

Policy for Allegations brought against Accredited and Recognised Ministers

Proposed Approval by **Assembly or AC:** 01 April 2017

Effective Date: 01 April 2017

To be reviewed and updated as required in future by Assembly Council

Please note this policy replaces the following three policies approved by assembly on 31 March 2012:

- Allegations brought against an Accredited (or Recognised) Minister Policy
- Allegations brought against Non Accredited Staff Policy
- Allegations brought against Lay Leadership Policy

Purpose

The Purpose of this policy is to ensure that the Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT has appropriate procedures to deal with allegations of abuse, boundary violations and / or misconduct by Accredited and Recognised Ministers within the Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT. The policy aims to ensure:

- Guidance and support exists for affiliated/ local churches;
- Appropriate support is put in place for all parties affected;
- A fair and transparent process is initiated for all involved; and
- A clear and consistent process is in place for the Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT.

Scope

This policy applies only to Accredited, or Recognised Ministers, as approved by the Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT.

However, the Ministry Standards Committee can provide recommendations and advice to affiliated churches, if requested, when allegations are made against paid staff and volunteer leaders. The Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT encourages each affiliated church to have their own grievance and complaint policy in place to deal with such allegations.

This policy applies to all situations where there is an allegation of abuse, misuse of power, misconduct or other breach of the Code of Ethics and Conduct, by an Accredited or Recognised Minister, that is brought to the attention of the Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT, and is not covered through another process. This will include, but is not exclusive to, issues of leadership and abuse of power, financial fraud, bullying, and sexual misconduct or other misconduct.

Note: This policy is operational within the unique governance structure of Baptist Churches. Individual churches ally themselves with other churches through membership of a voluntary association of churches. Despite retention of autonomy to make independent decisions, affiliated churches will be encouraged to act in accordance with the policy and processes relating to allegations of abuse, misuse of power, or misconduct by Accredited and Recognised Ministers in affiliated churches. Some staff may be registered with, or accredited by, other professional bodies, (for example counsellors and chaplains) and the Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT may choose to advise these bodies of any concerns. Church decisions to act independently, and not comply with the policy, or recommendations, of the Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT, may result in increased insurance premiums. Whether the individual will remain in employment within a church or any other organisation is the decision of that organisation.

Principles

- Prevention as much as possible through education, visibility of issues and screening.
- Processes that work with, and are complementary to, those undertaken by Authorities (eg. Police and Community Services) where required.
- Support and encouragement to congregations to have best practices in place.
- Proactive and prompt response to allegations, issues and concerns, once raised with the Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT.
- Encourage high standard of accountability and transparency through clear and consistent processes.
- Independence of investigation when appropriate. Attention will be given to ensure there is no conflict of interest for those investigating and to ensure procedural fairness for all parties.
- Due diligence to issues of safety, legality, faith and theology.

Policy Implementation

- A comprehensive Procedures Manual, consistent with the purpose and principles of this policy, shall be in place and outline the steps to be taken in the event of allegations. This is to be reviewed and updated regularly as required by authority of Assembly Council.
- The Procedures Manual should be read in conjunction with the Code of Ethics and Conduct.
- Following complex or significant cases, or a new emerging trend, there will be a review of procedures in light of learning from these experiences or trends.
- Information will be made available to affiliated churches via the website of the Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT.