

# West Preston Baptist Church CONSTITUTION

## 1. Name

1.1 West Preston Baptist Church ("the church")

## 2. Basis of Church Fellowship

2.1 The church is a body of Christian people who have responded to the Word of God and the call of the Holy Spirit and have been united to Jesus Christ and to his people in their own confession of faith and in their baptism.

2.2 The church baptises professing believers, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, as a sign of their salvation and their initiation into the membership of the body of Christ. Wherever practicable, baptism is practiced by immersion into water as the form of baptism normative in the New Testament because it portrays "going down" into death with Christ and "coming up" into resurrection with Christ.

2.3 Affirming Baptist understandings of the Gospel, the church is a member church of The Baptist Union of Victoria and accepts as expressions of the Christian faith the *Doctrinal Basis* and the *Principles and Ideals of the Baptist Faith* contained in the Constitution of that Union and printed as Appendices I and II to this Constitution.

2.4 In common with the whole Church, this church accepts its commission to participate in Christ's ministry to all creation, to proclaim and live out the gospel message of reconciliation to God and to one another. All members have been gifted by the Holy Spirit for their part in this ministry and are called to fulfill the meaning of their baptism by exercising their gifts together in nurturing the growth of Christian faith, peace and love.

## 3. Membership

3.1 The membership of the church consists of people who are personally committed to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and to the mission of the Church. Church members will affirm the Church's policy on membership as described in the Members Covenant (refer to paragraph 7).

3.2 A person is received into the membership of the church by baptism or by the church's recognition of their prior baptism. Their reception into membership requires the prior approval of a church meeting. It must be clear to the church meeting that the person:

- 3.2.1 Has made their own free decision to commit themselves to Christ and to the church;
  - 3.2.2 Has participated in appropriate membership preparation. This preparation can include discussion about baptism and membership, & discussion about the Policies of the church as discussed in paragraph 7;  
**and**
  - 3.2.3 Has been, or is about to be, baptised as a testimony of their own faith in and commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. A believer who because of age or disability refrains from immersion may with the approval of the Diaconate and Pastor be baptised by another method.  
**or,**
  - 3.2.4 Has been baptised according to the rites of another Christian church and is about to make public profession of their faith in and commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, as an affirmation of the significance of baptism in Christian life.
- 3.3 If a person seeks to become a member of the church, having been a member of another church, a letter of commendation must be sought from that other church.
- 3.4 The church will keep two rolls.
- 3.4.1 A Membership Roll will be kept of the names of the current members of the church.
  - 3.4.2 A Past Members Roll will record the names of previous members of the church. A name may be transferred from the Membership Roll to the Past Members Roll if the member:
    - 3.4.2.1 Transfers their membership to another church;
    - 3.4.2.2 requests removal from the Membership Roll;
    - 3.4.2.3 Dies
    - 3.4.2.4 Has not attended the church in the past year, unless the meeting notes that special circumstances apply or
    - 3.4.2.5 Has their membership removed by a decision of a church meeting for disciplinary reasons. (Two weeks notice of the date and purpose of that church meeting must have been given to the member concerned).
  - 3.4.3 The Membership Roll will be revised at each Annual Church Meeting on the basis of a report prepared by the Diaconate.

#### 4. Leadership

4.1 The church, through the church meeting, has final authority in deciding every matter that affects the church's life.

#### 4.2 The Pastor(s)

4.2.1 The pastor(s) of the church will be a person or persons whom the church believes to have been called and gifted by the Lord of the Church to fulfill a ministry of pastoral leadership within the church.

4.2.2 To become a pastor of the church, a person must be eligible for membership of the church.

4.2.3 The following decisions about a pastor of the church each require a two thirds majority of members who are present and who vote at a Special Church Meeting:

4.2.3.1 The calling of a pastor.

4.2.3.2 The approval of any extension of term if a pastor has been called for a specific term.

4.2.3.3 The removal of a pastor. A proposal to remove a pastor should not be put to a church meeting before the church has consulted with the General Superintendent of the Baptist Union about the matter.

#### 4.3 The Diaconate

4.3.1 The Diaconate consists of the pastor(s) and elected representatives of the church. The elected representatives must be members of the church and are each elected for a two year term at an Annual Church Meeting, each requiring a two thirds majority of members who are present and who vote. The elected representatives shall be:

4.3.1.1 The Church Secretary;

4.3.1.2 The Church Treasurer;

4.3.1.3 At least 2 other persons.

4.3.2 The Diaconate shall have a maximum of ten members.

4.3.3 The Diaconate will exercise oversight of those areas of the church's life and ministry delegated to it by the church meeting. The Diaconate is always accountable to the church meeting.

