

The Story Continues: Belonging Together. Sharing the Dream.

Conversation Paper: Relationship Agreement for *Affiliated Churches*

The next words, but not the last word, on what it means for churches to continue to belong to Churches of Christ.

TOGETHER
TOWARDS A
DIVERSITY
OF HEALTHY
AND GROWING
CHURCHES

DRAFT

Definitions

Churches of Christ means *The Conference of Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania Inc*

AGM means *Churches of Christ Annual General Meeting, usually held in May each year*

CCCA means *the Council of Churches of Christ in Australia*

CCTC means *the Churches of Christ Theological College*

GMP means *Global Mission Partners*

COCOA means *Churches of Christ Overseas Aid*

ACCIM means *Australian Churches of Christ Indigenous Ministries*

Ministry Contribution means *the annual contribution by church, formerly known as an Affiliation Fee¹*

Council means *the Council of Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania*

¹ See Appendix 5 on p24 for a description of the Ministry Contribution

The Next Words. Not the Last Word. *What this document is and isn't.*

This Relationship Agreement document is a Conversation Paper. It contains the next words (but not the last word) in an ongoing conversation we hope all churches have (or will have) about what it means to continue to belong to Churches of Christ.

It describes the relationship of an affiliated church with Churches of Christ. It is based on relevant requirements of the Constitution of Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania Inc., and of policies of the Council. It seeks to outline these requirements and policies in a way that will encourage open and transparent conversations with churches at all stages of their life cycle.

It seeks to address questions like:

- *What is a Church of Christ?*
- *What does it mean to belong to Churches of Christ?*
- *What are the benefits and responsibilities of belonging to Churches of Christ?*

The document seeks to address these questions using a collection of material assembled over many years, both historical and constitutional. This material has grown up around the catchcry of *In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things love*. The document assumes an ongoing commitment to what has become known as Churches of Christ practice. It is acknowledged that central to this conversation is an evaluation, in the context of a commitment to missional engagement in the 21st Century, of the validity of these historical markers and the language that is used to name them (in other words, what is essential and what is non-essential).

There are some obvious examples: firstly, the Purpose Statement contained in the Constitution of Churches of Christ (see page 9) was framed quite a few years ago. It needs to be reviewed and updated as necessary. Secondly, traditional markers described as practices of Churches of Christ in the responsibilities of affiliated churches on page 8 (e.g. weekly Lord's Supper) and terminology like the 'Restoration Movement' need a similar review, not because they are unimportant or because they should be ignored, but to understand and locate them in the context of current 21st Century thinking and actual practice.

Please note therefore that this document is a *process* document, and as such it will constantly evolve. While it is not designed to be part of the Constitution and thus can be held more lightly and re-shaped regularly, it is designed to be engaged with prayerful meaning and commitment.

"...denominations and local congregations face the daunting but also exciting and creative challenge of discovering new forms of affinity. In many cases, this means trading old unifiers like loyalty to institutions, assent to beliefs, and appreciation for styles of music for new ones like a common mission, shared practices, and a unifying dream. These new centres of affinity will, I imagine, create a radically different social shape and require new approaches to polity..."²

² A New Kind of Christianity by Brian McLaren, HarperOne, 2010, Note 1 Chapter 3, P263

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1. Why We Exist

Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania is a movement of around 130 churches who, committed to the cause of Christ, want to effectively reach Victoria and Tasmania and beyond with the Good News of the Kingdom.

Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania strives to be a network or system that serves congregations that have voluntarily united together in interdependence for mutual support and encouragement to do what most churches would find difficult to do alone. We strive for this in the context of the type of relationship of mutual belonging and unity that God proposed in Ezekiel 11:20: "They shall be my people, and I will be their God". We seek to provide a sense of belonging to something bigger.

We exist to cultivate an environment where a diversity of healthy and growing churches can thrive; where imagination and experimentation are encouraged and honoured. In this way we can together participate in God's dream for the world: congregations and systems that serve them, thriving as the sign, foretaste and witness of God's kingdom in Jesus in the midst of continually changing environments. It is this Kingdom dream, our common mission, that unites us.

In coming together we celebrate that each church is called to reach their own community (or mission context) in their own unique way, but that there are ways we can assist one another to be more effective in this. This Relationship Agreement outlines a number of the resources we share as well as the mutual benefits and responsibilities we have as we commit to one another in partnership and mission. At the heart of this document is the recognition that we are all united under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and are committed to key biblical beliefs and distinctives that reflect the Restoration movement³ of which we are a part. We encourage you to prayerfully consider these as your congregation works through the desire to become (or to continue to be) part of Churches of Christ.

We believe that through faith we are *positioned* as members of the body of Christ. However there is more that God asks of us as we serve and follow Him. He asks us to be *participating* members in the work of the Kingdom. This brings both privileges and responsibilities.

This Relationship Agreement is intended to outline what it means to be affiliated with Churches of Christ, and what it means to share a common mission to be the sign, foretaste and witness of God's Kingdom in Victoria and Tasmania and beyond.

We are planning to have a conversation around the themes of this document with all currently affiliated churches, with the hope that all will positively respond to the invitation to sign the relationship commitment on page 15.

