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of NSW & ACT

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Affiliation, Baptist Values and Marriage

Draft Recommendations and Explanations from Assembly Council For discussion at the Association Forum on Saturday 3 September 2022

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 pastors might confirm alignment with the Basic Doctrines, Objects and Values of the Association¹. These motions requested the Association's 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.

¹ A video of the presentation to our May22 Annual Assembly about the process that has been undertaken can be found at <http://www.vimeo.com/nswactbaptists/assemblyupdate>

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 pastors to 'affirm', 'support' or 'subscribe to',
2. The appropriate function and use of our core values and how these relate together with our beliefs and objects, and
3. What we are to expect from one another regarding being able to affirm our association's value regarding marriage.

Assembly Council has sought to reflect on these and their associated issues systematically as it has prepared these draft recommendations. In doing so it gratefully acknowledges the contribution of Taskforce 1², whose purpose was to assist the Council in thinking through key aspects of these matters.

These are DRAFT Recommendations

Given the complexity of these matters, significant amounts of time, effort and prayer have been expended by Assembly Council, taskforce members, and people who have provided feedback and engaged in conversation over past months. Even so, the Council wants to be clear that these are presented not as final motions but as **recommendations in draft form**, recognising they are part of an ongoing process of discernment.

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

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

The Council also recognises that there may well be no 'perfect' way forward in dealing with aspects of these matters. It therefore prayerfully brings these recommendations for discussion at the Forum on 3 September 2022. A key next step in the process is feedback obtained at the forum, which will then be prayerfully considered again by Assembly Council in preparation for presenting its final recommended motions at the Assembly in November.

The structure of the Draft Recommendations

We recognise that 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. For this reason, **Section A of the Draft Recommendations** are framed to state our position regarding marriage and how this position might function within our Association. Assembly Council's desire is to present this matter openly and clearly up front, with in-principle recommendations for consideration first by Assembly.

² 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)

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. **Section B of the Draft Recommendations** seeks to provide a way forward in this. It also seeks to recognise the complexity of the conversation we are having around what it means to affirm things together as Baptists.

(A) - In-Principle Recommendations regarding the Association’s Position on Marriage

	Recommendation	Explanation
1	That we adopt the following definition as our Association’s Position Statement 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. ³ The aim here has been to retain a definition that is as close to these 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.
2	Affiliated Churches, Fellowships, Simple Churches, Newstart Church Plants and Churches Proceeding to Affiliation need to affirm the Association’s Position Statement on Marriage.	The Association comprises about 350 churches in these 5 different forms, in relationship together. Around 290 of these are Affiliated Churches.
3	Accredited and Recognised Ministers need to affirm the Association’s Position Statement on Marriage.	

A note on the wording of “lifelong faithful union” in the Marriage position statement

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 pastors.

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 statement on marriage, Assembly Council notes that the statement 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.

³ These statements can be found at Appendix 1 of this document.

(B) - Responding to the February 2021 Special Assembly Motions 1 and 2 - Recommendations regarding the Affirmation Processes

Introductory Explanations

a) 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.

b) 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 affirmations to become overly complex, the Council senses that if we are going to require affirmation by churches of our marriage statement, it would seem inappropriate not to also require affirmation 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.

c) Association Position Statements

In the light of the above points, the suggested way forward is to include a category of "Association Position Statements" that would need to be affirmed. 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, meaning any changes to them down the track would need to be the result of discernment and decision by a future Annual Assembly.

d) 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.

e) Our Statement of Beliefs

The Motions from the Special Assembly do not mention our Statement of Beliefs. This is perhaps in part because this Statement serves a slightly different function and is more detailed than our 1919 Basic Doctrines. At the same time, we know that our Statement of Beliefs was originally crafted, at least in part, in response to the perceived inadequacy of our 1919 Basic Doctrines – most notably that they contain no reference to the Trinity. The 1919

Basic Doctrines are embedded in the Act of Incorporation of the Baptist Union of NSW and thus cannot be changed in the short/medium term. Yet it would seem strange to require affirmation of a statement about marriage, but not require support for the key evangelical doctrine of the Trinity. In view of this, Assembly Council have sought to reflect this in the Recommendations by including some response to the Statement of Belief. We note also that currently our constitution includes support for the Statement of Beliefs as part of what is required for churches to become affiliated with the Association.

f) 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 that deals with the withdrawal of a church's affiliation. This question was already under consideration by Assembly Council at the time of the February 2021 Special Assembly, and in April 2021 it approved a governance policy on the matter which can be found at Appendix 2. Assembly Council therefore believes the appropriate way forward here is for Assembly to simply note the Council policy that is already in place.

With these explanations in mind, the following 4 general recommendations are provided for consideration, followed by the draft recommended process of affirmation for both churches and pastors.

Draft General Recommendations

1. That we establish Association Position Statements, as agreed by Assembly, which are referred to in the confirmation process.
2. That the following statements are referred to collectively as Association Position Statements:
 - a) Congregational Governance
 - b) Local Church Autonomy and Healthy Association
 - c) Marriage (as per the recommended statement above)

Note: AC has not yet drafted statements (a) and (b) above, due to time constraints. It is proposed that these be concise statements, that they be prepared by AC representatives in conjunction with appropriate persons from the academic staff of Morling College, and that they be ready for the November 2022 Assembly.

3. That the reference to marriage be removed from our Values statements.
4. That the Assembly Council policy with respect to applying Section 17.5(a) of the Constitution be noted. (See Appendix 2 for this policy.)

