistent with the Association's position.

If a church indicates that it does not support the position on marriage and chooses to withdraw from the Association, AC will seek to facilitate conversation and appropriate support for the church as outlined in Phase 4.

Commentary regarding these Prompts

Point 2 and 6 – These do *not* include statements and teaching in a church setting intended to explore or educate on various views and issues around marriage. They are not intended to curb a church authentically wrestling with these issues. The type of statements referred to are those that specify a clearly held position of the church.

Point 4 – This comes from our Constitution, Section 17.5(b), which states:

Where Assembly Council becomes aware that an affiliated church may have a person in pastoral or other leadership role in the church who is engaging in unethical conduct Assembly Council (or an appointed committee) shall investigate the matter.

Assembly Council would regard a person who was sexually active outside of marriage as engaging in unethical conduct as described in s17.5(b). However, the Constitution does not define the specific leadership roles this section applies to. For clarity, Assembly Council would regard the following roles in particular (though not necessarily exclusively) as relevant: a pastor, an employed ministry worker, an elder, a deacon, a member of the church's governance group.

Points 1-5 – If confirmed through the subsequent phases of this process, and the church continues in them, this would most likely lead AC to recommend to Assembly that a church's affiliation be removed. Point 6 in and of itself would not necessarily lead to AC recommending disaffiliation, even if shown to be correct. Point 6 would need to be accompanied by one or more of the other prompts. In other words, it would be important for Assembly Council to be satisfied that the views of the leadership of the church also represented the expressed view of the majority of the church membership.

Phase 2: Clarify

The purpose of this phase is for representatives of AC to engage in dialogue with a church and to clarify their understanding of whether, in their view, the church does not support the Association's position on marriage.

The nature of this process is intended to be highly relational and will be worked through on a case-by-case basis, however the main steps are outlined below.

Estimated timeframe: 6-9 months

Main Steps in this Phase

1. AC appoints representatives to dialogue with the church.
2. During this phase, AC provides a copy of the document outlining the process and its potential outcomes to the church.
3. AC representatives request a meeting with church leadership.
4. AC representatives meet with church representatives on multiple occasions as required to develop a clear understanding of the church position.
5. (If the church is unresponsive, AC sends a letter to the church secretary. If the church remains unresponsive, AC representatives report this to AC and the process moves to Phase 3.)
6. AC recommends that the church discusses the matters internally, including at more than one members meeting, if they are yet to formally finalise their position.
7. AC representatives report the outcome of the dialogue to AC, and to the church, in writing.

Processes ongoing throughout this Phase

- Pastoral support for key church leaders.¹⁰
- Pastoral engagement with the church by the Regional Minister (if there is one and if such support is desired).
- Communications and engagement with Association staff continues as usual.
- Oversight and support for the AC representatives by AC.

Phase 3: Discern and Decide

The purpose of this phase is for AC and, as required, Assembly to make a decision regarding the affiliation of the church.

Estimated timeframe: 3-6 months

This Phase is Divided into Two Sub-Phases

- **Phase 3a:** Discernment and decision by Assembly Council as to whether to recommend or not recommend disaffiliation of the church to Assembly.
- **Phase 3b:** Review, discernment and decision by Assembly as to whether to disaffiliate the church.

Main Steps in Phase 3a

1. AC considers the findings of Phase 2 and makes a preliminary assessment.
2. AC informs the church of its assessment and invites church representatives to speak to AC.
3. AC decides whether it is convinced that the church does not support the Position Statement on Marriage, and if so, recommends disaffiliation of the church to Assembly.

Main Steps in Phase 3b

If the decision of AC is to recommend disaffiliation, the following steps apply.

1. AC sends written notice to the church at least one month prior to Assembly.
2. AC informs Assembly of its decision to recommend disaffiliation of the church as part of that Assembly's documentation, at least 2 weeks before the Assembly.
3. Assembly discusses and decides in accordance with section 17.5 of the Association's Constitution. This includes an opportunity for the church to speak to Assembly regarding the matter.

If Assembly resolves to remove the church's affiliation, the process moves to Phase 4.

Processes ongoing throughout Phase 3

- Pastoral support for key church leaders¹⁰.
- Pastoral engagement with the church by the Regional Minister (if there is one and if such support is desired).
- Communications and engagement with Association staff continues as usual.

Phase 4: Assisted Transition

If Assembly decides to remove the affiliation of a member church, a range of questions arise as to how that church will make the transition to its future beyond affiliation with the Association. Significant among these is clarity about the ways in which the Association and the church will relate to one another going forward, and the spirit in which that relationship will take place.

A significant amount of work has been done to identify the types of matters that will be important to consider at a practical level. Dialogue about these has also taken place with representatives of the recently formed Open Baptists

¹⁰ This could include access to the external pastoral support process the Association has made available, as well as discussions with the leaders about how they might best feel supported in the process and incorporating this where possible.

network. A separate document outlining these supports, and clarity about issues such as church property and other matters, can be found [HERE](#).

The general principle is that the services of the Association will be available to churches who cease to be affiliated but continue to be Baptist (i.e. continue to affirm the 1919 Doctrines). Services will be provided either on an ongoing basis (for some services) or for a period of two years from the date their affiliation ceases. These services will be provided on the same basis as affiliated churches. After this, services and advice would continue to be available to such churches on an at-cost basis at the discretion of the Association. Any publicly available resources of the Association would continue to be available to such churches.

A foundational commitment of Assembly Council in this phase is to prayerfulness, graciousness, and openness in these matters.

Recommendation

Assembly Council recommends this Process for Churches for approval at the 2024 Annual Assembly.

Process for Churches