Please contact the Vic/Tas Executive Officer (Paul Cameron) or the Executive Director: Mission and Ministry (Martin Boutros) at the Churches of Christ Centre on 03 9488 8800 to plan when we can have a conversation with you.

³ Sometimes called the Stone-Campbell Movement. A brief outline of the distinctive of this movement is included in Appendix 1 on p19. For a snapshot of the movement's history go to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stone-Campbell_Movement. For a range of historical documents go to <http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/restmov.html>

2. Churches of Christ began with Mission

In 1853 the first Church of Christ in Victoria or Tasmania was formed in Prahran, having first met rather less formally in the house of John Ingram in Queen St, Melbourne. Our churches grew in a frontier context: the rapid development of the colony after the discovery of gold. Most churches met first to break bread in the front room of a family home.

*In common with other religious organisations the Churches of Christ have held their annual conferences for the purposes of devising plans for the co-operative work of evangelisation. Looking at the history of these conferences, it would appear that the earlier efforts, though attended with a certain measure of success, failed to accomplish all that might have been legitimately expected from them. It must be admitted that during this time there was a decided absence of unity among the churches. Many churches stood aloof from conferences, and individual (brothers and sisters) were not attracted to these gatherings... (However) in 1882, the reconstructed conference, under a new constitution, held its first meeting, and from that time up to the present the successive conference meetings grew in favour...and increased in usefulness year by year...**the churches working harmoniously together for the consolidation and extension of the Kingdom of God.**⁴*

This mission continues. The Victorian population has grown dramatically in that time and has become a mission field of around 5.3 million people, plus a further 500 000 in Tasmania, most of who are not in a relationship with God. More than ever Churches of Christ need each other to maximise their effectiveness in fulfilling their mission and ministry, for we are not complete by ourselves.

This mission unites us. And this mission, can be defined as:

...a reborn, postimperial evangelism ... proclaiming the same good news of the Kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed. It would mean seeking to do so in the manner Jesus proclaimed it—in word and deed, through art and teaching, in sign and wonder, with clarity and intrigue, with warning and hope. It would mean recruiting people to defect from destructive ways and join God in the missio dei (“mission of God”), a decentralized, grassroots, spiritual-social movement dedicated to plotting goodness and saving the world from human evil—both personal and systemic. It would invite people into lifelong spiritual formation as disciples of Jesus, in a community dedicated to teaching the most excellent way of love...⁵

⁴ *Churches of Christ in Victoria* by F.G Dunn in *The Jubilee History of the Churches of Christ in Australasia*, (1903, Austral Publishing Co), p.155

⁵ *A New Kind of Christianity* by Brian McLaren, HarperOne, 2010. P.216

3. Affiliation as Relationship

A key question in times of transition, indeed at any time, is this: Where does the authority lie?⁶ Churches of Christ have always said that we live under the authority of Christ, and that this authority is seen as being worked out in the local congregation.

Therefore, Churches of Christ hold that the will of Christ for each church is to be found as the Holy Spirit brings direction and conviction to that congregation gathered to seek his will in the light of the Scriptures. Generally in Churches of Christ a congregational general meeting is the final authority under Christ for that congregation. Finding Christ's will through this type of conversation involves mutual counsel through the exercise of the members' gifts and learning from the experience of other congregations.

Christ gives leaders to his Church. It is the duty of the local church through its congregational governance to recognise and affirm Christ's call to such leaders, to set them aside and empower them to lead, and thereby charge them with the responsibility to serve. Mutual accountability is to operate between leaders and church members.

Churches of Christ are not hierarchical. Churches of Christ have a very flat structure, under Christ. Congregational autonomy has always been one of our values⁷. The Churches of Christ Constitution contains a Mission Strategy⁸ that includes the phrase, 'congregational autonomy with a commitment to the other churches of the movement through our conference structures'. It is important to remember that while autonomy is a word wired into our movement, independence and isolation are not.

While we enjoy autonomy, we can turn it into an independence that is counter-productive to the biblical ideal of an inter-connected body⁹ which is to be a spirited interdependence best characterised by generosity rather than survival, self-focus or self-centredness.

In a covenant-like relationship, affiliates enjoy the privilege of independently discovering their unique mission and ministry within their context, but allow this discovery and the health and growth that follows to enrich all affiliated churches. This can occur through inspirational and generous storytelling and resource sharing. This will encourage an interdependence that fosters health and growth in all affiliates, far beyond a self-focused competitiveness that can sometimes exist between congregations within our movement, let alone with those beyond it.

While not in any way diminishing the autonomy of the local church, it is appropriate for individual congregations of Churches of Christ to cooperate within a network or family of churches in which mutual care, support, and accountability are shared practices. The responsibilities and benefits of the parties involved in the relationship (Churches of Christ and a congregation) is summarised in the following table.

This is not designed as a 'book of rules' nevertheless it does describe how together we can imaginatively live as Kingdom-partners and Kingdom-bearers in the 21st Century.

⁶ An idea suggested in *The Great Emergence* by Phyllis Tickle (Baker Books, 2008)

⁷ Different congregations express their autonomy in different ways. For some, this congregational autonomy is absolute; for others who still guard their autonomy do so within the context of discovering ways to work together with other congregations, all within a network (or 'conference') of like-minded and like-spirited congregations. For the former, affiliation can be not much more than a pragmatic business transaction based on 'what's in it for us'. For the latter it could be better described as a covenant relationship. While we will inevitably live with (and between) these polarities, Churches of Christ values the idea of affiliation as a covenant relationship.

