



# Baptist Churches

## WESTERN AUSTRALIA

### Membership Policy

#### 1 Purpose

- 1.1 The Baptist Union of Western Australia Incorporated (BUWA) is an Incorporated Association in the State of Western Australia meeting the requirements of the Associations Incorporation Act 2015.
- 1.2 The Constitution of BUWA outlines the eligibility requirements for membership and maintaining membership of BUWA and refers to the Relationship Agreement as the agreement between Member Churches to support one another in fulfilling God's mission to Western Australia and beyond.<sup>1</sup>
- 1.3 The Membership Policy defines the responsibilities for the acceptance and maintenance of Membership with BUWA.

#### 2 Scope

- 2.1 The Constitution of BUWA describes two types of groups recognised by BUWA: Other Groups, and Members.
- 2.2 Other Groups means bodies in the process of becoming churches, associated congregations and other groups who do not meet the full requirements for Member Churches but whose ministry is recognised by the Union as valid.<sup>2</sup>
- 2.3 Member Churches means churches that have been accepted into membership under clause 8.3 of the Constitution and have not ceased to be members under clauses 8.4 or 8.6 of the Constitution.<sup>3</sup>
- 2.4 The Council has delegated authority to give guarantees on behalf of Member Churches, and Other Groups, where consistent with the Declaration of Trust of the Union and also on behalf of Societies and Agencies of the Union.<sup>4</sup>
- 2.5 The Council has delegated authority to confer among the Member Churches and Other Groups of the Union on matters of Christian principle and opinion and to make public declaration of principles and opinion, and to confer and cooperate with other Christian communities as occasion may require.<sup>5</sup>
- 2.6 The Council has delegated responsibility for the governance of BUWA and have the authority to implement policy, make public comment on social questions and establish and maintain policies and guiding principles that authorise the Director of Ministries to lead the Union towards the fulfilment of its Objects.<sup>6</sup>
- 2.7 The scope of this policy covers the Council, Director of Ministries and all Other Groups and Members of BUWA, and associations seeking or gaining recognition of BUWA.

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<sup>1</sup> The Constitution of the Baptist Union of Western Australia Incorporated clause 3. Definitions

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. clause 3 Definitions

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. clause 3 Definitions

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. clause 6.5

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 6.6

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 10.7

## 3 Principles

### 3.1 General

- 3.1.1 The membership of BUWA is made up of Member Churches.
- 3.1.2 The Relationship Agreement, as set by Council from time to time, is a covenantal agreement between Member Churches, is administered by BUWA on behalf of members, and contains the requirements for ongoing membership of BUWA.
- 3.1.3 The Relationship Agreement covenant forms part of this Membership Policy.
- 3.1.4 The Director of Ministries will ensure that appropriate Guidelines and processes for applications for membership meet the requirements of Section 8 of the Constitution, the Membership Policy, including the Relationship Agreement Covenant, as set by Council from time to time.
- 3.1.5 The Director of Ministries will ensure that guidelines and processes exist to enable BUWA staff to support and equip churches towards eligibility for, and maintaining of, membership of BUWA.

### 3.2 Doctrinal Statements

- 3.2.1 To be eligible to become or continue as a Member Church, the Church at the time of applying and thereafter must have a doctrinal statement that is compatible with the Statement of Faith of the Union (clause 4 of the Constitution) and also expresses the principle of Congregational Government, including the principle that the final authority for the Church is vested in the Church Members' Meeting.<sup>7</sup>
- 3.2.2 The Statement of Faith of the Union represents the essential elements of belief for Membership of BUWA, and recognises that individual churches may hold specific theological positions on various matters within, or beyond, those within the Statement of Faith. It is expected that any additions or differences would be aligned with the Statement of Faith, and not contradict the essence of the Statement of Faith. These would be determined by the Member Church's members' meeting and reflected in a form of Doctrinal Statement.<sup>8</sup>
- 3.2.3 Doctrinal Statements may be expressed in Statements of Faith, Doctrines, By-laws, Position Papers, Policies and other forms that declare a BUWA, or a Member Church's, particular theological position on specific matters. Positions held by an individual Member Church do not represent the BUWA but the local Member Church.
- 3.2.4 The Director of Ministries will ensure that there are staff and resources to assist Member Churches in the provision and review of Doctrinal Statements taking into considering the BUWA Statement of Faith, and any other BUWA Doctrinal Statements.
- 3.2.5 Member Churches will consult with the Director of Ministries, or delegates, when considering or reviewing Doctrinal Statements.
- 3.2.6 Member Churches will provide the Director of Ministries, or delegates, with copies of their Constitution and any Doctrinal Statements for review prior to adoption.
- 3.2.7 Where a Doctrinal Statement varies from, or is not contained within, the Statement of Faith of BUWA, the Director of Ministries will ensure that discussions are held with the Church leadership to discern whether the difference is consistent with the Statement of Faith of BUWA, as required by section 8.2 of the BUWA Constitution.
- 3.2.8 From time to time, the Council may make declarations of principles and opinions that are Doctrinal Statements on behalf of BUWA. Such positions will result in policies that are applicable to the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 8.2