4.3.4 The Diaconate will endeavor to ensure that the terms of the Church Secretary and the Church Treasurer end in alternate years.

4.3.5 Any church meeting may decide the number of the Diaconate, up to a maximum of ten, with effect from the following Annual Church Meeting. Such a decision shall not shorten the term of any person serving on the Diaconate.

- 4.3.6 A vacancy on the Diaconate may be filled at any church meeting, with the elected person serving the remainder of the vacated term.
- 4.3.7 Nominations for the Diaconate must be in writing signed by two church members and the person nominated.
- 4.3.8 Elections for positions on the Diaconate will be by secret ballot.
- 4.3.9 The Diaconate will meet at least monthly. Half of the Diaconate forms a quorum. The Diaconate must keep records of their meetings.
- 4.3.10 For the purposes of Schedule B of The Baptist Union Incorporation Act 1930, the Diaconate is deemed to be "the deacons".

## **5. Church Meetings**

- 5.1 Ordinary church meetings to consider the life and ministry of the church must be held at least three times each year.
- 5.2 Ordinary church meetings shall normally be called by a decision of the previous meeting. Additional meetings will be called if requested by a pastor, the leadership team or one quarter of the membership of the church.
- 5.3 Notice of the time, place and major business must be given to members on at least two consecutive Sundays prior to the holding of any church meeting.
- 5.4 Every church meeting must have an agenda prepared by the leadership team.
- 5.5 Records of the decisions of all church meetings must be kept and a copy made available to church members at least two Sundays prior to the next meeting.
- 5.6 The quorum for any church meeting other than a Special Church Meeting (see 5.14 below) shall be one quarter of the membership of the church.
- 5.7 All people on the Membership Roll of the church are entitled to vote, with the following exceptions:
  - 5.7.1 Members under eighteen years of age at the time of the meeting and have been members for less than six (6) clear months are not entitled to vote on matters affecting pastoral appointments or acquisition or disposal of church property.
- 5.8 A motion put to a church meeting will be carried by a simple majority (50% + 1 of members who are present and voting) unless otherwise provided for in this constitution or unless the meeting decides that a particular decision will require a larger majority.
- 5.9 Absentee or proxy voting is not permitted.

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- 5.10 Audited financial statements (for the preceding church year) must be presented to a church meeting in every year.
- 5.11 A budget for the next church year must be approved by a church meeting in every year.
- 5.12 An Annual Church Meeting must be held each year. Its agenda must include:
  - 5.12.1 A report/presentation by the pastor(s) and by the leadership team;
  - 5.12.2 Leadership team elections; and
  - 5.12.3 Review of the membership roll.
- 5.13 The agenda of any church meeting may include:
  - 5.13.1 Report/presentation by any church group;
  - 5.13.2 Report/presentation by any external group working in co-operation with the church;
  - 5.13.3 Other appointments the church meeting decides to make.
- 5.14 Special Church Meetings are needed to consider any decision regarding the calling, extension of term or removal of a pastor or any transaction affecting any land or buildings of the church. Special Church Meetings are governed under different rules set out in Schedule B to The Baptist Union Incorporation Act 1930.

## 6. Church property

- 6.1 Where church land/buildings enjoy a rate free status, they are not to be let by the church except in special circumstances approved by the leadership team and approved by a Special Church Meeting.
- 6.2 Subject to the direction of a church meeting, the activities of any church group or external group that is using the church's name, property, buildings or equipment, are subject to the supervision of the leadership team.
- 6.3 If a church group ceases to function, the church becomes the owner of any property purchased or owned by that group and any money in its possession.
- 6.4 In the event of the church being closed, the ownership of the property assets of the church reverts to the Baptist Union of Victoria.

## 7. Policies

7.1 The church may adopt new policies or alter existing policies on various matters for the purpose of governing aspects of the Church's life and mission, or for the purpose of expressing a collective opinion about something that is happening in the wider Church or society. The adoption of a policy requires the approval of a majority of the members who are present and who vote at a church meeting. Copies of the proposed policy must be made available to members at least two weeks prior to the meeting.

