

BAPTIST CHURCHES OF NEW SOUTH WALES



WOMEN IN MINISTRY

**Information prepared for the Baptist Churches of New South Wales,
June 1997 Assembly held at Springwood Baptist Church,
June 14, 1997.**

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INTRODUCTION TO REGIONAL DISCUSSIONS

We need to begin by recognising our shared allegiance to the supreme authority of Scripture. We can probably go even further: Baptist recognition of the authority of Scripture has normally been no abstract principle but a living commitment to being New Testament churches today.

Also important is our Baptist commitment to the autonomy of the local church. This has great importance as we look forward to a decision in September. This decision will govern what the Baptist Churches of NSW do in acting together, not what they do individually. It may be that women applicants for ordination and accreditation will be considered on the same basis as men; it may be that women applicants will not be eligible to apply; it may be that women applicants will be considered but not on exactly the same basis as men. But this will not govern the roles of women in local churches; each church will decide for itself whether it is willing to consider a woman for appointment as (sole) Pastor, Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor, Elder, Deacon or any other position.

It seems probable, moreover, that at the end of the current process of consideration there will still be differences of conviction and practice among our churches. If this is so, the key question is how we should act together so as to best express respect for and sensitivity to those with whom we differ. Is it best to ask those churches and organisations who will appoint women to roles for which we ordain men (and the women so appointed) to forego the recognition given to men so appointed so as to avoid possible offence? Or is it best to ask those churches who are not willing to appoint women to such roles to allow recognition of those appointed by others so as to express respect for the conscientious decision of those others?

We should all be ready to recognise, even those who are opposed to having women in leadership roles, that God does give gifts to women as well as men and that God calls women as well as men to serve. Therefore we should seek to encourage the service, or ministry, of women wherever such service is not contrary to our understanding of Scriptural principles.

We should all be ready to recognise, even those who are opposed to any restriction of the ministry roles of women, that there are passages of Scripture which some people see as imposing restrictions. Therefore we should study these passages carefully (and, indeed, all relevant passages) before making a decision.

Our primary and unifying purpose should be to hear what God is saying to us today as followers of Jesus Christ, beginning deliberately with the Scriptures as the Word of God.

This hearing of God will be helped by hearing one another, since no one of us has a monopoly on the wisdom which comes from God. And it will be helped by our praying together for that wisdom, since God gives wisdom to those who seek it. It will not be helped by those who believe they are incapable of being mistaken; it will not be helped by those whose true purpose is to win the debate, rather than to be united in love with other believers (including those with different opinions) in a sincere endeavour to reach a decision which "seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28)

We need to consider together those Scripture passages most beloved of advocates of unrestricted women's ministry and those passages most emphasised by its opponents. We need to look carefully at Galatians 3:28 with attention to its context and ask whether

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respect for this Scripture requires us to open new doors to women. We need to look in the same way at 1 Timothy 2:8-15 and ask whether respect for this Scripture requires that some doors remain closed. We need likewise to look both at the passages which record women leading and teaching and the passages which speak of the "headship" of men.

So let us proceed to discussion determined to listen to the Scriptures and to the Holy Spirit, especially being open to the possibility that the Spirit might speak to me through someone with whom I disagree and that such a person might lead me to a better understanding of the Scriptures. And let us proceed with a determination not only to speak the truth as we understand it, but to "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15).

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BACKGROUND TO THE DISCUSSION

During the 1974/5 Denominational year the Ministerial Acceptance and Ordination Committee (now Committee for the Ministry) which was then a sub Committee of the Executive Committee advised the Executive Committee that it had received and considered an application from a woman for acceptance as a candidate for the ministry.

Arising from consideration of that advice the Executive Committee decided that the general principle of ordaining women to the ministry should be considered by the Assembly before any particular application was dealt with and, accordingly, it was recommended to the 1975 Assembly:-

"That Assembly authorise the Executive Committee to ordain approved women applicants to the ministry."

The 1975 Assembly resolved that the recommendation be received and laid on the table and that the following procedure be carried out:

"That the matter be referred back to the, Executive Committee to -

- i) prepare written statements for and against the recommendation.*
- ii) distribute to the churches and members of Assembly not later than April, 1976, copies of such statements.*
- iii) provide adequate time in the programme of the 1976 Assembly for discussion of this issue, the actual time allocated to be specifically designated in the Official Programme and advised in Statements when distributed, and*
- (iv) assess any administrative difficulties that may arise from such ordination."*

The written statements for and against the Ordination of Approved Women Applicants to the Ministry were prepared and circulated as requested and appear at Appendix D of the 1976 Baptist Union Year Book.