⁸ See page 9

⁹ See 1 Corinthians 12:12-26

Relationship Benefits and Responsibilities

For a Church	For Churches of Christ
<p>Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of belonging to something bigger, and ready-made partnerships with other like-minded and like-spirited congregations • Training, formation, endorsement, support and nurture of ‘minister-leaders’ • Assistance in ministry search and appointment • Training, support and nurture of ‘leader-leaders’ in all areas of its mission and ministry including elders and those leading among children and young people • Ways of engaging mission overseas (through GMP and COCOA) and among Indigenous people (through ACCIM) • Other support from Mission and Ministry, CCTC, the Properties Corporation and the Social Justice Network • Church loans and financial services, insurance program and trusteeship of property • Support and advice if a church experiences crisis, conflict, tension or uncertainty about its future viability • Opportunity for conversation with Churches of Christ when membership falls below 25 (other than specialist, alternative or ‘boutique’ churches) 	<p>Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources, relationships and processes that help ensure there is a future for the movement • Capacity to fulfil constitutional and legal responsibilities
<p>Responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alignment with the mission of Churches of Christ • Public branding as ‘a Church of Christ’, or ‘affiliated with Churches of Christ’ • Stewardship and communication of the Churches of Christ story in local context • Commitment to mission and ministry reflecting practices of Churches of Christ (including centrality of Christ, baptism by immersion, discipleship, mutual mission and ministry, weekly Lord’s Supper) • A generous interdependence expressed through a contribution to the Churches of Christ network and its affiliates through people and other resources, and by participation in gatherings • Appointment to key ministry positions of people either endorsed by Churches of Christ, or willing and able to be endorsed, within a timeframe agreed between the minister, the church, and Mission and Ministry • Commitment to operation of good governance (constitution, financial reporting) and membership policies consistent with the ethos of Churches of Christ • Engagement with indigenous and multicultural people in local context • Stewardship of property and other resources • Payment of an annual Ministry Contribution • Timely ‘census’ reporting as requested • Willingness to enter conversation with Churches of Christ when Ministry Contribution is unpaid or ‘census’ not completed for three years 	<p>Responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of mission-shaping leadership that reflects the deeper story of Churches of Christ in the context of the 21st century • Provision of appropriate, contextual leader-leader and minister-leader training and formation • Provision of mission-shaped resources to develop healthy and growing churches • Provision of ongoing ministry and church formation processes • Ensure the ongoing stewardship of the story and resources of local congregations to reflect and honour their past, present and future • Provision of conversation partners when the membership of an affiliated church (other than specialist, alternative or ‘boutique’ churches) falls below 25, or when Ministry Contribution is unpaid or ‘census’ not completed for three years • Communication of connection with the wider church, locally and globally • Represent Churches of Christ in interchurch conversations • Communication of global and local issues of mission and justice, including indigenous issues • Provision of property trusteeship and financial services that fulfil the appropriate legal requirements • Provision of group-purchase benefits • Legal accountability and risk management

4. Together Towards Diversity: Statement of Purposes¹⁰

Vision

To become a dynamic, relevant, Christian movement through a renewed emphasis on implementing New Testament Christianity in ways which create meaning for contemporary Australians.

Mission Strategy

To achieve our vision of being a dynamic, relevant Christian movement we need, under the Lordship of Christ and the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit, to implement in creative new ways the following aspects of New Testament Christianity that make up the distinctive ethos of Churches of Christ:

- (i) Mutual ministry of Christian believers.
- (ii) Congregational autonomy with a commitment to the other churches of our movement through our conference structures.
- (iii) Simplicity and vitality of worship.
- (iv) Weekly communion.
- (v) Witness to, and practice of believers' baptism by immersion.
- (vi) Commitment to extending the kingdom of God and the making of disciples through a passion for sharing 'the good news'.
- (vii) Working for social justice, equality and the responsible care of our environment and all of God's creation.
- (viii) Being a servant church, responding to human need.
- (ix) Concentrating on the essentials rather than the nonessentials of the Christian faith.
- (x) Allowing for wide diversity of Christian understanding, practices and beliefs.
- (xi) Recognising as Christians all who accept Jesus as Saviour and Lord and an openness to close co-operation with other Christians in worship, witness and service.
- (xii) Promotion of the unity of all God's people, maintaining a passionate commitment to the ultimate goal of visible unity.
- (xiii) Affirming the centrality of the scriptures as our authority for Christian belief and practice.

Within the above, Churches of Christ exists *to cultivate an environment where a diversity of healthy and growing mission-shaped churches can thrive.*

In that environment, we see mission-shaped churches, radically living Christ's love, enjoying the favour of all the people, maturing and equipping people as they serve to build the Kingdom of God; a network of ministers, leaders and specialists trained and supported for ongoing and future ministry; and we see Churches of Christ building strong community through supportive and accountable relationships and providing resources, particularly through its four Partner Departments, to serve and equip the church¹¹. This affinity is based more on the common dream written about earlier and the missional and spiritual practices that help achieve it, rather than creeds or doctrines.

In order to fulfill this vision, we see generous churches financially committed to their mission context and beyond.