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 4.1.5; 4.3

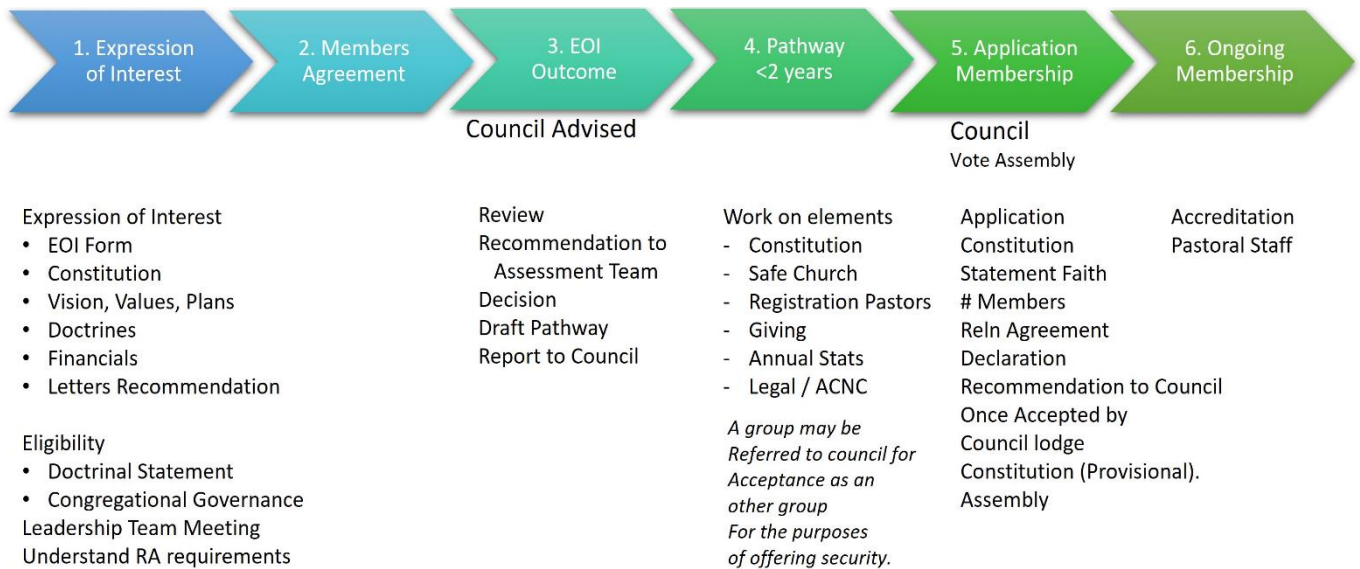
responsibilities of BUWA Council, including Accreditation, staffing and appointment of Council members.<sup>9</sup>

- 3.2.9 Declarations made under 3.2.8 will be distributed to Member Churches for presentation to their members to discern whether the Member Church will adopt its own Doctrinal Statement, following the requirements outlined in clauses 3.2.4 - 3.2.7. Where a Member Church does not have or adopt a Doctrinal Position on the particular topic, the BUWA position is assumed to apply.
- 3.2.10 The Director of Ministries will ensure that the Guidelines Concerning Congregational Government are considered when assessing an application for Membership, and upon any change to a Member Churches’ constitution.

### 3.3 Legal Compliance

- 3.3.1 The Statement of Faith of BCWA recognises that God has given to human governments the right and responsibility to promote what is good. In order to be responsible citizens, Member Churches are expected to uphold and comply with legal requirements and other necessary obligations, assuming the instructions of Scripture are not contradicted, as represented in the Statement of Faith and Doctrinal positions.<sup>10</sup>
- 3.3.2 The Director of Ministries will ensure that necessary supports are in place to assist and equip Member Churches in understanding and maintaining any legal or external requirements. A list of key statutory obligations and requirements will be reviewed by the Council and published annually by the Director of Ministries.