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The 1976 Assembly did not adopt the recommendation presented to the 1975 Assembly and laid on the table by that Assembly until 1976 "that Assembly authorise the Executive Committee to ordain approved women applicants for the ministry." Subsequently Assembly resolved -

"to request the Executive Committee to enquire Into the practical and other aspects of ordination and the ministry, including, - but not necessarily limited to, such matters as who should be ordained, by whom and to what ministries, including reference to the role of women; a Report of such enquiry to be available to the churches prior to the Assembly."

The 1978 Annual Assembly considered the report and requested the Executive Committee to

"give further consideration to the present practice of accreditation in the Union and bring a report to the 1979 Assembly dealing with (but not restricted to) the following areas:

1. (a) *the desirability of devising meaningful categories for listing ordained persons according to present functions of service (and such distinctions would in no way reflect any differences of status) so that the list could be of greater practical benefit to the Union of Churches:*
 - (b) *the advisability of devising other lists of accreditation, (for example, pastoral assistants and/or deaconesses; lay preachers; student pastors; evangelists, etc.) and "what should be minimum requirements for such lists.*
2. *That the principle of ordination being to the "Ministry of the Word" (as discussed in the report considered by the 1978 Assembly on Ordination and the Ministry) be adopted as a guide for the Executive Committee in determining the sphere of service for which a person may be ordained by the Union.*
3. *That local churches be asked to discover, test, and encourage those persons with spiritual gifts for the Ministry of the Word and that the Executive Committee be asked to formulate and distribute to the churches guidelines for churches to assist them in fulfilling this task."*

Arising from these considerations the List of Pastors (not ordained) was initiated. Subsequently the name of the list was changed to Recognised Pastors.

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SPECIALISED MINISTRIES

The report of the Committee for the Ministry to the 1988 Assembly made reference to some candidates for the ministry to be recognised by the Union for specialised ministries. Arising from this, a report on Specialised Ministries was presented to the 1989 Assembly (1989 Annual Reports Pages 16-19) with recommendations as follows -

- (a) *The Committee for the Ministry itself consciously seeks to consider applicants for both ordination and accreditation on the basis of the 1978 Assembly decision, recognising the full validity of any special ministry which is clearly "A Ministry of the Word";*
- (b) *a like standard of training be expected from all those preparing for ordination, so that all will spend a similar amount of time and share certain core studies but some requirements will be specific to intended ministries;*
- (c) *the accredited list to include accreditation to area or areas of ministry according to the desire of the minister in question and the determination of the Committee for the Ministry regarding that minister's having demonstrated appropriate gifts and having been appropriately trained (or being otherwise sufficiently prepared).*
- (d) *applications being required from those wishing to broaden their accreditation, so that the Committee for the Ministry (or a sub-committee of it) may either deem such applicants to be already eligible or require appropriate further training.*

At the 1991 Assembly the name of the List of Deaconesses was changed to Women in Specialised Ministries.

MORE RECENT CONSIDERATIONS

In 1992 Annual Assembly passed the following Notice of Motion which was received from the Avalon Church -

Re Ministry of Women -

1. *That this Assembly requests a Committee be set up to investigate-*
 - a) *the ministry of women in the churches, and*
 - b) *the theological attitude of the churches to this ministry*
 - c) *that this committees report include recommendations of a way forward,*
 - d) *the Committees report be brought to the 1993 Assembly.*
2. *That the Executive Committee be asked to call for nominations for a committee of eight to be elected by the March Assembly, the President or his representative to convene the first meeting when the committee is elected.*

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The March 1993 Assembly appointed a Committee as in 2 above. The Committee reported to the 1993 Annual Assembly that a survey had been designed and field tested and distributed to the churches.