¹⁰ From the Conference of Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania Inc. Constitution. *This will be reviewed in 2010.*

¹¹ For an overview of the structure, and how Council of Churches of Christ interacts with the Four Partner Departments (Mission and Ministry, Properties Corporation, Churches of Christ Theological College and Community Care) and affiliated congregations turn to Appendix 3 on page 20

5. The Benefits of Doing Mission Together

We believe that by becoming an affiliated church of Churches of Christ we can do mission more effectively because we are better resourced together.

5.1 Churches and their Leaders are better resourced for ministry and mission by:

Realigning Churches around Mission including assistance to develop a church's missional imagination within a culture of experimentation; including its vision, values, strategies, annual ministry plans, evangelism, discipleship and governance structure.

Church Health Consultancies including church assessments, intervention and ongoing health development

Mediation is available to churches as needed, either by referral or by Mission and Ministry staff. This may be between leaders, members of the congregation, staff or any other group.

Intentional and other Interim Ministries

Ministry Placement Process

Minister's Terms and Conditions, including Salary: Advice for ministers and churches regarding recommended remuneration, conditions and Minister/Church Agreements from a third party who understands the special relationship between a Minister and a church.

Church Leadership Training and Development

Community Mission including CareWorks

Youth Vision provides support for congregational youth and young adult ministries, including leadership training and an Internship program.

Kids Vision provides support for congregational ministries among families and children, resourcing ministers and other leaders.

Child Protection – policy documentation and procedures are provided for all churches to enable them to fulfill government regulations for all those working with children and youth. This is in partnership with the ChildSafe organisation.

Preaching and teaching support for churches on request, especially when they are without a minister or when in need of specialist teaching on a subject.

5.2 Ministers are Better Resourced for mission by:

Coaching and Mentoring for Ministers is available, encouraging growth as imaginative, mission-shaped leaders.

Minister care and support is offered through Mission and Ministry.

Minister's Professional Development for refreshment and renewal of people in ministry.

Endorsement of Ministers including church staff members and chaplains.

Ministers Review and Documentation: If churches wish to undertake a review of their minister an independent chairperson is provided along with documentation and a fair process.

Marriage License applications are made on behalf of Ministers and churches and practical training and advice is provided through Mission and Ministry team members.

Minister's Long Service Leave Fund: For churches to contribute to on behalf of their minister provides portability enabling ministers to accrue long service leave when moving between churches.

5.3 Churches are Better Resourced for Mission by:

Insurance: The Churches of Christ Group Insurance Program reduces all insurance costs (including Property, Public Liability etc) for affiliated churches. We are able to do this because the Properties Corporation, in partnership with Australian Baptist churches, negotiates on behalf of Churches of Christ with insurance companies. This collaborative approach reduces the cost of premiums.

Administrative Support and advice through the staff of the Churches of Christ Centre (in particular the Properties Corporation and Mission and Ministry) that have expertise that many leaders lack, but are able to access at the end of the phone.

Constitutional Support: The Properties Corporation and Mission and Ministry are creating a Model Constitution for churches. This will be provided along with constitutional advice for each local church situation.

Sharing of Legal Advice on particular issues or referral to a Legal Practitioner who understands churches and their particular legal needs.

Financial Advice on particular issues including taxation, GST, Business Activity Statements (BAS) or referral to a financial advisor for financial advice.

Property: Participating from the beginning as a church considers a property purchase or development, including the negotiation of contracts on behalf of churches, and holding properties in trust.

Finances and Investments: Churches and members of Churches of Christ have access to the helpful professional financial services of the Properties Corporation. The Corporation provides competitive at-call and term deposit interest rates and excellent service for local congregations.

5.4 Theological Education and Ministry and Leadership Formation

CCTC is a Partner Department of Churches of Christ and it provides excellent theological education, formation for missional leadership and ministry, and personal growth opportunities for mission and ministry.

Professional Development for Ministers and Christian Leaders (including church leaders and chaplains) overseen by Mission and Ministry, and in partnership with CCTC.

Vocational Education & Training (VET) sector training for those seeking equipping for Certificate I to IV level training is also available through Australian College of Ministries (ACOM). ACOM is accountable to Churches of Christ in NSW and Queensland.

5.5 Churches of Christ Together in Mission

Celebration Events: events where all churches are encouraged to combine for mutual inspiration and encouragement about what God is doing in and through our movement.

Supporting the development of other Churches of Christ across Victoria and Tasmania

Church Planting including experimenting with different shapes of church.

Aged Care: Community Care provides residential aged care.

Community Mission: Community Care works with Mission and Ministry through CareWorks, to partner with churches for community mission, service and outreach.

Cross Cultural Ministry: support including the Asian Ministry Council and the Indigenous Ministry Unit to churches involved in, or wishing to enter, this area of mission.

Global Mission: support for overseas mission programs and aid projects through GMP and COCOA.

Council of Churches of Christ in Australia – links churches to like-minded and like-spirited churches around the country.

World Convention of Churches of Christ – links churches to like-minded and like-spirited churches around the world.

5.6 Communication to Assist our Mission in the Wider Community

Social Justice Network: A collective voice on social issues to the community.

Victorian Council of Churches: A link with other Christian communities, and a shared voice with the community and with government.

