

Info from our recent Assembly (11 November 2023) and Update re Affiliation and Pastoral Support

Email from Assembly Council dated 14 November 2023



From our Ordinary Assembly

On Saturday 11th November, 267 people gathered across 6 venues and online for our 2023 Ordinary Assembly.

It was an encouraging morning!

Rev Dr Tim MacBride, Principal of Morling College, brought a keynote address highlighting the need for us as a movement to be developing more pastoral leaders. A panel discussion followed exploring these realities and ways forward for developing leaders for us as a movement. Tim's address and the panel discussion can be accessed [here](#).

Encouraging stories were shared of how we are seeing churches embrace mission and seeing people disciplined into and in the faith. We also heard stories of effective partnerships promoting mission across the movement. The 40th Anniversary of Woolloomooloo Baptist Church/Hopetree Inner City Ministries was celebrated. This session also included several stories of how churches participated in National Baptism Week in October. If your church saw Baptisms happen as part of this national initiative, we would love to share them with the movement! Visit the [Crossover Baptism Hub](#) to share your stories.

Assembly also approved an updated [Code of Ethics and Conduct for Accredited Ministers](#) and [Procedures for Handling Allegations](#). The updated documents are now available to view on our website using the links above.

We heard countless stories of how God's making our Gen1K vision a reality across our movement. And we were reminded of our Matching Grant. Every donation made by individuals to the Gen1K vision between now and the end of December, and every contribution by a church over and above its 2022 contribution level, will be matched dollar for dollar by a generous donor who believes whole-heartedly in this shared vision. Your contribution will have twice the impact! You can contribute [HERE](#).

Update on the Way Forward regarding Affiliation, Baptist Values and Same Sex Marriage

At the Assembly, Jamie Long presented a brief update on the work being done following the decisions of our Annual Assembly in May, where Assembly resolved:

That Assembly Council:

- *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*
- *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 has been working on this task along with the Director of Ministries and have engaged the assistance of Rev Pete Davies and a team of consultants to help develop a relational process.

To be able to keep the 4-month communication timeline set by Assembly, we have moved our next Annual Assembly to June 2024. Good progress has been made and we are on track to be able to communicate a suggested process by February 2024. Some of the detail of any constitutional changes needed may be distributed after February, but still with plenty of lead time before the Annual Assembly.

Assembly Council is working on a step-by-step process that will be relational in that it will:

1. Encourage face-to-face meetings and meaningful discussion,
2. Allow time for affiliated churches and accredited pastors to work through the issues,
3. offer pastoral support throughout the process, and
4. Facilitate some ongoing services to a church that may need to leave the Association. For these services to be ongoing, the church would need to remain "Baptistic" which for our purposes relates to the 1919 Statement of Faith contained in our Constitution.

Once the process has been communicated in February, there will be opportunity for people to ask questions, seek clarification and provide feedback prior to the 2024 Annual Assembly.

With respect to the ongoing use of property, it has now been confirmed by external legal advice that churches whose affiliation ceases but who remain Baptistic, and

whose property is held by the Property Trust, will be able to continue in beneficial ownership of that property. An information summary of the legal advice will be provided.

Council also acknowledges the need to point to good resources for how we live out our position on marriage well, both missionally and pastorally. Work is being done on this and will be released in the leadup to the Annual Assembly next year.

Similarly, during our discussions on this issue it has been raised that it would be helpful to do some further theological reflection on the matter of affiliation. Work is being done on this by a small group, including Dr Nicole Starling (coordinator), Rev Dr Andrew Sloane and Rev Dr Graeme Chatfield. We anticipate this will also be made available in the leadup to the Annual Assembly.

Additional Pastoral Support

We want to acknowledge that there will be people who are personally impacted by the decisions of our 2023 Annual Assembly regarding pastors needing to support the Association's Position Statement on marriage.

We expect pastors will be able to find support through the existing relationships each should have with a professional supervisor or mentor. If support beyond what is possible within these relationships is required, the Association is committed to provide additional support.

The Association has entered an agreement with Bridges Counselling to provide up to three sessions with a specialist therapist, with the option for up to three further sessions upon the recommendation of that therapist.

Bridges Counselling is a Christian organisation which describes itself as a "team of psychologists, social workers and registered counsellors, with a passion to give hope, and restore the joy in living for clients." See <https://www.bridgescounselling.com.au>. Sessions can be held at a Bridges Counselling centre (there are two Sydney locations) or online for those not able to attend in person.

Persons eligible to access this support include:

1. Accredited or recognised ministers with the Baptist Association of NSW & ACT and/or their spouses,
2. Persons in pastoral roles in Association churches and/or their spouses,
3. Previously accredited or recognised ministers, for a period of 6 months after their accreditation or recognition has ceased, and/or their spouses, and
4. Employees of the Baptist Association and/or their spouses.

Persons who wish to access this support can contact Bridges Counselling directly on 02 9683 1444. On this initial call the Centre Manager will ask a few questions to ensure that the person is eligible and is referred to the most suitable therapist for their needs.

Bridges Counselling will not report the identity of anyone accessing this service to the Association and will maintain strict confidentiality in all sessions.

**Assembly Council
November 2023**

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