

Tuggeranong Baptist Church Meeting 15 September 2024

To be held in the Auditorium at 11:15 am following Sunday worship

Notice of motion re Open Baptists

Motion

That the church agrees to seek affiliation with the Open Baptists and to that end it:

- a. Agrees to the objects and principles of Open Baptists (Attachment A)
- b. Agrees to be bound by the Open Baptists constitution (distributed separately)

Background

Tuggeranong Baptist Church (TBC) is committed to affiliation with other Baptist churches and does not wish to leave the NSW and ACT Baptist Association. However, that Association has finalised a process to disaffiliate churches that do not support the Position Statement that:

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.

Churches are required to support the position statement and will be investigated and removed from the association if they don't.

Baptist Churches have always developed confessional statements summarising the beliefs that members hold in common. The Position Statement is a radical departure because it is required to be supported compulsorily and not to be deviated from. It has been deliberately created to function as a law which must be adhered to.

Tuggeranong Baptist Church does not hold a specific position on marriage and does not intend to divide the church over this issue or any other where people are living in ways that in ways that may, in the view of some, be considered *incompatible with God's intention for his people*. We all have such areas in our lives and depend upon God's grace to go deeper in our faith and to grow closer in our relationship with Him. We do not exclude any from exploring a life of discipleship in our church.

THE DECISION TO DISAFFILIATE CHURCHES THAT DO NOT SUPPORT THE POSITION STATEMENT EFFECTIVELY STRIPS THE PRINCIPLE OF AUTONOMY FROM THE LOCAL CHURCH.

Affiliation with Open Baptists aligns with Clause 1 of our own Constitution:

1) PRINCIPLE OF AUTONOMY

- a) We hold that the church is under Christ's headship and power is exercised by the church assembled as a Fellowship, decisions thus made shall not be subject to change or reversal by any other body. This Church is autonomous, but advice and counsel may be sought from qualified ministers or other bodies of like principles and faith.

History of Open Baptists

Open Baptists began as a network of church leaders wishing to provide support to churches in a way that is liberating, collaborative and hope-filled. The network includes about seventy leaders from about thirty churches in NSW, the ACT, Victoria and New Zealand. Many of those involved are also concerned about the potential disaffiliation of churches and withdrawal of accreditation for ministers in NSW and the ACT.

The work to establish the Open Baptists Association has involved representatives from Canberra Baptist Church and Mosaic Baptist Church and leaders from Tuggeranong have been included in the conversation.

On 27-28 October 2023 Canberra Baptist Church hosted a meeting of the Open Baptists network. An invitation to attend the opening meeting was accepted by representatives from Tuggeranong Baptist church.

Open Baptists was established more formally as a company limited by guarantee on 25 August 2023. The Company has six directors, including two from Canberra Baptist church: Belinda Groves (chair) and John Higgins (Company Secretary). Other directors are: Christine Redwood, Nathan Nettleton, Viv Grice.

Affiliating with Open Baptists

To affiliate with Open Baptists, a church must indicate that it agrees with the Open Baptist Objects and Principles (Attachment C) and agree to be bound by the Open Baptists Constitution. In this regard, it is important to note that:

- The Open Baptists Principles are broad and are consistent with Baptist traditions. They explicitly recognise freedom of conscience and the autonomy of the local church.
- The Open Baptists Constitution will not place any constraints on how Tuggeranong Baptist Church manages its own affairs. The Constitution can only be changed by 75 % majority of members present and eligible to vote at a general meeting.

The request to affiliate will be sent to the Board of Open Baptists. The Board will then recommend to a meeting of members that Tuggeranong Baptist Church be affiliated. Affiliation will take place following a vote at the meeting.

Once affiliated, Tuggeranong Baptist Church will be entitled to nominate three people to be members of Open Baptists. This is the equivalent of appointing delegates to an Assembly of the NSW and ACT Baptist Association.

Frequently asked questions

Q: Would affiliating with Open Baptists mean we would have to leave the NSW and ACT Baptist Association.