Churches of Christ News: Electronic and hard copy communication bringing the churches together, and advising churches and leaders of opportunities, decisions and proposals that affect them.

Web Resources: Particularly through the Mission and Ministry webpage.

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6. Responsibilities and Expectations as we do Mission Together

Because of our mutual relationship with one another, Affiliated Churches play an active role within Churches of Christ – by practically, prayerfully and financially supporting one another as we share the Good News of Jesus Christ locally, throughout our nation, and across the world. By affiliating with Churches of Christ you will be agreeing to:

- 6.1 Support our shared Purpose, Vision, Mission and Value Statements.
- 6.2 Protect the unity and interdependence of our churches.
- 6.3 Co-operate with other Churches of Christ, and maintain healthy relationship with congregations of Christian traditions or denominations.
- 6.4 Play your part in decision-making forums of Churches of Christ that are held at least annually, contributing to the development of its policies and strategies and being involved in their implementation through its ministries and those of the four Partner Departments.
- 6.5 The appointment of a sole minister or senior minister/ministry team leader who is either an endorsed minister within Churches of Christ or is on a journey towards such endorsement.
- 6.6 Support Church Planting through establishing new Churches including multiple congregation churches.
- 6.7 Promote the Partner Departments of Churches of Christ and encourage the participation of appropriate members on the Boards, Task Groups and committees of Churches of Christ
- 6.8 Supply a copy of your Church Constitution, mission, vision and values statements.
- 6.9 Complete an annual church statistical or census return.
- 6.10 Financially support the shared ministries of Churches of Christ through giving your annual Ministry Contribution which is based on a percentage of a church's general offerings¹². *We recognise that every church is at a different stage in its lifecycle. We would request that if you think that you are unable to meet the recommended percentage that you discuss your situation with the ministry staff of Churches of Christ and we will come to an alternative arrangement.*
- 6.11 Where possible using the services that Churches of Christ and its Partner Departments provide for mutual benefit, e.g. *Properties Corporation Investment & Finance, Churches of Christ Insurance Program and Long Service Leave Fund*
- 6.12 Generously contribute resources and skills to assist other member Churches of Christ.
- 6.13 Play your part in keeping the Churches of Christ Centre up to date with all contact details for your church, its minister/s, leaders and office bearers.
- 6.14 Promote GMP as the worldwide expression of our movement's mission.
- 6.15 Promote COCOA as the aid arm of GMP and Churches of Christ in Australia.

¹² This is a proposal for delegates assembled at the May 2010 AGM.

7. What Belonging Means for affiliating (and affiliated) Churches

It is helpful to remind affiliated churches that in the affiliation process churches provide:

- A brief background summary of the development of the church seeking affiliation.
- An outline of its current mission and ministries, its future vision (including new mission and ministry opportunities), and anything that may impede their development.
- Brief information on the Minister and/or Key Leader, including training and ministry experience (other ministers and their responsibilities can be listed).
- Brief information on the members attending (numbers, demographic, where drawn from etc.).
- An explanation about why the affiliation with Churches of Christ is important to the church.
- A commitment to good governance through an explanation about the way the church is organised. This will include a copy of the church's Constitution consistent with the purpose, vision and mission of Churches of Christ and with any model church constitution produced by Mission and Ministry and The Properties Corporation, an annual report, budget and details of, or plans for, an Annual General Meeting.
- Any additional information about the church, as necessary.

Affiliating churches also agree to the following in a signed and dated agreement:

- To be held accountable in a covenant relationship with Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania, for its ministry and the stewardship of its resources.
- To financially support the mission and ministry of Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania through an annual Ministry Contribution or affiliation fee and general donation.
- To ensure its minister leader/s are or will become Endorsed Minister/s of Churches of Christ within an agreed timeframe; and to appoint ministers according to the Terms and Conditions of Employment of Ministers within Churches of Christ.
- To accept the conditions of the Code of Ethics for ministers and leaders, and to implement the Responsible Leadership with Children policy.
- To have governance and membership policies consistent with a model church constitution of Churches of Christ.
- The church agrees that either the words "Churches of Christ" will appear in the name of the church, *or that* the words "affiliated with Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania" and the Churches of Christ logo will be included in any governance document (e.g. constitution), and also displayed in a public place and/or within any communication and advertising of the church (e.g. newsletters and letterheads).

How does your church express these commitments?

What areas might you need to develop further?

What will you do, and when will you do it?

Is the church able to sign the attached Relationship Commitment?

Relationship Commitment

We _____ (*insert name of church*), **agree:**

- To be held accountable in a covenant relationship with Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania, for its ministry and the stewardship of its resources.
- To financially support the mission and ministry of Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania, through an annual Ministry Contribution or affiliation fee and general donations.
- To ensure its minister leader/s are or will become Endorsed Minister/s of Churches of Christ within an agreed timeframe; and to appoint ministers according to the Terms and Conditions of Employment of Ministers within Churches of Christ.
- To accept the conditions of the Code of Ethics for ministers and leaders, and implement the Responsible Leadership with Children policy.
- To have governance and membership policies consistent with the model church constitution of Churches of Christ.
- That either the words “Church of Christ” will appear in the name of the church, *or that* the words “affiliated with Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania” and the Churches of Christ logo will be included in any governance document (eg constitution), and also displayed in a public place and/or within any communication and advertising of the church (eg. newsletters and letterheads).

