

Open Icon Baptist Church

CONSTITUTION

(As adopted 11 September 2016)

1. Name

Open Icon Baptist Church (“the church”)

2. Basis of Church Fellowship

- 2.1. The church is a body of Christian people who have responded to the proclamation of the Word of God and the call of the Holy Spirit and have been united to Jesus Christ and to his people in their baptism and in their own confession of faith.
- 2.2. The church baptises professing believers as a sign of their salvation and their initiation into the membership of the body of Christ. Wherever practicable, baptism is practised 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.
- 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 fulfil the meaning of their baptism by exercising their gifts together in nurturing the growth of Christian faith, peace and love.
- 2.5. The church’s present understanding of its specific call and mission is expressed in a covenant.
 - 2.5.1. The current Church Covenant is included as Appendix 1 to this constitution.
 - 2.5.2. The Covenant should be reviewed and either readopted or replaced at a Church meeting during the Easter Season each year. All members of the church are then invited to pledge to live by the Church Covenant for the next year. The pledge is made together during a worship service, which will normally be held on the Sunday nearest the Church Anniversary (June 18th) each year.
 - 2.5.3. The adoption of a new Church Covenant is governed by section 7 - *Policies*.

3. Membership

3.1. Eligibility for Membership

Membership of the church is open to any person who has a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, who is committed to the mission of the church and who is willing to commit to the covenant of the church for the current year.

3.2. Confirmation of Membership

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;

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 Saviour;

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 Saviour, as an affirmation of their baptismal vows.

3.3. If a person seeks to become a member of the church, having been a member of another church, a letter of commendation will usually be sought from that other church.

3.4. Membership Roll

3.4.1. A roll will be kept of the names of the members of the church ("the membership roll").

3.4.2. The membership roll will be revised at each Annual Church Meeting on the basis of a report prepared by a person authorised to do so.

3.4.3. A reserve roll will be kept containing the names of those members who the church meeting wishes to continue to recognise as members despite their inability to continue fulfilling the requirements of membership. Those on the reserve roll do not have formal voting rights at church meetings. Members on the reserve roll may be reinstated to the full roll upon renewing their participation and commitment to the covenant. A meeting of the church must ratify reinstatement before the member is permitted to vote at any church meeting.

3.5. A name may be removed from the membership roll at any time if the member:

3.5.1. requests a transfer of membership to another church;

3.5.2. requests removal from the membership roll;

3.5.3. dies;

- 3.5.4. 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).
- 3.5.5. has not attended the church in the past year unless the church meeting notes that special circumstances apply, in which case the name will be moved to the reserve roll.
- or
- 3.5.6. the member is unable or unwilling to commit to the covenant for the current year. Such members will have their names placed on the reserve roll.

4. Leadership and Decision Making

- 4.1. The church's members, seeking to discern the will of God in an open church meeting, have final authority in determining the shape and the direction of the church's life. The church meeting can delegate authority for special projects or for the day-to-day management of various organisational and administrative tasks to suitably able individuals or task groups.
- 4.2. The number of covenanting members of the church required to form a quorum for a church meeting is one third of the covenanting members or seven covenanting members, whichever is the greater.
- 4.3. The following principles will guide the decision making processes of all meetings of the congregation or task groups operating on behalf of and/or as part of the congregation:
 - 4.3.1. The emphasis is always on discerning the mind of Christ, not determining the mind of the majority.
 - 4.3.2. Discerning the mind of Christ happens most reliably when a group gathers to prayerfully listen to one another, and therefore absentees may send an opinion, but not exercise a vote.
 - 4.3.3. Decisions will normally be made on a consensus basis, including all those who are present at the meeting, and without unnecessary recourse to the formalities of voting and allowing the participation of all who are present at the meeting. However the chairperson of any meeting is empowered to invoke the formal conventions of meeting process.
 - 4.3.4. Where consensus has not been achieved:
 - 4.3.4.1. A proposal that is being considered for the first time and has more than 50%, but less than 80% support from the church members present and voting will be deferred for further consideration at a subsequent meeting.
 - 4.3.4.2. Where a decision needs to be finalised by a formal vote, the meeting must first seek to understand the spread of opinion and its implications. Before voting, all present at the meeting must have an

opportunity to contribute to the discussion, followed by a time for prayerful silent reflection on the implications. The decision must receive two-thirds support from the church members present and voting in order for the vote to be concluded in the affirmative. If however a choice must be made because status quo is not an option, a decision may be made by a simple majority of church members present and voting.

