

Dear Pastor, Church Secretary or Administrator,

Re: Use of the title "Pastor"

As you would be aware, sadly many denominations of the church in Australia have been before the recently concluded Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. In every case we grieve for those who have been victims of such abuse. We also grieve for each occasion the church has failed, for whatever reason, in its duty of care.

Within the Baptist movement, whilst tragically isolated cases have come to light where individuals have perpetrated abuse and/or inappropriate institutional responses to known cases of abuse have occurred, these have to this point, by the grace of God, been rare. However, that does not mean that there are not things for us to learn!

In particular, there is much for us to gain from a good understanding of the Royal Commission's Case Study 18: "The response of the Australian Christian Churches (ACC) and affiliated Pentecostal churches to allegations of child sexual abuse." The ACC is a voluntary association of autonomous local churches. There are many parallels with how the Baptist Association of NSW/ACT is structured.

While the Royal Commission (RC) recognised this structure, it still made three observations that are worth our noting:

- i. The RC expected the ACC to have greater control over Member churches around compliance and policy implementation
- ii. Where churches failed to adopt and/or comply with policies and standards, the RC expected the ACC to implement action to ensure compliance in Member churches
- iii. The RC considered that the use of the title 'Pastor' in the ACC implied a certain level of responsibility, competence and compliance. The RC expected the ACC to address the question of who can be given the title 'Pastor'.

With respect to items (i) and (ii), we note that the NSW Government indicated in June 2018 that they will encourage all organisations who work with children to adopt the Child Safe Standards and practices recommended by the Royal Commission. The Baptist Association of NSW & ACT is currently awaiting further responses from government, however it seems clear that there will be greater compliance obligations upon churches in the future. While still seeking to work within our ecclesiological convictions, we are currently piloting a Safe Church Certification process to assist local churches in meeting their obligations for safe ministry with children and young people. There is more work to do in this area and you should expect to hear more from the Association about these matters later in 2018.

Item (iii), however, is also a matter to which we need to give appropriate attention. As autonomous local churches we have continued to affirm that it is a local church's role to discern before God and appoint whomever they sense appropriate to ministry roles. We would not want to stray from this essential expression of theological conviction and autonomy.

However, the point made by the RC cannot be ignored. Appointment to ministry roles and the giving of associated titles such as “pastor” or “minister”, brings with it perceptions and expectations by both the church and the wider community. In making such appointments, and determining role titles, we must be considerate of this contextual reality.

In the light of the above reality, including the RC's conclusions and recommendations, the Assembly Council of the Baptist Churches of NSW/ACT strongly recommends to our churches that the use of the title “Pastor” be restricted to persons who have been (or are in the process of becoming) either accredited or recognized by the Association, thereby having undergone an appropriate level of assessment, examination, training and oversight.

However, if such a title is applied to other persons, we strongly encourage our churches to ensure appropriate skills, qualification, orientation and accountabilities are in place. Anyone who carries the title 'Pastor' should:

- undertake the Creating Safe Spaces training offered by the BANSW/ACT,
- have an up to date Working with Children Check (or Working with Vulnerable People Check in the ACT),
- have a National Police Check clearance prior to commencement of a new pastoral appointment,
- sign off on the BA NSW/ACT Ministers' Code of Ethics and Conduct, and
- ensure they engage with appropriate professional or pastoral supervision, or mentoring.

Compliance with these measures should be required by the local congregation regardless of the specific area of ministry to which the Pastor has been called.

Ultimately this is not simply about compliance, adapting to a societal context, or responding to recommendations from a Royal Commission. It is about demonstrating God's love and care by being diligent and intentional in watching out for the most vulnerable in our congregations and the communities in which we minister.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this letter or its implications please do not hesitate to contact any of the undersigned.

Yours in His service,



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Director of Ministries



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Chair, Assembly Council



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