

Constitution

Basis

1. This Church shall consist only of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, who believe in the existence of the three co-equal Persons in the Godhead — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — and that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are of Divine Authority and constitute the only infallible rule of faith and practice. The Church shall be governed on congregational principles, viz: The Church having full power to manage its affairs.

Objects

2. The life of the Church shall centre in worship, in the preaching of the Word, in the observance of the two sacraments of Believer's Baptism and the Lord's Supper, in growth, in fellowship and in witness and service to those outside of the church.

Membership

3. Membership

(i) Theological presuppositions regarding the relationship between baptism and church membership

- a) As a church we teach and practice the baptism of believers by immersion, in obedience to the command of Jesus to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."
- b) As a symbol of the grace of God in the gospel, and of repentance and faith in Jesus, baptism ideally belongs at the point of, or very soon after, conversion. We aim for a practice where conversion, baptism and church membership go together, and are chronologically as close to each other as possible.
- c) We recognise that symbols are important, but less important than the realities they stand for. Hence, baptism is important, but less important than repentance and faith in Christ, and a life of discipleship.
- d) Whilst there is a command from Christ to us as a church to make disciples and baptise them (Mt 28:19), and a command to unbelievers to repent and be baptised in the name of Jesus (eg. Acts 2:38), the New Testament does not directly address the situation that is common today, where someone was converted some years before, in a church that did not practice believers' baptism, and then wishes to join a church that does. For us to make it a requirement for church membership that such people undergo baptism years after their conversion would be to go beyond the Scriptures.

(ii) Requirements for membership

- a) Only publicly professing believers in Jesus Christ, who desire to participate actively in the life of this local fellowship of believers, shall be admitted as members of Petersham Baptist Church.
- b) Applications for membership shall be lodged with the Pastors (or in the absence of Pastors, with the Elders or Leadership Team), and be dealt with by the Church, after visitation by two members (supervised by an Elder), at a duly constituted Church Business Meeting, and shall not be accepted unless their admittance gains at least three-fourths of the votes of members present.

Normally, applicants for membership will have already been participating in the life of the church for long enough to enable an assessment of their suitability for membership.

- c) The requirement of public profession of faith may be met by:
 - i) baptism as a professing believer, whether at this church or another
 - ii) some other form of public declaration of faith (e.g. by confirmation) at another church, or
 - iii) public declaration of faith (e.g. by verbal testimony) at Petersham Baptist Church.

Normally, it would be expected that those who have come to faith in Jesus Christ through the ministry of Petersham Baptist Church, or have come to faith elsewhere in the recent past, would make their public declaration of faith in the form of baptism as a believer, by immersion.

- d) In the case of those who have come to Petersham Baptist Church from another church, where they have been members, a letter of transfer may be requested from that church.
 - e) Only persons who hold the belief of "the baptism of believers only by immersion" can:
 - i) be called as a pastor of the church
 - ii) be a delegate of the church to the Assembly of the Baptist Union, or
 - iii) be entitled to vote on a resolution concerning property.
 - f) All members shall be expected to contribute regularly to the funds of the Church, and as far as possible attend and sustain its various meetings, and to engage in such Christian work as they have time and ability to do.
4. All Church members shall be expected to communicate regularly with the Church through the Pastors or Elders. The Pastors and Elders shall be responsible for the maintenance of contact with all members.
5. On behalf of the Leadership Team, the Elders will use the following procedure to review the membership roll:
- a) The official member roll is reviewed at least annually.
 - b) Members to be deleted from the roll are identified. The reasons for deletion from the roll must be either:

- i) death
 - ii) church transfer
 - iii) not actively supportive of PBC (apart from infirmity or temporary relocation), or
 - iv) unrepentance in the face of the clear teaching of Scripture.
- c) The procedure for removing a member from the roll entails:
- i) attempts to contact the relevant member, notifying them of the review and explaining the reasons for the recommended deletion
 - ii) a recommendation endorsed by the Leadership Team, and
 - iii) a decision by vote made by the church meeting.
6. Members who are unable to take an active part in the life of the Church because of residence in a district distant from the Church or by reason of incapacity, or who are not currently regularly attending PBC for other reasons, may be noted as “inactive” on the Members Roll by the Elders.

Ordinances

7. Ordinances
- a) The Communion of the Lord's Supper shall be observed regularly.
 - b) The Church welcomes applications from believers for Baptism. At his discretion, a Pastor (or another Christian at the discretion of the Pastor) may administer this Ordinance after suitable instruction.

Discipline

8. Cases appearing to require the exercise of discipline by the Church shall be investigated by the Pastors and the Elders, who shall at their discretion report to the Church via the Leadership Team.

Church Business Meetings

9. The ordinary Church Business Meeting shall be held quarterly. The Pastor or a nominated representative shall preside at all such meetings and in his absence the meeting shall appoint a chairman.
- a) Special Church Business Meetings may be called by the Leadership Team or by a requisition signed by eight members where such members believe exceptional circumstances apply. All Church meetings shall be announced, on the previous Sunday at morning and evening services except in the case of property decisions and pastoral and other staff appointments which require two weeks' notice (see Clauses 10 and 11).

- b) Persons who are not members of the Church shall be allowed to attend Church Business Meetings provided that:
 - i) they may not speak on any matter except with the permission of the chairman
 - ii) they may not vote on any matter, and
 - iii) the Church reserves the right to exclude any non-members from attendance at whole or part of any Church Business Meeting by show of hands at such meetings.
- c) Ordinarily the vote of the Church shall be taken by show of hands; but all voting relative to an election of a member of the Leadership Team or Administration Team ("**Church officers**") shall be by ballot.
- d) Where voting is by ballot, two members who have not been nominated for the position(s) being voted for shall be elected by the meeting as scrutineers of the votes cast.
- e) The election of a Church officer shall be by ballot, requiring a two-thirds majority. If only the required number is nominated, a ballot shall still be taken and no candidate shall be elected unless he or she obtains a two-thirds majority of votes. In the event of no one candidate obtaining a two-thirds majority, a second vote shall be taken. Should the second vote also be inconclusive, a new vote shall be taken at the succeeding meeting (also requiring a two-thirds majority).
- f) Members under 16 years of age shall not vote in matters of Business.
- g) At the Annual Church Business Meeting reports shall be received, including the Treasurer's financial statement.
- h) A member who is unable to attend a Church Business Meeting may appoint another member present at meeting as his or her proxy to vote on his or her behalf at such meeting. For such appointment to be valid it must be made:
 - i) in writing in the specified form, with the consent of the member being appointed as proxy, and
 - ii) submitted to the Senior Pastor at least 48 hours prior to the commencement time of the Church Business Meeting; (or in the absence of the Senior Pastor, to the proposed Chair of the Church Business Meeting).

For the avoidance of doubt, the proxy is entitled to exercise the member's vote both on a resolution by show of hands or by ballot, and may exercise that vote in such manner as he or she sees fit (subject to any express instructions given by the member to the proxy).

- i) The quorum for all Church Business Meetings is 25% of active members (excluding missionaries currently residing outside of Sydney). If a quorum is not present within 30 minutes of the advertised starting time of the meeting, that meeting must not proceed and another meeting must be convened as soon as practicable. The same quorum will apply for such subsequent meeting. For the purpose of determining whether or not a quorum is present, any proxies made under clause 9h) shall not be counted.

Staff Appointments

10. The choice and election of a Pastor shall be determined at a Church meeting convened for the purpose and announced on two preceding Sundays.
 - a) No one shall be elected to the Pastorate unless he receives the approval of three-fourths of the members voting at the meeting.
 - b) The Pastors shall be Elders and ex-officio members of all Committees of the Church.
 - c) Pastors will be regularly reviewed, in accordance with the Pastoral Staff Review Policy (as may be amended from time to time by Church meeting).
11. The choice and election of paid staff (other than Pastors) shall be determined at a Church meeting convened for the purpose and announced on two preceding Sundays.
 - a) No one shall be elected to a staff position unless he or she receives the approval of two-thirds of the members voting at the meeting.
 - b) The Leadership Team may require paid staff to be members of Committees of the Church.
 - c) Paid staff will be regularly reviewed, in the manner specified in their employment contract.

Leadership & Administration Teams

12. Leadership & Administration Teams
 - a) The Leadership Team (**LT**) is made up of all pastoral staff, Elders and elected members of the Church and is responsible for implementing the vision for ministry and mission of the church, and administering the affairs of the Church, on behalf of the members.
 - b) The LT shall consist of a minimum of four members elected from the membership of the Church, as well as the Pastors and Elders. At least one of the elected members should be drawn from each congregation. The term of elected members is two years (one year, in the case of half of the LT members elected at the 2012 AGM.) Elections for vacant positions will be held annually at the annual general meeting.
 - c) The Administration Team (**AT**) shall serve as a sub-committee of the LT with oversight of administrative matters, such as property, finance, legal compliance and media & communication. The AT shall consist of a minimum of three members, at least one of whom will have financial skills and serve as Treasurer. The term of elected members is two years, (one year, in the case of half of the AT members elected at the 2012 AGM.) Elections for vacant positions will be held annually at the annual general meeting.
 - d) The mode of election for the LT and AT shall be as follows:
 - i) Nominations in writing signed by the nominator, and with the nominee's consent, shall be submitted to Senior Pastor on behalf of the Leadership Team fourteen clear days before the date of the election. The Leadership Team will have discretion to determine

whether any nomination not received within the required period may stand for election.