The Committee presented a comprehensive report to the 1995 Annual Assembly (1995 Annual Report Pages 38-56). Arising from the report Annual Assembly resolved -

1. *That churches be supplied with Bible study material and reading lists which deal with the whole area of Women in Ministry;*
2. *That churches note that there is a high level of acceptance within the churches for women to occupy positions of responsibility and leadership at both the local church and Union levels;*
3. *That churches be encouraged to recognise, affirm and use the giftedness of both men and women (recognising that women are currently involved in many aspects of ministry).*
4. *That churches be encouraged to include a definitive and positive statement about women in ministry in their constitutions, and to ensure that the language of their constitutions are consistent with the congregations values.*
5. *That churches be aware that many women who believe that they are called to a wide variety of ministries are restricted from the exercise of such ministries within churches. (There is no denominational barrier to women occupying a wide variety of ministry positions within local churches of the denomination).*
6. *Presently the Baptist Union accredits women for ministry (Women in Specialised Ministries). We recommend that the Union authorise the Committee for the Ministry to review the process of male and female Students for training for preparation for Christian ministries, making the process the same for male and female.*
7. *That churches note that the inclusion of women on the Morling College faculty was highly approved by the majority of respondents.*
8. *That Morling College address gender issues during theological training.*
9. *That there be positive encouragement and action to see a greater number of women on committees of the Baptist Union of NSW (There is no denominational barrier to women being elected to these committees.)*
10. *That churches be encouraged to include women on ministry teams, diaconates and leadership in the worship and outreach of the church.*
11. *That the Union take steps to clarify the meaning and purpose of ordination and to clarify the meaning of terminology used in relation to ministry (e.g. pastor, pastorate, pastoral teams) and its relationship to Baptist doctrine.*

The Executive Committee prepared Bible Study material as in Recommendation 1 which was available to the churches at the 1996 Assembly.

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Resolution 6 above -

"Presently the Baptist Union accredits women for ministry (Women in Specialised Ministries). We recommend that the Union authorise the Committee for the Ministry to review the process of male and female Students for training for preparation for Christian ministries, making the process the same for male and female"

was remitted to the Committee for the Ministry which presented the following recommendations which were passed by the 1996 Annual Assembly.

1. The Committee for the Ministry strongly urges churches to do the proposed Bible Studies on the matter;
2. That the Assembly request the Executive Committee of the Union to arrange regional meetings which would discuss relevant material on the issue. This is to be done in the first half of the year;
3. That further time be given at the June Assembly for discussion of the matter;
4. That at the 1997 Annual Assembly the following be discussed:

"Persons with recognised gifts calling and theological training should be ordained to the Ministry of the Word."

The Committee for the Ministry advised that it would report on Recommendation 11

11. That the Union take steps to clarify the meaning and purpose of ordination and to clarify the meaning and purpose of ordination and to clarify the meaning of terminology used in relation to ministry (eg. pastor, pastorate , pastoral teams) and its relationship to Baptist doctrine.

at a further Assembly.

This report is at pages 8-11 of the Supplementary (Pink) Booklet "Women in Ministry" issued to delegates to the June 1997 Assembly.

A sample of the Bible Study material was posted to each Church Secretary and churches were encouraged to do the Bible Study material through the Church Officers Bulletin which is mailed to Church Secretaries.

Regional Seminars were held at Newcastle, Taree, Narrandera, Tamworth, Moruya, Alstonville and Molong churches and at Gympie, Wentworthville and Epping churches.

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NOTE RE BY-LAWS

During the 1989 Annual Assembly the matter of the gender neutrality of the By-Laws was raised.

The 1990 Annual Assembly added a new By-Law: By-Law 24, INTERPRETATION

“In these By-Laws, unless the contrary intention appears, words importing the masculine gender shall include females”.

In a revision of the By-Laws in 1991, this By-Law was renumbered By-Law 1 (See Page 223, 1997 Baptist Union Handbook).

The addition of this By-Law has rendered By-Law 17 which deals with the Ordination and Accreditation of Ministers is gender neutral. (Pages 227-8, 1997 Baptist Union Handbook).

It should be noted however that the Rules Relating to the Acceptance and Training of Candidates for the Ministry (See Pages **249-252**, 1997 Baptist Union Handbook) are gender specific.

ORDINATION AND TERMINOLOGY RELATED TO ORDINATION

What Is the meaning and purpose of ordination?

Any answer to this question in the context of the Baptist Churches of NSW must begin with our last agreed statement on ordination. This statement was adopted at the Annual Assembly of 1978 and reads as follows:

That the principle of ordination being to the “**Ministry of the Word**” (as discussed in this report) be adopted as a guide for the Executive Committee in determining the sphere of service for which a person may be ordained by the Union.