### 3.4 Gaining Membership



- 3.4.1 We believe the most effective way to grow our denomination and participate in the expansion of the Kingdom of God, is by having our existing churches plant new churches, congregations and campuses. However, we also recognise that independent churches will also seek affiliation as we endeavour to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ through Western Australia.
- 3.4.2 The Director of Ministries will ensure that processes are in place for churches enquiring about membership, and that resources and staff are available to support and equip a church in meeting the requirements of membership in this Policy and as outlined in the Relationship Agreement.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 6.6

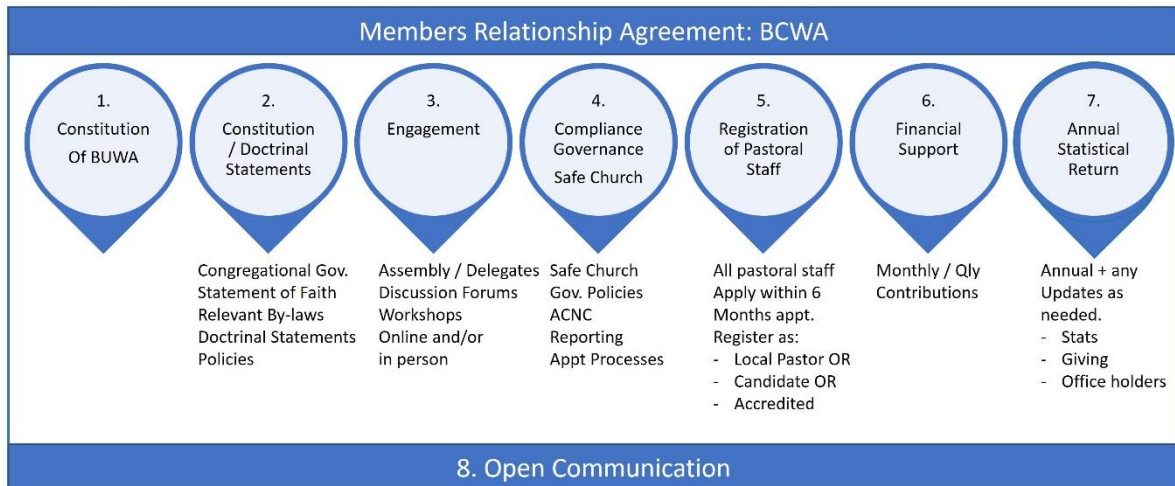
<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 4.1.5 and Guidelines Concerning Congregational Government 3.2.9

- 3.4.3 Where an enquiry is received from a group that has resulted from a church split, the Director of Ministries will ensure that sufficient steps are undertaken to reconcile the churches prior to an application proceeding.
- 3.4.4 The Director of Ministries has the authority to issue an approval to proceed to an enquiring church who is willing to work towards meeting the commitments of the Relationship Agreement. Any such approval will be reported to the Council along with the Pathway towards meeting the Relationship Agreement. This Pathway would normally be no longer than 2 years.
- 3.4.5 A church making such an enquiry, or issued with an approval to proceed, and being supported by BUWA staff, will not be entitled to claim affiliation with or use the BCWA name or logo until the Membership Process has been completed and the church has been accepted as a Member Church by the Assembly.
- 3.4.6 The Director of Ministries will not allow applications for membership to be presented to Council that do not meet the Constitutional Requirements for membership, the Relationship Agreement or pose significant risk to BUWA.
- 3.4.7 The Director of Ministries will ensure that recommendations to Council clearly demonstrate an applicant's capacity to meet the Relationship Agreement Commitments. The recommendations made to Council will include the application form, references, a declaration of acceptance of BUWA Constitution and Statement of Faith; the number of members and confirmation of acceptance of the Relationship Agreement.
- 3.4.8 The Council must be satisfied that the applicant church is fulfilling all of the commitments listed in the Relationship Agreement.
- 3.4.9 All Churches will be admitted to membership as per the Constitution, Bylaws and Policies of the BUWA.
- 3.4.10 Council is empowered to provisionally accept applications for membership, subject to ratification by the Assembly. All applications for membership must be presented to the Assembly for approval or ratification.
- 3.4.11 Once Council is satisfied that all of these requirements are met, the BUWA will write to the joining church advising them of their decision to recommend the church for membership to the Assembly.
- 3.4.12 Council may recommend that the church becomes an 'Other Group' with the BCWA, under the oversight of the assigned BCWA representative. If the church is recognised as an 'Other Group' with the BCWA, regular reviews will be undertaken at agreed intervals to move towards Membership.
- 3.4.13 The Director of Ministries may recommend to Council the acceptance of an Organisation who does not meet the requirements for Membership to Council for recognition as an 'Other Group'. An Agreement outlining the requirements of recognition, the review date, and any conditions must form part of the recommendation. This will at least include acceptance of the BUWA Constitution, and BUWA Policies.
- 3.4.14 Whilst no fee is payable on application for membership, Member Churches are expected to contribute to the finances of the Union in accordance with the Relationship Agreement.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 8.2A

