

Q1 Why do we need the Affirmation?

Currently churches that apply for affiliation are required to complete an application form that covers much of the territory that is in the Affirmation. This application process is a relatively new expectation. That means that there are many churches that have never really considered these areas of belonging, or their implications, or haven't for a long time. As we all know, leaders change, different and new thinking emerges, and older and deeper connections become understandably less important or overt.

Assumptions about 'benefits' and 'responsibilities', as well as the DNA or identity and purposes of Churches of Christ, have been made on both sides, sometimes resulting in tension that distracts from our primary mission as the people of God. The Affirmation gives current and long term affiliated churches the opportunity to evaluate this relationship, and to re-affirm their partnership on the journey we are on together.

Q2 What is the 'covenant' called now? Why so many changes?

Having heard the voices, rather than calling the agreement between Churches of Christ and affiliated churches a 'covenant', we returned initially to 'Relationship Agreement', before finally calling it an Affirmation (of Affiliation).

The changes have only occurred as we've listened to those involved in the conversations and considered a range of opinion.

Q3 Isn't the document too contractual and legal?

The document has been reconfigured so that is less a contract, and more like what it is: an affirmation. It is now clearer and less formal and 'tight'. It is also 'warmer' and more relational, and better describes what the Affirmation is all about, in both words and presentation.

Q4 Where is the spirituality of the Affirmation?

The reconfiguration of the Affirmation invites readers, decision-makers and signatories to first engage the Statement of Purposes of Churches of Christ in Vic/Tas. It is important to read all that follows in the context of those Purposes that clearly provide a spiritual foundation for the relationship.

Q5 Isn't the Affirmation too one-sided, (i.e. tougher for affiliated churches)?

The Affirmation seeks to describe a relationship of mutuality, thus the listing of commitments of both affiliated churches and of Churches of Christ. Churches will also note another Notice of Motion that gives churches an opportunity to request Council call a Special General Meeting, something that is not in the Constitution currently.

Q6 Is it one size fits all or can there be variations?

Churches have the opportunity to 'negotiate' variations to the Affirmation, including a possible arrangement around the registration of property Titles with the Properties Corporation. Diversity is further invited by an expressed commitment by Churches of Christ to foster 'missional experimentation'.

Q7 Isn't the process all too hasty and rushed? Our church hasn't had a chance to consider the document...

The recent Regional Conversations gave those who participated an opportunity to be in meaningful conversations with each other about who we are, what we're here for, and what it means to belong to Churches of Christ in Vic/Tas. People had the space to ask questions and express opinions. We hope that all churches, whether they attended the Conversations or not, will have accepted the invitation to engage the material. Offers are open for Churches of Christ leaders to meet with church leaders and/or ministers to take the conversations further.

Dialogue about 'belonging' and our 'identity and purpose' has been underway over the past four years, at Annual General meetings, Dreaming Days (2007 and 2010), as well as a round of regional conversations in 2009.

This dialogue, as well as other conversations, formal and informal, planned and unplanned, have informed the thinking of Council and helped shape the Affirmation document that will be presented at the AGM. Many

changes to wording or concepts emerged; significant changes were made and they are generally outlined in this FAQs paper; some, while important, are too minor to note here.

To give all churches an opportunity to better (or further) engage the issues raised in the Affirmation document, Council is proposing 'in principle' support of it as the basis for an agreement at the AGM in May, and that a Special General Meeting be called for a suitable date in October to decide its final shape. Suggestions for initiating local conversations about the Affirmation will also be available.

Q8 Hasn't the debate produced disunity?

Debate reflects diversity. Healthy debate produces understanding and a unity around new learnings. Debate can produce disunity when there is low trust, animosity, secrecy or a judgemental attitude present in the debate. Council has valued the debate around identity and purpose and belonging because it has been a debate about things that really matter, about the essentials of who we are and what it means to be on this journey together.

Q9 What are the 'governance guidelines' recommended by Churches of Christ?

Good governance of any association of people, incorporated or unincorporated, including a church seeking to operate in ways that are consistent with New Testament values and practices, will be best expressed by the drafting and implementation of a charter or way of operating that includes statements about the following:

Purpose and objectives; a definition of 'membership'; processes of appointment of leaders and minister/s; the manner of voting to be undertaken; financial management, recording and reporting; affiliation with Churches of Christ; requirements of the Properties Corporation Act regarding property matters (where appropriate); not-for-profit status; as well as winding up or closure process/es.

Good governance also includes compliance with external and/or legal requirements related to employment (for ministers and other employees, this includes tax law, provision for superannuation and long service leave, keeping of leave records etc), occupational health and safety, local building regulations, and where appropriate the incorporation of association law.

The idea of good governance is included in the Affirmation because it provides protection for the church and the minister. This is particularly (but not only) true in matters relating to a minister's employment. Council, Mission and Ministry (and its Church Health Consultancy teams) and Prop Corp have all been recently involved in mediating conversations where a lack of clarity in employment relationships has resulted in disagreement. The mission of the church is seriously disrupted when conflict happens, the reputation of the church and our Movement can be tarnished, and litigation threatened. In most instances good governance (including the completion of a written employment agreement with a minister based on the Terms and Conditions of Employment of Ministers) would prevent such a breakdown and assist in the prevention of disharmony and hurt for congregations.

Q10 Isn't this simply a way to give Churches of Christ control over an affiliated church?

Responses indicate that this question particularly relates to a church's Property Titles, and specifically to the registering of a church's property Titles in the name of Prop Corp to act as Trustee for the church and for Churches of Christ.

It is acknowledged that churches will see this issue differently. Sometimes these views are related to a church's size or shape or health, sometimes on local leadership skills and abilities (or lack of them), and sometimes on a range of views of autonomy and independence and/or theology and ecclesiology.

Council believes in the interdependent autonomy of local churches. It also believes that there is a stewardship responsibility for the story of Churches of Christ in Vic/Tas, and that this story includes a partnership of trust for resources and properties in a particular location or region. Its preferred option therefore is for the Titles to be held centrally, on behalf of the church. As indicated in the Affirmation other arrangements can be made, on the basis of the above or other views.

Whatever a church chooses to do with their Titles however, doesn't (and mustn't) alter the fact that it is free to use its property to fulfil its purposes, in accordance with the purposes, values and policies of Churches of Christ, and any legal compliance. It is the church's property, and it is the church that makes any decisions (in accordance with its governance) to buy, sell or develop properties to achieve this end.

The only proposed caveat to this is when a church falls below 25 or 10, and then Churches of Christ becomes more directly involved in the management of the church and the stewardship of any property involved. Currently Council, Mission and Ministry and/or Prop Corp already enters a conversation when a church is considering closing, merging or disaffiliating.