

A Member Church of The Baptist Union of Victoria

(Explanatory notes are italicised and enclosed in brackets in the body of the document.)

1. Name

Doveton Baptist 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.

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 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 and printed as Appendices I and II to this Constitution.

(The "Doctrinal Basis" and the "Principles and Ideals of the Baptist Faith" are part of the Constitution of The Baptist Union of Victoria. Member churches of The Baptist Union of Victoria accept these as expressions of the Christian Faith, understanding that the Union may, in future, choose to amend its Constitution in this regard.)

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 faith by exercising their gifts together in nurturing the growth of Christian faith, peace and love.

2.5 The church's mission statement is:

“Knowing Jesus and sharing His hope with all people”

3. Membership

3.1 The membership of the church consists of people who are personally committed to Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord and to the mission of the Church.

3.2 A person is usually 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 the leadership team. It must be clear to the leadership team 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;
(Membership preparation "classes"/discussions are strongly encouraged. Such discussions might be adapted for a person who has been a member of another Baptist church. There should be a particular focus on the church's teaching about baptism and membership.)

and

3.2.3 has been baptised as a testimony of their own faith in and commitment to Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord;

or,

3.2.4 has, to the leadership team's satisfaction, made a personal and meaningful public profession of their faith in and commitment to Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, in accordance with the rites and practice of another Christian church, as an affirmation of their faith, and is able to affirm the normative nature of believer's baptism.

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

(A letter of transfer from a previous church is not to be regarded as an automatic ticket to membership in the church. It is suggested that the process of application for membership be the same whether or not there has been previous membership of a Baptist church. However the letter of commendation should always be sought. It is possible that there are details of the person's involvement in the previous church that the church should be aware of when deciding whether to receive them into membership. The request for a commendation also gives the previous church notice that it can take the person off its membership roll.)

3.4 A roll will be kept of the names of the members of the church (" Membership Roll").

3.5 A name may be removed from the Membership Roll at any time if the member:

3.5.1 becomes a member of another church;

3.5.2 requests removal from the Membership Roll;

3.5.3 dies;

or

3.5.4 has their membership removed by a decision of the leadership team for disciplinary reasons. The leadership team may, at its discretion, refer the matter to a church meeting in which case two weeks notice of the date and purpose of that church meeting must have been given to the member concerned.

3.6 The Membership Roll will be revised at each Annual Church Meeting on the basis of a report prepared by the leadership team. Unless the meeting notes that special circumstances apply, the names of members who have not attended the church in the past six months and those not adhering to the membership policy of the church will be removed.

(A Membership Roll should reflect the participating membership of a church. However, before recommending anyone's removal from the list, the leadership team should make reasonable efforts to clarify the reasons for the member's absence and to enable them to resume participation in the church's life. The most likely "special circumstances" referred to envisage members who are unable to attend services due to age or infirmity, or members who are engaged in missionary service or other ministry elsewhere, but view the church as a supporting home base.)

4. Leadership

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

(Baptist churches acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord of the Church and as ultimate authority in its life. As a local Baptist church, the church meeting is responsible for discerning Christ's leading and therefore has final decision making power. This is usually referred to as congregational government. The pastor(s) and the leadership team exist to serve and resource the church members.)

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 fulfil 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 by secret ballot as per item 4.3.7. of the constitution 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.

(The whole of clause 4.2.3 arises out 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 III to this Constitution.)

4.3 The Leadership Team

4.3.1 The leadership team 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 maximum of two years usually at an Annual Church Meeting, each requiring a two thirds majority of a quorum of members who are present and who vote for or against. The leadership team will appoint, where possible from within its number, the Church Secretary and Church Treasurer.

(The concept of electing leadership [so there is always a vote regardless of number of nominations] is encouraged. If the number of nominations and positions are equal, there should still be a ballot and a level of two thirds confidence for each nominee is suggested. This puts all leadership positions on the same footing. If there is a greater number of nominations, a 2 stage vote is strongly encouraged; firstly a two thirds confidence ballot for each nominee and then a ballot for choosing between nominees with the required confidence level. The second ballot would be decided on the "first past the post" principle.)

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

4.3.3 The leadership team will endeavour to ensure that the terms of the Church Secretary and the Church Treasurer end in alternate years.

4.3.4 Any church meeting may decide the number of the leadership team, with effect from the following Annual Church Meeting. Such a decision shall not shorten the term of any person serving on the leadership team.

4.3.5 A vacancy on the leadership team may be filled at any church meeting, with the elected person serving the remainder of the vacated term.

4.3.6 Nominations for the leadership team must be in writing signed by two church members and the person nominated and submitted to the current leadership team for endorsement.

4.3.7 Elections for positions on the leadership team will be by secret ballot.

4.3.8 The leadership team will endeavour to meet at least monthly. Half of the leadership team forms a quorum. The leadership team must keep records of their meetings.

(Records of the leadership team meetings must be sensitive to confidential matters.)

4.3.9 For the purposes of Schedule B of The Baptist Union Incorporation Act 1930, the leadership team 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 twice 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 date, 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 shall be one quarter of the membership of the church.
- 5.7 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.

(As far as possible, church meetings should aim for a consensus approach to decision making. If a decision can barely get the required votes, it should normally be assumed that the congregation needs more time to consider the issues. There may be cases where a decision cannot be delayed and will be taken on a simple majority, but 50% + 1 should never be considered to be a reliable indicator of the will of God.)

- 5.8 Absentee or proxy voting is not permitted.
- 5.9 Audited financial statements (for the preceding church year) must be presented to a church meeting in every year.
- 5.10 A budget for the next church year must be approved by a church meeting in every year.
- 5.11 An Annual Church Meeting must be held each year. Its agenda must include:
 - 5.11.1 a report/presentation by the pastor(s) and by the leadership team;
 - 5.11.2 leadership team elections; and
 - 5.11.3 review of the membership roll.

5.12 The agenda of any church meeting may include:

5.12.1 report/presentation by any church group;

5.12.2 report/presentation by any external group working in co-operation with the church;

5.12.3 other appointments the church meeting decides to make.

(The church is strongly encouraged to appoint delegates who can formally represent the church at Union Assembly meetings.)

5.13 Special Church Meetings are needed to consider any decision regarding the calling, extension of term or removal of a pastor or any transaction (eg. Purchase, sale or leasing) 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.

(The rules for calling and notifying people of Special Church Meetings, the eligibility for voting, and the required majority for decisions all differ from the provisions for ordinary meetings. Details can be found in the plain English summary of Schedule B, prepared by The Baptist Union of Victoria, which is reproduced as Appendix III to this Constitution. Any Schedule B Trust Deeds entered into by the church and The Baptist Union of Victoria are copied as Appendix IV to this Constitution.)

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. In situations not covered by item 5.13 such use may be decided by the leadership team or its appointed representative.

6.2 The activities of any church 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.

7. Policies

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.

(The following are examples of matters where the formation of policies may be appropriate:
- a church mission statement;
- rights and responsibilities of members;
- the process for exercising church discipline;
- a public statement on racism in society.

Although technically only a simple majority vote is required, it would usually be unwise for churches to adopt policies without something much closer to unanimity.)

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.

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 endeavour 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 vigour 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.
5. 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].
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. (transitional provision)
13. 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.
14. The beneficial ownership and control of Church property by the Church is not affected per se if the Church moves to another locality.
- 14A. 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 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.