### 3.5 Maintaining Membership



- 3.5.1 The Director of Ministries will ensure that Member Churches are informed of and encouraged to support the ministries of BUWA, Australian Baptist Ministries and related agencies including Baptist World Aid Australia, Baptist Mission Australia, Baptistcare, Crossover Australia and Morling College.
- 3.5.2 The Director of Ministries will ensure that resources and staff are in place to support churches in maintaining the commitments of the Relationship Agreement.
- 3.5.3 The Director of Ministries will inform Council of the membership status of Member Churches on at least an annual basis.
- 3.5.4 Where a Member Church is unable to uphold a commitment, appropriate enquiries and discussions will be held between representatives of BUWA and the Member Church in order to understand the reasons and consider courses of action to uphold the Relationship Agreement.
- 3.5.5 Notwithstanding the commitments within the Relationship Agreement, a Member Church may make an application to the Council requesting a variation. The application will identify the item within the Relationship Agreement, the variation, timeframe and the reasons for the request. The Council will consider the application and advise the Member Church of a decision to accept or deny the request, and any conditions of the variation.
- 3.5.6 Should a Member Church adopt a Constitution that does not include congregational governance, or holds a doctrinal position that is incompatible with the Statement of Faith, the Director of Ministries will ensure discussions take place with the Member Church to seek to understand the differences. If there is no resolution and the Member Church decides to maintain their position, the matter will be referred to Council for action. Such action may include inviting the Member Church to resign membership.
- 3.5.7 Where a Member Church is in ongoing breach of the Relationship Agreement; maintains a Doctrinal Statement incompatible with the Statement of Faith of BUWA; has a governance structure that does not reflect Congregational Governance; or poses a significant risk to the reputation of BUWA, the Director of Ministries will provide Council with a detailed report, and recommendations for action to be taken.

### 3.6 Ceasing Membership

- 3.6.1 Where a Member Church, not being an association incorporated under the Act, is unable to function, the Director of Ministries will inform the Council. The Council, through its delegates, is empowered to, in consultation with the church, take control of the affairs of that Member Church,

and where appropriate, dispose of or otherwise deal with its assets, including the distribution of any surplus assets.<sup>12</sup>

- 3.6.2 The Council is empowered to declare that the membership of any Church with the Union will cease as from a certain date. The declaration of the Council stating reasons for such declaration will be conveyed to the Church concerned by the Director of Ministries or delegate in such manner as the Council may decide. Council shall inform the Assembly of the actions taken.<sup>13</sup>
- 3.6.3 Where the Council takes action under clause 8.4 or clause 8.5 of the Constitution, the Church concerned will have a right of appeal under clause 17.
- 3.6.4 A Member Church may at any time request that its membership of the Union will cease. The Church will advise the Council of the request in writing. The Council will seek to arrange discussion with the Church. If the Church maintains its desire to cease membership, the Church may so notify the Council in writing and as from the time when that notice is received by the Council, the membership of that Church will cease. The Council will report on the cessation of membership to the next Assembly.<sup>14</sup>

## 4 Relationship Agreement

Because of our mutual relationship with one another, Member Churches play an active role in supporting one another within the Baptist Churches Western Australia (BCWA) – by practically, prayerfully and financially supporting one another as we share the Good News of Jesus Christ locally, throughout our nation, and across the world.

Member Churches of The Baptist Union of Western Australia Incorporated (BUWA) agree to:

1. The Constitution of The Baptist Union of Western Australia Incorporated.
2. Adopting and maintaining a Constitution and doctrinal statement that is compatible with the Statement of Faith of the Union and also expresses the principle of Congregational Government, including the principle that the final authority for the Church is vested in the Church Members' Meeting<sup>15</sup>.
3. Actively engaging in our mutual relationship with one another through participation in Assembly and other discussion and forums, whether in person or online.
4. Adopt, implement, and maintain appropriate policies and procedures for the ongoing safety and governance of the church consistent with relevant legislation and denominational requirements.
5. Appoint Pastoral Staff who are Registered with BCWA, or apply for Registration within 6 months of their appointment.
6. Financially supporting shared ministries through the Annual Partnership Ministry Contribution of a minimum of 5% annual general church income.
7. Complete and submit the church annual statistical return to Baptist Churches Western Australia.
8. Open communication with Baptist Churches Western Australia in meeting these responsibilities and expectations.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 8.4

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 8.5

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 8.7

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. clause 8.2

## Document History and Version Control Record

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<b>Associated External Documents:</b>			
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