This raises the question of the report to that Assembly and its discussion of ordination to the “Ministry of the Word”. The report briefly characterises the meaning of ordination for Baptists in general as follows:

To define “the” Baptist position on any doctrine is notoriously difficult. A summary of three Baptist statements about ordination and then a review of what NSW Baptists have previously agreed about ordination will be found in Appendix 4.

Comparing various Baptist statements and definitions it is possible to note the following elements as consistently found in a Baptist understanding of ordination.

1. The **call of God to an individual** is a basic requirement for ordination.
2. The church **recognises the gifts and call** God has given to an individual.

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3. The church **sets apart the gifted person** to undertake those tasks to which the church, under God, has called that person. In that sense the individual has authority to undertake the tasks of the ministry.
4. In general, Baptists have practised the **laying on of hands**, accompanied by prayer in ordination.

(This section of the report is reproduced on pp. 58-59 of the 1978-79 Year Book of the Baptist Union of NSW while Appendix 4 appears on pp. 71-74. The Appendix briefly summarises a British report of 1957, the Australian Baptist Theological Colleges' Staff Statement of 1968 and a Victorian Baptist definition of ordination of 1977, before more fully describing a statement adopted at the NSW Annual Assembly of 1956 (together with decisions concerning the order of service for Ordination and Accreditation made in 1957 and 1970)

The report subsequently discusses several issues related to ordination. It is in connection with this issue of **who should be ordained**, and more specifically of **whether only pastors should be ordained**, that the principle of ordination to the Ministry of the Word is enunciated:

Only Pastors? For most of our history this has been our practice. But we have ordained missionaries, theological teachers and now to "other forms of ministry." Whilst the 1970 report thought it valuable that this was not defined so that flexibility could be provided for, there does seem to be a need for some attempt at definition. Otherwise, one could reasonably argue that an accountant, for example, employed by the Union in a full-time capacity should be ordained. This seems to make ordination so radically different as to be meaningless and to suggest every Christian should be "ordained". Can we identify limiting factors in "other forms" of ministry for ordination?

The traditional answer has been to restrict ordination to some form of ministry of the Word and Sacraments. To be more precise, those ordained if not serving as pastors in a local church have been and are involved (at least from time to time) in preaching, teaching and pastoral care (i.e. visitation, counselling - situations where the Word of God is related to need). In fact this would cover the situation of all whom the Union has so far ordained to "other forms of ministry". It would also cover those discussed under "accreditation" in the preceding section. Ordination is to some "ministry of the Word", but not necessarily as a pastor of a local church.

This principle, so stated, opens the way for ordination to ministries other than of the pastor. This is taken up in another recommendation of the report which was adopted by the 1978 Annual Assembly, namely:

That the Executive Committee be asked to give further consideration to the present practice of accreditation in the Union and bring a report to the 1979 Assembly dealing with (but not restricted to) the following issues:

- a) The desirability of devising meaningful categories for listing ordained persons according to present functions of service (and such distinctions would in no way reflect any differences of status) so that the list could be of greater practical benefit to the Union of Churches;
- b) The advisability of devising other lists of accreditation (for example, pastoral

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assistants and/or deaconesses; lay preachers; student pastors; evangelists, etc) and what should be the minimum requirements for such lists.

This decision led eventually, among other things, to a report from the Committee for the Ministry to a General Council in 1989. As a result the General Council (ratified by the Annual Assembly of the same year) directed that the Committee for the Ministry should "consciously seek to consider applicants for both ordination and accreditation on the basis of the 1978 Assembly decision, recognising the full validity of any special ministry which is clearly a Ministry of the Word." Such specialised ministries can be taken to include all those listed as examples in the Committee's report, namely:

- missionary service (itself taking several forms)
- theological education, (including but not restricted to training others for pastoral ministry)
- specialised ministries within local churches (such as youth ministry, pastoral counselling and Christian education)
- chaplaincy (now in a variety of fields)
- itinerant preaching and/or teaching ministries
- Christian education outside the local church (including denominational work and appropriate roles within Christian schools)

Ordination in the Baptist Churches of NSW is, then, at present, ordination to 'the ministry of the Word', understood in the light of the above history. This is not a final and unchangeable position. It remains subject to correction by appeal to Scriptural principle and, where Scriptural principle is not in question, adaptation to express the will of the churches in new situations.