### 7.2 Values Statement

We believe that in Jesus we see a loving and compassionate God. This God calls each of us together into His church and mission. In response to God's call, we as a church community affirm and aspire to hold these values in common:

- Build *relationships* with God, each other and with the wider community
- Encourage *creativity* in our community life and mission
- Celebrate *diversity* in our people and activities
- Promote *equality* that reflects our common status before God
- *Serve* each other and the wider community

### 7.3 THE MEMBERS' COVENANT

7.3.1 Introduction.

A Covenant is both a **pledge** and a **plan**. In this covenant we are pledging our faithfulness to God and each other. This reflects God's prior faithfulness to us. We are also planning to express this commitment to God and each other in specific ways.

This covenant is intended to be a commitment by resident members of the church to one another and to the life and work of the West Preston Baptist Church. It would form part of the dialogue for acceptance into membership of the church community.

Adhering to this Covenant is not a precondition for continuing in membership of this church. Therefore while this covenant is not binding, it does suggest which way we intend to travel, and invites us to travel together. It points to some ways that we can be faithful to God and each other. It points to some specific actions that are basic to participating in church life. However, we recognise that some people may be able to affirm this covenant yet be unable to follow it through thoroughly.

It is intended that this covenant be held before the church community regularly (e.g. quarterly meetings - perhaps read by members). It should also be communicated to those seeking membership as part of the process of acceptance into membership. It may also be displayed in the church as a reminder to all members of the commitments made.

### 7.3.2 Members Covenant

In response to God's call in my life, I covenant before God, with this pastor, and this congregation to:

- Be faithful in attendance in worship and community life.
- Involve myself in at least one aspect of community life and of mission, as I am able.
- To care for both new and established participants in our congregation.
- Give of my means sacrificially, and
- To let our church's values guide my participation in its community and mission.

By this covenant I declare my committed to an innovative church, one that is warmly evangelical and socially concerned. I firmly resolve to assist the church to be a faithful people of God.

## 7.4 Policy relating to the Diaconate.

7.4.1 A member of the Diaconate and her or his spouse may not serve together on the Diaconate in the same term of office.

7.4.2 It is recommended that a Deacon resign from the Diaconate for one year if they have served for three consecutive terms of two years each.

7.4.3 Deacons may take leave of absence for up to twelve months after approval by the Diaconate. This clause may apply in circumstances such as maternity leave, illness, or other changes in circumstances that the Diaconate considers to be significant.

## 8. Alteration to this Constitution

**8.1** No proposed alteration to this Constitution can be brought to a church meeting unless notice of the wording of the proposed alteration has been given to members at least four weeks prior to the meeting date. If the church is in debt to The Baptist Union of Victoria, any proposed alteration does not take effect until approved by the Executive Council of The Baptist Union of Victoria.

**8.2** This Constitution remains in operation until it is revised or replaced by a church meeting. It is recommended that a review of this constitution's continuing suitability should be undertaken at least once every five years, and a church meeting asked to either reaffirm it or revise it.

**Appendix I****The Doctrinal Basis****from the Constitution of the Baptist Union of Victoria**

1. The divine inspiration and supreme authority of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.
2. The existence of one God in three persons - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
3. The deity and incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity.
4. The fallen, sinful and lost estate of all people.
5. The salvation of men and women from the penal consequences and power of sin through the perfect obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ, His atoning death, His resurrection from the dead, His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and His unchanging priesthood.
6. The immediate work of the Holy Spirit in the regeneration of men and women, in their sanctification, and in their preservation to the heavenly Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.
7. The necessity, in order to know salvation, of repentance towards God and of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
8. The resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment of all people by the Lord Jesus Christ.
9. The two ordinances of the Lord Jesus Christ, namely Baptism and the Lord's Supper, which are of perpetual obligation: Baptism being the immersion of believers upon the profession of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and a symbol of the fellowship of the regenerate in His death, burial and resurrection; the Lord's Supper being a memorial, until He comes, of the sacrifice of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

## Appendix II

### **The Principles and Ideals of the Baptist Faith from the Constitution of the Baptist Union of Victoria**

Whilst holding many phases of Christian Truth in common with other denominations, Baptists place a distinctive emphasis upon the following fundamental principles of the Christian Faith, as revealed in the New Testament.

#### **1. The Child in the Kingdom.**

- (a) Baptists believe that infants are God's little ones, whether children of Christian or non-Christian parents, and accept without modification the word of the Lord, "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven". This Christian view of the child makes the external act of "Infant Baptism" unnecessary.
- (b) Baptists approve of the presentation of children to God by parents, if thereby they solemnly undertake to train them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, in the home and in the Church.