A: No. A church is only required to leave the NSW and ACT Baptist Association if it becomes part of another denomination. Open Baptists is not another denomination but another Baptist association. Affiliating with Open Baptists would not affect our membership of the NSW and ACT Baptist Association any more than being part of the ACT Baptist Association did.

Q: What will it cost to affiliate with Open Baptists?

A: There is no fee for being affiliated with Open Baptists. The church will be able to make voluntary contributions to the Open Baptists budget.

Open Baptists is just starting up and has a limited range of activities. Its costs are therefore low and contributions required from churches will be small. This will change as the range of activities expands.

Q: Are other churches joining Open Baptists?

A: Yes. Since motions passed at the last Assembly, a number of churches are now taking proposals to join to their members.

In addition, Open Baptists has developed a list of churches that may be interested in affiliation. However, these churches will need time to consider whether affiliation with Open Baptists is right for them. Open Baptists anticipate that between four and a dozen churches will affiliate with Open Baptists in the next twelve months, with further affiliations in subsequent years.

Affiliating with Open Baptists does not stop a church from remaining part of its existing state association. It is expected that some churches will choose to be affiliated with two associations.

Q: What does Open Baptists offer?

A: Open Baptists will require several years to develop a full range of services to support churches and broader mission. Since October 2023, Open Baptists have focussed on its

governance underpinnings (policies, finances, insurance, committees etc), establishing credible guidelines and processes for accrediting ministers, developing its communications, recruiting churches to affiliate with it, and supporting a network of pastors and other church leaders adversely affected by recent changes in the NSW and ACT Baptist Association. The Board held a strategic planning meeting in February 2024.

Negotiations with the NSW and ACT Baptist Association contributed to the outcome to allow disaffiliated churches to retain access to existing services.

Q: What is the relationship between Open Baptists and other Baptist Associations?

A: Open Baptists aims to maintain friendly, cooperative and collaborative relations with other Baptist Associations. Open Baptists has had cordial and constructive discussions with the NSW and ACT Baptist Association.

Q: Why are we proposing to continue our association with the Association of Baptist Churches in NSW&ACT?

A: We wish to continue as an indication of our desire to maintain our long-established connection and affirm our willingness to affiliate with others who hold different positions from us, as we honour their autonomy and freedom of conscience.

Q: What will it cost to be part of the Association of Baptist Churches in NSW&ACT?

A.: Some years ago, Assembly agreed to ask churches to set aside *5% of their general income* to support the work of the Association. As Partnership Contributions are voluntary, we have discontinued making contributions.

Q: What services will we receive from the Association of Baptist Churches of NSW&ACT.

A: Whether or not we are affiliated with the Association of Baptist Churches of NSW&ACT, we will continue to receive these [services](#).

Objects and Principles of the Open Baptists

Objects

The advancement of the Christian faith and its practice, especially by the means of and in accordance with the principles of the Baptist Denomination in particular, but not exclusively, through any or all of the following means:

- a) Support the affiliated churches, including by providing advice and administrative support, accrediting ministers, training, governance, financial support and liaising with government.
- b) To cultivate among its members and affiliated churches respect and love for one another, and for all who love the Lord Jesus Christ.
- c) To spread the Gospel of Christ by such methods as the Company shall determine.
- d) To afford opportunities for conference, and for united action on questions affecting the welfare of the Churches, the support of the ministry, and the extension of the Christian faith, both at home and abroad.
- e) To promote good relations between Baptists [in Australia and globally].
- f) To confer and co-operate with other Christian communities as occasion may require.

Principles

- a) That our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, is the sole authority in all matters of faith and practice, as revealed in the Scriptures, and that each Church and individual has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to seek the mind of Christ in matters of faith and practice.
- b) That, [symbolising our participation in Christ,] Christian Baptism is by water (normally by immersion) into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, of those who have professed repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ who "died for our sins according to the Scriptures; was buried and rose again the third day".
- c) That every church and disciple is called to bear witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and partner in the mission of God in our world.