4.4. The Pastors

- 4.4.1. The pastors of the church will be persons whom the church believes to have been called and gifted by the Lord of the Church to fulfil a ministry of spiritual leadership in word, sacrament and pastoral care.
- 4.4.2. To become a pastor of the church, a person must be eligible for membership of the church and be willing to be a covenanting member.
- 4.4.3. The following decisions about a pastor of the church each require a two-thirds majority of the members who are present and who vote at a 'Schedule B' (refer Section 5:11 & 5:11) Church Meeting:
 - 4.4.3.1. The calling of a pastor.
 - 4.4.3.2. The approval of any extension of term if a pastor has been called for a specific term.
 - 4.4.3.3. The removal of a pastor.

(The whole of clause 5.4.3 exists because of and summarises some of the requirements of Schedule B of The Baptist Union Incorporation Act 1930. A plain English summary of Schedule B, prepared by The Baptist Union of Victoria, is reproduced as Appendix IV to this Constitution)

4.5. The Leadership Group

- 4.5.1. A leadership group may be established at any time, by a majority vote at a church meeting, to exercise oversight of those areas of the church's life and ministry delegated to it by the church meeting.
- 4.5.2. Any meeting that votes to establish a leadership group must also vote to establish a policy (see section 7 - *Policies*) to govern the appointment and workings of the leadership group.

5. Church Meetings

- 5.1. Church meetings to consider the life and ministry of the church must be held at least twice each year. The quorum for such meetings is as defined in Section 4.2.
- 5.2. Church meetings will be called if requested by the pastor, the Leadership Group, one quarter of the membership of the church, or by any church meeting.

- 5.3. Whenever a church meeting is set, notice of the time, place and any special business of the meeting must be given to members on at least two Sundays prior to the meeting date.
- 5.4. Every church meeting must have an agenda prepared by or for the Leadership group or by those who called the meeting.
- 5.5. Records of the decisions of all church meetings must be kept.
- 5.6. Absentee or proxy voting is not permitted.
- 5.7. Financial statements (for the preceding church year) must be presented to a church meeting in every year. If the Treasurer or other person preparing the statements is a signatory to the church bank accounts, then the annual financial statements should be externally audited. A Church Meeting or the Leadership Group may decide at any time to require that the financial statements be audited.
- 5.8. An Annual Church Meeting must be held each year. Its agenda must include:
 - 5.8.1. a report/presentation by the pastors with opportunity for questions;
 - 5.8.2. a review of the membership roll;
and
 - 5.8.3. a statement of the financial situation of the church; and
 - 5.8.4. a budget for the next church year, which requires approval.
- 5.9. The agenda of any church meeting may include:
 - 5.9.1. report/presentation by any church group;
 - 5.9.2. report/presentation by any external group working in co-operation with the church;
 - 5.9.3. other appointments the church meeting decides to make.
- 5.10. Special Business Meetings will be called as and when required.
 - 5.10.1. Examples of the kinds of business requiring such meetings are:
 - 5.10.1.1. The annual approval of the membership of the Leadership Group.
 - 5.10.1.2. The affirmation or removal of someone from or into the Leadership Group.
 - 5.10.1.3. Changes to the Church Constitution.
 - 5.10.1.4. Disputed and unresolved matters referred from a meeting of a group or council within the church.
 - 5.10.2. Special Business Meetings may not deal with any business other than that for which the meeting was called.

- 5.10.3. When appropriate, Special Business Meetings may be convened at a time that allows opportunity for a full discussion and a process of discernment and decision within the one meeting.
- 5.10.4. The rules governing Special Church Meetings are the same as those governing Church Meetings. Refer 4.2, 4.3, 5.2 - 5.6 of the Constitution.
- 5.11. "Schedule B" Church Meetings are needed to consider any decision regarding
 - 5.11.1. the calling, extension of term or removal of a pastor
or
 - 5.11.2. any transaction affecting any land or buildings of the church.
- 5.12. Schedule B Church Meetings are governed under different rules set out in *Schedule B to The Baptist Union Incorporation Act 1930*.

6. Church property

- 6.1. Acknowledging the rate free status of church land/buildings, they are not to be leased by the church except in special circumstances 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 who are using the church's name, property, buildings or equipment, are subject to the supervision of the Church Meeting.
- 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 their possession.

7. Policies

The church may adopt new policies or alter existing policies about any matter at any time. The adoption of a policy requires the approval of two-thirds of the members of the church who are present and who vote at a church meeting. Copies of the proposed policy must be made available to all church members at least two weeks prior to the meeting. All existing policies are included as Appendix 2 to this constitution.

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.
- 8.2. Any alteration to this Constitution requires the approval of two-thirds of the members of the church who are present and who vote at a church meeting. 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.

- 8.3. The ongoing operation of this Constitution must be reviewed by a church meeting no more than five (5) years after adoption, at which time it should be amended and readopted or replaced.