#### **2. The Significance of Conversion.** (a) To all who at the stage of personal responsibility, ignore God's law, and wander as

- prodigals from the Father's Home, Baptists preach the gospel of the Father's love, and the message of the cross, as the Way of Life. Conversion is acceptance of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.
- (b) This acceptance of Christ is a personal and deliberate act, involving the assent of the mind, the decision of the will, and the love of the heart.
  - (c) This avowal of allegiance to Christ implies a constant endeavor to live a life worthy of, and well-pleasing to Him in all things.

#### **3. The Church - a Spiritual Society.** Baptists hold that the Church, as established by the Lord Jesus Christ should consist of persons who have personally and intelligently accepted Him as Saviour and Lord, and pledged themselves to discipleship and service in the Kingdom of God.

#### **4. The Lordship of Christ in the Church.**(a) Baptists hold and teach that Jesus Christ alone is the Head of the Church, and that without

- any human intervention or ritualistic ceremony.
- b) Therefore, He is the sole authority in all matters of faith and conduct, in the life both of the Church and of the individual.
  - (c) This involves liberty of thought and conscience, and the rights of the Believer and the Church, freed from any ecclesiastical or other external authority, to interpret His mind.

#### **5. The Standard of Belief.**(a) Believing that the voice of the Church is subordinate to the voice of Christ, and that the

mind of the Master is the Standard of Christian belief, Baptists do not subscribe to any formal Church Creed lest it hamper the development of Christian thought.

- (b) Further, in their interpretation of the Lord's farewell declaration, "When He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth", Baptists accept the principle that God has yet "more light and truth to break forth from His Word".
- (c) Therefore, Baptists claim the personal privilege, and accept the Christian responsibility of courageously thinking God's thoughts after Him, under the guidance and inspiration of the Spirit of Truth.

## 6. **The Ministry of Leadership.**

- (a) In adopting the Congregational Principles of Church government, with no formal creed, with no external authority, and no defined ecclesiastical policy, and each member having equal rights and responsibilities, the Baptist Church is largely dependent on the reality and vigor of the spiritual life of its individual members.
- (b) This spiritual life is generated by the understanding and inspiration of Christ's ideals, and by the creation and maintenance of a spiritual atmosphere, in which all that is unworthy dies, and in which Christian life becomes healthy and aggressive.
- (c) Baptist ministers accept their office from the Lord of the Church, and while they are "servants of the Church" the Church is not master over them. They are the spiritual leaders in the life and ministry of the church.
- (d) Associated with the ministers in the spiritual oversight of the Church are men and women chosen for their Christian gifts and graces, who are called to be examples to the members of the Church, in conduct, zeal, self-denial and generosity.
- (e) Church officers are appointed as spiritual leaders to work in sympathetic cooperation with the minister and Church members.
- (f) The periodic Church Business Meeting is the centre of the Church's Christian activities, and is the seat of authority in the management of Church business.

## 7. **The Christian significance of Baptism.**

- (a) Christian Baptism, by which is meant the immersion of believers as instituted by our Lord, is a personal, public confession of the believer's identification with Christ, and also a means of grace to the Christian.
- (b) Baptism is an outward act which symbolises, but does not effect regeneration, and salvation is not dependent on it.
- (c) Baptism is a glorious privilege and a personal responsibility, and is a help to all believers in reminding them of their spiritual union with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection.

## 8. **The Fellowship of the Lord's Supper.**

- a) To Baptists the Church is not so much an organisation as a fellowship, effective only as there is spiritual association with the Head of the Church.
- b) The Lord's Supper is a service of spiritual fellowship whereby, through remembrance of His Life and Death believers may experience in supreme degree the reality and influence of His Presence.
- c) It is an opportunity of entering into close fellowship with the Lord in the Holy of Holies, where there is a rekindling of love and a reconsecration of life to His service.

**9. The Church and the Kingdom.**

Baptists recognise their responsibility to strive for the establishment of the Kingdom of God in the world and teach that membership in the Church implies service and sacrifice. This involves a stewardship of time, talents and money which aims at being worthy of the Son of God who loved and served humankind, even unto death.