But the decisions cited above were themselves made with the Scriptures deliberately in mind (see especially pp. 55-58 of the 1978-9 Year Book and the opening section of the 1989 Committee for the Ministry report) and provide a helpful background for present consideration of the Ministry of women, especially the question of whether they should be ordained and accredited by the Baptist Churches of NSW.

What is the meaning of terminology used in relation to ministry?

Of the terms commonly associated with the ordained ministry of the Word, "**Reverend**" is the product of church history and cultural influences, and is not sanctioned (although also not excluded) by Baptist doctrine.

We sometimes use "**Minister**" (with the capital "M") specifically to identify an ordained minister of the Word, but Baptists have usually wanted to emphasise that all Christians are ministers, servants of Jesus Christ, so that there has often been an understandable reserve toward the narrower usage. The New Testament word "diakonos" (with its related word group) which lies behind the Christian use of the English word "minister" is rarely used as a title, being used most frequently of those who serve, in general (e.g. Matthew 8:15, Romans 13:4, Hebrews 1:14), of Christian service, in general (e.g. Matthew 25:44, Ephesians 4:12, 1 Peter 4:10), of Christian servant leadership (e.g. Matthew 20:26, Mark 9:35, and of a variety of forms of special Christian service (e.g. Acts 1:17, Romans 12:7, 11 Corinthians 8:4, 1 Peter 1:12). Where "diakonos" is a title it is the title which we normally transliterate as "deacon" (possibly Romans 16:1, probably Philippians 1:1, clearly 1 Timothy 3:8-13).

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Baptists most frequently use the term "pastor" for a minister of the Word in the local church situation. This usage can be traced back to the "polmen" word group in the New Testament. In the New Testament these words are used of the shepherding of literal sheep (e.g. Luke 2:8, 1 Corinthians 9:7), of the ministry of Jesus as Messiah/Shepherd (e.g. Matthew 2:6, John 10:11- 16, Hebrews 13:20, Revelation 7:17) and of the shepherding/pastoral ministry of Christian leaders (e.g. John 21:16, Acts 20:28, Ephesians 4:11).

Therefore the term itself points to the shepherding role of the minister of the Word in the local church. The metaphor of the shepherd to all that is done to benefit the "flock", the members of that local church, and may even by extension be applied to outreach activity, as reaching out to bring in "other sheep" (John 10: 16). But most people probably think particularly of ministry directed toward identifiable individuals and families, such as visitation, counsel and crisis support. Certainly in modern usage "pastoral care" is a term used to identify such ministry.

Modern usage also embraces a range of associated terms, some without a settled meaning. For example "**pastoral team**" normally designates two or more persons called by a local church to serve together in that church as ministers of the Word, although it can also designate a group of church members given responsibility for "**pastoral care**" (probably more often known as a "**pastoral care team**".) In the former instance it is normal to designate one person as team leader, or "senior pastor", and others as "**associate pastor**". But it is by no means unknown for two persons to serve together as "**co-pastors**", with neither being accorded greater formal authority than the other. The adjective "pastoral" can be allied with the office of pastor or with shepherding ministry performed by a wider range of people. The abstract noun "**pastorate**", on the other hand, is consistently applied to the office or role of the pastor.

In the setting of a consideration by the Baptist Churches of NSW of the ministry of women, the term "**pastor**" is probably not of key importance. We already ordain and accredit men for special ministries "**other than the pastorate**" (the phrase used to introduce the list of special ministries in the 1989 report of the Committee for the Ministry to General Council), men who would not normally be referred to as "**Pastors**".

Suggested Reading

Among publications which deal with Baptist principles in general the two most helpful are probably Ken Manley's "**Baptists - Their Heritage and Faith**" (chiefly chapter 6 on The Life and Work of the Church) and Henry Cook's "**What Baptists Stand For**" (chiefly chapter 2 on The Nature of the Church)

Two booklets of narrower focus are John Nicholson's "**The Ministry: A Baptist View**" and the British Baptist report entitled "**The Doctrine of the Ministry**". The NSW Baptist publication entitled "**Towards Better Churches**" includes (on pp 11-21) a full reproduction of the doctrinal statement adopted at the 1956 Annual Assembly, which is mentioned in this paper.

These publications are difficult to obtain, but copies are held in the Gilbert Wright Library of Morling College.