Trusting Jesus Christ as the Lord and Saviour of His Church, and being in agreement with the purpose, values, vision, mission, statements and structure of Churches of Christ, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we unite with Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania.

In so doing we commit ourselves to God and to other affiliated churches to the following:

- 1. We will protect the unity of Churches of Christ**
By acting in love toward other member churches. By refusing to gossip. By supporting the leaders as they follow Christ. By reconciling conflict.
- 2. We will share in the responsibilities of Churches of Christ**
By praying for and building healthy and growing churches. By supporting other churches within our movement. By faithfully attending gatherings, including the AGM. By warmly welcoming new churches.
- 3. We will serve the ministry of Churches of Christ**
By developing and using our God given and unique gifts and talents. By regularly giving of our finances to support the movement. By developing a generous, servant heart.
- 4. We will support the story and reputation of Churches of Christ**
By ensuring all aspects of our church’s ministry and mission are safe places for all people. By encouraging a Godly lifestyle and behaviour among our members, leaders and minister/s. By building healthy relationships with members of other Christian churches.
- 5. We will participate in ongoing conversations with Mission and Ministry**
By developing a sense of partnership with Mission and Ministry (and other Partner Departments). By being open to dialogue about our church’s health and growth, and the futures God may have for it.

Churches of Christ also commits itself, its Partner Departments, and its leaders to:

1. **Serve each church with love and integrity**
2. **Be praying for your church regularly**
3. **Seek to equip you according to God’s calling for your church in your mission context**
4. **Willingly and cheerfully providing support services to your church.**

Church

Minister

Secretary

Treasurer

One other Board member

Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania

Executive Officer

Executive Director—Mission and Ministry

____ / ____ / 20 ____

Please return, along with a copy of the resolution of the church, to:
Executive Officer—Churches of Christ First Floor, 582 Heidelberg Rd., Fairfield 3078

Appendix 1. The Distinctive Practices of our Movement¹³

The family of churches known around the world as Christian Churches, Churches of Christ and Disciples of Christ began 200 years ago in both the United Kingdom and the United States of America. It was a time when churches tended towards legalism, authoritarianism and exclusivism. Our movement began with a passion for the unity of this rigid and divided church. There was deep conviction that unity could not be achieved without a thorough reformation of the church of those times and that through such reform the life, faith, and order of the 'New Testament' church could and should be restored.

Today in any Christian world family there will be great diversity in belief and practice. There are also many features of each family that are shared by the whole church of Jesus Christ. What follows is an attempt to create an overall but simple picture of who Churches of Christ are and so it needs to be read as a whole. It also needs to be read in the context that no attempt is being made to separate this family from the church of Christ universal but rather to describe its place within the whole church.

So what are the marks of Churches of Christ? It is possible to choose ten major characteristics:

1. A concern for Christian Unity
2. A commitment to Evangelism and Mission
3. An emphasis on the centrality of the New Testament
4. A simple Confession of Faith
5. Believers' Baptism
6. Weekly Communion
7. A Biblical Name
8. Congregational autonomy
9. 'Lay' Leadership
10. Diversity/Freedom/Liberty

1. A concern for Christian Unity

In the 1808 'Declaration and Address' Thomas Campbell wrote that the 'Church of Christ on earth is essentially, intentionally and constitutionally one'. Another pioneer, Barton Stone, spoke of Christian unity being the 'polar star'. The 'Christian' movement was a movement for unity within the fragmented and often hostile and competitive church environment of that time but ultimately became a separate movement. Today there are different understandings of how Christian unity might be understood and achieved ranging from commitment to the ecumenical movement, with some involved in dialogue and negotiation with other church families, through a belief that there is already an underlying God-given unity despite apparent division, to those who feel that they have discovered what the church should be like and that unity will come through others recognising this and joining with them.

2. A commitment to Evangelism and Mission

Unity was never an end in itself. Its desirability came out of the understanding 'that the world could be won only if the church became one'. Today that commitment is shown both by emphasising the need for personal commitment to Jesus Christ and by a concern for peace and justice for all people. Many will balance these two emphases but sometimes one will be emphasised much more than the other.

3. A New Testament emphasis

Churches of Christ are a people of Christian scripture. Many see themselves within the 'Restoration Movement'; believing that unity can be achieved by 'restoring' the New Testament Church, by stripping away the accumulation of traditions that had brought about division. The authority is the scriptures, not the church. The New Testament writings are unique as writings of proclamation; they are the written revelation of a word already being proclaimed, with its focus in the gospel. In triune reality, we are a new creation in Christ the incarnate Word; we are taught by the Spirit toward tangible grace and truth in the world for the glory of God, which is disclosed in Jesus Christ. While all members of Churches of Christ would describe themselves as biblical, Christian reception of the word of God does not belong to a religious sociological category as one among several peoples of the book, and a perpetual quibble over the letter of texts in quest of its correct word. Christians are a new creation in Christ.

¹³ Based on a statement prepared by Lorraine and Lyndsay Jacobs, former General Secretaries of World Convention of Churches of Christ, with amendments for the current Australian context.