## Appendix III

### Schedule B to The Baptist Union Incorporation Act 1930 ... a plain English summary ...

This summary has been prepared by the Union office as a guide to the operation of Schedule B. It is a guide only. We recommend that Schedule B in its original form be read when specific questions arise. If you are in doubt about the meaning of a particular provision, please contact the Union office.

The Baptist Union of Victoria ("Union") holds property on trust for its member churches for the following purposes and subject to the following conditions:

1. To allow the member church concerned ("Church" to build/alter a sanctuary, manse or other buildings/structures as desired by the Church. These buildings are to be used as directed by the Church.
2. Based firmly on the principles of congregational government, the Church has complete discretion to manage its affairs, subject to clause 10 below.
- 3 The Church is entitled to direct the use of money received by it.
- 4 A pastor called (including for a new term) to the Church:
  - 4.1 must be Baptist;
  - 4.2 must be called (including for a new term) by a Special Church Meeting complying with clause 10 below;
  - 4.3 must subscribe to the Doctrinal Basis [reproduced as Appendix I].
  - 4.4 and a pastor removed from the Church must be dismissed by a Special Church Meeting complying with clause 10 below.
5. The Church is entitled to use its property as security to borrow money. The decision to mortgage or otherwise charge the Church property must be made at a special Church meeting complying with clause 10 below.
6. The Church is entitled to:
  - 6.1 create easements over;
  - 6.2 construct roads over;
  - 6.3 sell;
 its property. Without the consent of the Executive Council of the Union ("Executive Council"), the Church may not sell its property at substantially less than current market value.

7. Money received by the Church:
  - 7.1 raised by way of mortgage of Church property;
  - 7.2 derived by sale of Church property;
  - 7.3 received as an insurance payout in relation to Church property; must be used for further property purchase or building improvements. Moneys so derived are deposited with the Union in the normal course until the Church directs the use of the money.
8. The Church is entitled to rent Church property on terms decided by a special Church meeting complying with clause 10 below.
9. Where the Union receives money on behalf of the Church, the payee has no further responsibility to follow up the payment.
10. The special Church meetings referred to above:
  - 10.1 may generally be called at any time;
  - 10.2 may be called by the Church leadership;
  - 10.3 must be called upon the written request of at least one-sixth of the members of the Church;
  - 10.4 must be convened by 14 days' clear notice specifying the time, place and purpose of the meeting

At a special Church meeting:

- 10.5 persons voting must be over 18 years, must have been members of the Church for at least 6 months, and must have been present at Church for communion at least once in the preceding 6 months; and
- 10.6 a two-thirds majority vote is required. (the two-thirds rule relates to two-thirds of all those members present and voting. if the vote is by ballot and invalid votes are cast, the number of invalid votes must still be included in the total number of votes against which the two-thirds requirement is measured.)
11. A minute signed by the chairperson of a Church meeting is sufficient evidence that the minute is an accurate record of a Church decision.
12. In special circumstances of the Church owing money that the Union is liable to pay, the Union may, having given 6 months written notice to the Church, mortgage or sell Church property so as to cover the debt.
13. The beneficial ownership and control of Church property by the Church is not affected per se if the Church moves to another locality.
14. In relation to the powers vested in the Church by clauses 4,5,7,8 and 13 above, the Church may, at any time, ask Executive Council to stand in the shoes of the Church and be able to exercise those powers in the Church's stead. Executive Council and

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the Church may later both determine that those powers will revert back to the Church.

15. If:
- 15.1 the Church is dissolved;
  - 15.2 the Church is dispersed;
  - 15.3 the membership of the Church is reduced below 6; or
  - 15.4 public worship in the Church sanctuary property stops for six months (not being for building alterations)
- the Union automatically assumes full control of the Church property.  
[At this stage any proceeds of sale of Church property by the Union would be deposited in the Union's Advancement Fund.]
- 15A. If the resident membership of the Church is reduced to less than 29 but more than 5, Executive Council may exercise the powers vested in the Church by clauses 4,5,7,8 and 13 above. Executive Council may only exercise this discretion to stand in the shoes of the Church if it has given three months written notice of its intention to the Church and to Assembly. The Executive Council action must also have the endorsement of Assembly. Executive Council and the Church may later agree and both determine that the powers vested in Executive Council will revert back to the Church.
16. If the Church moves to another locality and leases the original Church property, then, until the end of the lease, the clause 15 "trigger" above, relating to the absence of public worship for at least six months, does not apply.

Trevor Spicer  
Union Administrator

13 October 2000