- ii) The elections shall be by ballot. If only the required number is nominated, a ballot shall still be taken and no candidate shall be elected unless he or she obtains the required number of votes. Election to each position requires a two-thirds majority.
 - iii) Extraordinary vacancies shall be filled as soon as convenient in the manner aforesaid (save that the ballot will be held at the next Church Business Meeting), and the LT or AT member then elected shall hold office to the end of the current term of his or her predecessor.
 - iv) The LT shall appoint specialist roles within, and the chair of, the AT as the LT deems appropriate. Such appointments shall be ratified by a two-thirds majority vote at the next succeeding Church Business Meeting.
 - v) Elected members of the LT and AT will be eligible for re-election at the end of their term.
- e) The LT and AT shall meet at such frequency and in such manner as they determine appropriate in order to fulfil their functions, and in any event at least four times a year. Each member of the LT will have a standing invitation to attend meetings of the AT.

Elders

13. Elders

- a) An Elder is a man who meets the qualifications in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9 and leads the congregation with the Pastors by teaching the Word (1 Timothy 3:2), praying for the congregation (James 5:14) and overseeing the pastoral care of the congregation (1 Peter 5:2). The Elders are to meet regularly (often informally) with the Pastors to focus on the pastoral oversight of the church. They also automatically form part of the Leadership Team along with the Pastors.
- b) Elders must be PBC members and are to be recognised rather than simply elected. Like Pastors they are identified based on the qualifications set out above. Members of the congregation are invited to suggest the name of any man who they believe fulfils the requirements for elder and is already exercising such gifts, qualities and service within the life of the church, which would commend them as worthy of consideration to this role. Recommendations for elder are considered by the pastoral team in consultation with any existing elders and, then brought to the LT for endorsement, before presentation to a Church Business Meeting for acceptance (requiring at least 75% of the vote, which is to be held by ballot).
- c) Elders serve for an initial term of three years and may be appointed again (in accordance with clause 13(b)) at the end of any term upon a recommendation to the Church via the LT.

Auxiliaries

14. Auxiliaries

- a) The Church may establish auxiliaries or agencies from time to time, including Flo Harris Lodge and Petersham Welfare Service.
- b) The activities of such auxiliaries will be overseen by committees, consisting of office bearers appointed annually by the Church at a Church Business Meeting, unless the Church has determined that the auxiliary may appoint its own office bearers.
- c) Office bearers of all auxiliaries shall be Church members, except that up to one in three elected members (but not the Chair) of the Flo Harris Lodge Committee may be non-members.
- d) Notwithstanding anything in 14(b) or (c), the Church reserves the right in exceptional circumstances for the Pastor and LT to appoint office bearers of auxiliaries or remove an incumbent office bearer, or make such other conditions upon auxiliaries as they see fit; such exceptional circumstances to be reported and ratified at the next Church Business Meeting.
- e) Any auxiliary or agency of the Church having an independent constitution or set of rules approved by the Church at a Church Business Meeting shall not be subject to 14(b) to (d).

Finance

15. Finance

- a) The ministry shall be supported, and all expenses met, by voluntary contributions.
- b) Suitably qualified auditors shall be appointed at a Church Business Meeting to audit the books of the Church and to report to the Church at the next annual general meeting.

Business

16. Business

- a) Church Business Meetings shall be conducted in an orderly fashion. The LT shall be responsible for the agenda of such meetings.
- b) No new business dealing with the alteration or addition to the constitution of any auxiliary or agency, or any other matter which the LT deems necessary, shall be introduced without notice of the motion in the agenda or at a previous meeting. Provided that in all such cases the Chairman of the Church Business Meeting shall be the final arbiter.
- c) Any alteration or addition to the Church Constitution must be approved by three-fourths of the members voting at the Church Business Meeting.

Not-for-Profit Status

17. The assets and income of the church shall be applied solely in the furtherance of its charitable purpose and the advancement of the Christian faith, and no portion shall be distributed directly or indirectly to the Members except:
- a) as bona fide reimbursement of expenses
 - b) as payment for services
 - c) as gifts in support of members who are also missionaries of the church, or
 - d) as charitable assistance to members who are in circumstances of crisis or financial need.

Membership does not of itself confer any ownership interest in Church property on a member.

Dissolution

18. In the event of the church being dissolved, the amount that remains after such dissolution and the satisfaction of all debts and liabilities shall:
- a) in the case of property held in trust pursuant to the *Baptist Churches of NSW Property Trust Act 1984*, be dealt with in accordance with that Act and in particular Section 29 which provides that no portion shall be distributed directly or indirectly to the members of the Church, and
 - b) in all other cases be transferred to the Baptist Union or to another organisation with similar purposes and which has rules prohibiting the distribution of its assets and income to its members and which is exempt from income tax.

Petersham Baptist Church Constitution

As amended 18 May 2014