4. A simple confession of faith

From Matthew 16:16 came the cornerstone question for salvation: 'Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ and accept him as your Lord and Saviour?' Answering yes to that question is all that is required to begin a faith relationship with God. This simple question avoided the use of—often divisive—creeds. Many today will not make any use of creeds; others will use them as a means of expressing faith, but not a test of faith.

5. Believers' Baptism

Only people who have reached an age where they can make their own confession of faith are baptised. The means of baptism is always immersion. Faith and baptism have always been the means for church membership. Although many congregations will now accept into membership those who become church members through other traditions; other congregations still hold that believers' baptism is essential. Baptisteries, for immersion, are features of worship facilities.

6. Weekly Communion

Again believing that they follow the New Testament model, Churches of Christ celebrate communion or 'The Lord's Supper' each Sunday.

7. Biblical Name

Members of the emerging 19th Century Movement wanted to be known only as 'Christians' or 'Disciples of Christ'. Slogans such as 'Christians only, but not the only Christians' and 'Biblical names for Biblical people' captured this emphasis. In Australia congregations tend to use the name Church of Christ (eg. Affiliated with Churches of Christ). In the USA and elsewhere the name varies from Church (or Churches or church) of Christ, Christian Church or Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

8. Congregational Autonomy

Members of Churches of Christ live under the authority of Christ but this authority is seen as being worked out in the local congregation. For many this congregational autonomy is absolute; many others guard their autonomy jealously but have established ways of working together; many are organised in regions and/or nationally but still with a very large degree of congregational autonomy. Globally there is very limited organisation. The World Convention of Churches of Christ is a global fellowship which endeavours to build up fellowship and understanding within the whole family.

9. 'Lay' Leadership (leader-leaders)

The priesthood of all believers is a mark of all Churches of Christ. We speak of and seek to practice mutual ministry. We believe that all people are baptised into mission and ministry. Participation by 'lay' people in all aspects of the church's life is a notable feature. They lead the Lord's Supper, they baptise, they preach, they are involved in mission and evangelism, and in a diversity of leadership roles and functions. Women and men are seen as equal by most parts of the family but some see distinct roles for men and women. There is a 'called', paid and (usually) trained ministry (minister-leader) with recognition varying from a 'paid member' to an expectation of special leadership, but always seeking to respect the gifting and passion found in Ephesians 4.

10. Diversity

'In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things love' is the best-known slogan in our family. Churches of Christ have always allowed for diversity and much of that diversity has been enriching. Diversity also allows for the possibility of intolerance and division and that unfortunately has also been part of our experience. This Christian family is left with the challenge of finding for itself the unity-in-diversity it seeks for the whole church of Jesus Christ.

Appendix 2. What Churches of Christ are About¹⁴

We will be a dynamic, relevant Christian movement transforming our culture with the Gospel of Christ.

Statement of Purpose

We exist as a movement to extend the kingdom of God by creatively implementing new mission initiatives and supporting active ministries in diverse Australian contexts.

Core Values

The Gospel

We passionately value the good news about God as revealed to us in Jesus Christ, and are committed to the mission of communicating it and sharing it with others, making disciples who can make more disciples, and so extend the kingdom of God.

Collaborative Ministry

We value the unique contribution to ministry of each individual believer, and are committed to equipping believers and encouraging them to participate in ministry and mission on the basis of their giftedness and capacity.

Diversity

We recognise the diversity of Christian understanding, belief and experience, particularly in the 'non-essentials' for Christian faith. Therefore, we value the freedom, flexibility and creativity of a variety of ministry practice and expression.

The Scriptures

We value and affirm the centrality of the scriptures as our authority for Christian belief, identity and practice.

Social Justice

We value the dignity, equality and inherent value of all persons regardless of gender, race, economic standing or belief system. Therefore we will work for social justice, equal opportunity for all persons and the responsible care and management of the environment.

Servanthood

We value the biblical principles of servanthood and therefore seek to be a servant church committed to responding to human need.

Cooperation and Unity

We value the close fellowship, cooperation and service of all those who accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Therefore, we passionately seek to promote unity in the wider church and are committed to the ultimate ideal of visible unity.

Churches of Christ

A movement of the people of God shaping missional churches, crossing new frontiers, impacting cultures.

¹⁴ A lighter view of the Purpose etc of Churches of Christ as published in the Vic/Tas Annual Report.

Together, Towards...



Affiliated Churches

Council

Constitutional Responsibility:
 Oversee spiritual health and direction of Conference¹
 Empower Partner Departments and devolve tasks to them that enable the fulfilment of the mission and purpose of the conference
Mission Alignment

¹ See Constitution Clause 14 for Role statement and Clause 13 for membership and appointment.
² See Constitution Clause 15 for the constitutional steps of the roles of the PDCs. Governance structures of PDCs exist to enable them to fulfil their task, not as an impediment to alignment, or as a basis for 'silo' formation.
³ See Constitution for Statement of Purpose, and front of this Report Book for a parallel version. This stated summary statement was accepted at the 28 October 2009 All Boards Meeting, as an appropriate summary of 'together towards a diversity of healthy and growing mission-shaped communities/activities. We understand that 'church' can mean many things. Sometimes they look like what we have always called 'church', and sometimes they look very different to that stereotypical view. Diversity and experimentation is encouraged.