Draft Recommendations with respect to Churches

Recommendation	Explanation
<p>1 What churches would need to confirm. Churches entering into or continuing in relationship with our Association will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Affirm (where affirm means “agree with and commit to”) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. the Basic Doctrines of the Association, and b. the Association Position Statements and 2. Support (where support means “approve of and not act contrary to”) the Objects, Values and Statement of Beliefs of the Association. 	<p>See Appendix 3 for our Basic Doctrines, Statement of Beliefs, Objects and Values</p> <p>See General Recommendation 2 above regarding the Association Position Statements.</p> <p>See below for further information on the underlined terms.</p>

Term	Further information
‘Churches’	The term “churches” is intended to encompass all the forms of churches that are connected together in our Association. These are outlined further in the following recommendation.
‘Affirm’ & ‘Support’	The words Affirm and Support are chosen and defined clearly so to represent the different types of commitments we would be making to one another.
‘Objects’	The Objects 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> .
‘Values’	As noted above Values are statements of culture. Each church might have their own Values. The important thing is that they are not inconsistent with the Association’s values.
‘Statement of Beliefs’	The 1979/2002 Statement of Beliefs, as noted in point (e) of the explanations above, has been included to assist in overcoming the perceived inadequacy of the 1919 Basic Doctrines. These would require changes to an Act of Parliament to amend - which is possible, but not quick. It is also recognised that the Special Assembly motions did not require the Statement of Beliefs to be Affirmed. “Supporting” the statement of belief is presented as a possible solution to the perceived inconsistency, expressed by some, of being required to affirm a position statement eg about marriage, but not have to affirm the trinitarian nature of the Godhead.

Recommendation	Explanation
<p>2 Who would make these confirmations and when?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affiliated Churches, Fellowships and Simple Churches - once every 5 years • Churches in the process of becoming affiliated - as part of entering the process towards affiliation, then every 5 years thereafter • Approved Newstart Church Plants - as part of their approval as a Newstart plant, then every 5 years thereafter 	<p>Though it would be highly unlikely that a church would be in the process towards affiliation for greater than 5 years.</p>
<p>3 After Assembly adopted constitutional changes to give effect to the above confirmation, a transitional period of 18 months would be given for Churches, Church Plants, Fellowships and Simple Churches to confirm their support for them.</p> <p>This would be given in the form adopted by Assembly Council, and signed by two persons, who would need to state that they are authorised to do so by their church and how that authority has been given. It would provide opportunity for the church to state whether it agrees or does not agree with the Affirmations.</p>	<p>The confirmations would be signed off by each Church according to the decision-making process of the individual Church.</p> <p>In practice this could mean that the statement is signed off either by the Church leadership or by resolution of the Church meeting.</p>
<p>4 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 did not confirm:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In the case of an Affiliated church, that church would forgo 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 would be paused. 3. In the case of a Simple Church, that church would forgo 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>

Recommendation		Explanation
5	<p>If a church, church plant or fellowship confirmed it could not support the Affirmations:</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 it 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 confirm its support for the Affirmation and rejoin, the process of re-affiliation would be expedited to provide easy reconnection with the movement.</p>

FAQs

Q: Does this process mean that all members of Association Baptist Churches would need to confirm support for the Affirmations?

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: Not all of these have been addressed yet but some have been considered. 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.

Draft Recommendations with respect to Accredited and Recognised Ministers

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

As far as possible these recommendations have been drafted:

- a) to mirror the requirements for churches, but also
- b) to work within the existing processes of Accreditation/Recognition.

Recommendation	Explanation
<p>1. What Accredited and Recognised Ministers would need to confirm:</p> <p><i>Accredited and Recognised Ministers will:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) <i>Affirm (where affirm means “agree with and commitment to”)</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>the Basic Doctrines of the Association, and</i> b. <i>the Association Position Statements</i> 2) <i>Support (where support means “approve of and not act contrary to”) the Objects and Values of the Association, and</i> 3) <i>Hold to their response to the Statement of Beliefs as previously approved by the Affirmation Oversight Team (previously the Committee for the Ministry).</i> <p>These confirmations would be made every 5 years as part of the pastor’s Continuing Ministry Development (CMD) process.</p>	<p>Refer to the explanations for the Church Confirmations earlier in this document.</p> <p>With respect to the Pastors’ response to the Statement of Beliefs, this is as per the current Affirmation of Ministry Guidelines and seeks to preserve the current process for pastors.</p> <p>Note that under these guidelines if a person’s response to the Statement of Beliefs changes, they need to advise the Affirmation Oversight Team (Committee for the Ministry).</p> <p>The Special Assembly motions required these affirmations 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 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>2 After Assembly adopted constitutional changes to give effect to the above confirmations, a transitional period of 18 months would be given for Accredited and Recognised ministers to indicate their support for them through the CMD process.</p>	

Recommendation		Explanation
3	<p>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 pastor had not resolved their support for the confirmations, any voting rights they had at Assemblies of the Association would be forgone.</p> <p>Assembly Council would connect at least annually with any Accredited or Recognised pastor 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.</p>	Note that this would include voting rights in any capacity eg accredited pastor, non-accredited sole/lead pastor, church delegate etc.
4	If an Accredited or Recognised pastor indicated they were unable to support the confirmations, their Accreditation or Recognition by the Association would cease.	The Assembly Council/Association would provide appropriate support to the pastor during this process.

Draft Recommendation with respect to Nominees for Assembly Council or Morling College Council

Recommendation		Explanation
1	Persons nominating for positions on Assembly Council or Morling College Council would need to confirm their support for the Affirmations prior to their names going to election by Assembly.	

Being God's People Together

We recognise that people across our churches will be 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 these matters are discussed we will be very conscious of God's enabling strength and leading.

Assembly Council

August 2022

Appendix 1

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 2

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 recommending 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 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 foundational beliefs, 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 the church has clear opportunity to set out its position directly 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.

Assembly Council

April 2021

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.