

Well Constituted?

If I wanted to choose a scintillating topic for conversation, let alone for this article, it probably wouldn't be constitutions! When you mention a church or Baptist Union constitution, for example, most people's eyes glaze over. If such matters are being discussed in a meeting, people often pass the buck to presumed pundits to pick pedantically over the points in question.

Constitutions can be a pain! Instead of helping the life of an organization, as intended, they can stifle it. Some can be too tightly prescriptive, excessively legalistic, too "set in concrete", or simply too convoluted for the average person. They can also be badly used. Constitutional wars are not unknown even in Baptist circles! It's tragic when, figuratively speaking, people try to use a constitution as a bludgeoning weapon to get their own way.

The truth is that constitutions can also be a plus! A well-framed, properly-respected constitution can be one of a church's most valuable treasures. Mind you, a constitution isn't the Bible, which is our true guide for belief and conduct, and it shouldn't be elevated anywhere near that status. But if it accurately expresses a group's visionary purpose, encapsulates shared convictions and values, and sets out mutually accepted processes for decision-making and healthy governance, such a constitution can be a blessing indeed. Used well, such a document can enable healthy meetings, keep our focus on our God-given mission and save us "re-inventing the wheel" whenever we need to process important decisions. A straight-forward, realistic method of changing or up-dating is also necessary if a constitution is truly to reflect the evolving life of the organization, not simply enshrine the past.

For these reasons we're currently reviewing the constitution of Tasmanian Baptists. Copies of the draft have been made available for consideration by constituent churches. Written feedback to our Union Office is warmly invited, whether by post or email, so we can take issues "on board" in preparing a streamlined Assembly session on October 27. We want the association to be well-constituted. Our revised constitution needs to under-pin our corporate life as a missionary movement – a "family" of churches clearly focussed on the full-orbed mission to which God calls here in Tasmania.

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