Appendix 4. Affiliation as Covenant¹⁵

The idea of a covenant relationship is deeply rooted in the text of the Bible. The motif of covenanting permeates the story of the people of God in the Judeo-Christian tradition. God covenants with people, and people make covenants with each other, under God's oversight. The idea of a covenant implies a significant commitment. It is a reliable and lasting relationship, which includes both promises and obligations (or benefits and responsibilities). Biblically, the relationship is usually sealed with a ritual action.

The covenants God makes with the people stem from the sovereign, gracious, free initiative of God, and have their basis in this God, who is holy, righteous and extravagantly merciful. One style of covenant includes those made with Noah, signifying God's everlasting promise to the whole creation, and with Abraham and David, which emphasise God's promises to individuals, and through them to the whole people of God. Another style of covenant is that made with Moses and the people of the Exodus. Here, the stress is on God's merciful delivery of oppressed peoples and, in turn, on the obligations that flow to the people as a result of the covenant. The Bible witnesses not only to the need for obedience on the part of the people, but also to the possibility of the covenant being threatened when the people fail to live up to its obligations.

A highly significant development arose with the prophets who, aware of the people's failure to live up to the covenant, restlessly began to seek and hope for a different and better covenant, a true faithfulness. Jeremiah discerned God's purpose to establish a new covenant, written on the heart, in which everyone, being forgiven, would know God and walk with God in a relationship of responsible faithfulness.

Covenants between people are seen as being under God's oversight, or enacted in the sight of God. But they follow different patterns. There are covenants between equal nations, between conquering kings and their subject kings, between a king and his people, and between two individuals.

This web of understandings of covenant, which is woven through the Old Testament, is developed in the New Testament, where the covenant imagery persists. The most significant way that this theological motif is taken up is the understanding that Jesus embodies a 'new covenant', seals it through his life, death and resurrection, and signifies it in his Last Supper, calling people to a radical change of mind and style of living.

The old covenant is fulfilled in the new. The new covenant is opened to all; it is made accessible through the action of the Spirit, who draws the covenanted people into communion (*koinonia*). They are thus rightly seen as a covenanting community.

This has important implications for the church: it offers an alternative understanding of how things are and how things could be. Because of the divine initiative and because God is totally committed to all people, a new beginning is possible for the church and for the whole human community. Therefore, the covenant requires a constant, solid commitment in the circumstances of life. Within the one faith community—the Body of Christ—there is a mutual responsibility and solidarity with one another for the fulfilment of this commitment.

This fits in well with the deeper story of our movement: We live under the authority of Christ, worked out in the local congregation; and also with the lively practice of our movement in Australia: We work out what it means to live under the authority of Christ in local congregations and within a network (or 'conference') of likeminded and like-spirited congregations.

¹⁵ From a 2009 AGM Discussion paper, *Covenanting Together*, this section informed by Meryll Blair. While the word 'covenant' was briefly used to describe the relationship between a church and Churches of Christ, it was moved away from because of cultural sensitivities to the use of that word, hence this document describing a 'Relationship Agreement'.

Appendix 5. From Affiliation Fees to Ministry Contribution¹⁶

Affiliation Fees are a significant source of revenue for the activities of Churches of Christ, and particularly for the ongoing operation of the Mission and Ministry Partner Department. Income from Affiliation Fees produces around 40% of available income. The collection of Fees and the basis of setting them (per capita) is outlined in the constitution, and is explained to churches annually¹⁷. In the past Affiliation Fees were increased each year, by an amount at least equivalent to CPI, but in certain circumstances by a higher figure.

Affiliation Fees have always been calculated on a per capita basis. The practice of “per capita” Affiliation Fees, based on church membership has become increasingly inappropriate, as it has some serious flaws. Churches in the 21st century have a changing emphasis on and criteria for membership, and the maintenance of membership rolls varies greatly. Some churches with quite reasonable attendances have comparatively low membership numbers. This all adds up to a very inefficient and inequitable way of calculating Affiliation Fees. It is also reasonable to say that some churches with good membership numbers have lower per capita giving based on many factors, and vice versa.

A more equitable way is to align Affiliation Fees with the annual income of an affiliated church, and for Fees to be a fixed percentage of that income. This takes into account the actual financial ability of churches to meet Fees with a direct relationship to their income. The income on which the Fees are based excludes giving designated for missions, building and other special purpose funds. Capacity to pay becomes the basis of the Fee rather than an arbitrary count of people in membership. Churches in lower socio-economic areas, or with higher proportions of retirees, for example, would no longer be penalised on a “one size fits all” member-based fee. This will release more funds more mission where it is really needed.

Another advantage of this percentage basis for Fees is that as churches grow then the income to Conference grows accordingly and an annual revision of fees will generally no longer be necessary. This makes Conference more accountable in terms of its services and their outcomes.

Introducing the Ministry Contribution

The words ‘Affiliation Fees’ don’t really provide the best description of the purpose of the contribution churches make to Churches of Christ. It sounds like what clubs require of club members. It doesn’t sound like the expression of a commitment to continuing the ministry of Jesus. On the other hand, the notion of a ‘Ministry Contribution’ is a better descriptor. In making their regular Ministry Contributions churches are contributing to the wider ministry and mission of Churches of Christ. This relationship is not about membership of a club, rather a prayerfully considered and generous partnership with Churches of Christ as we continue the mission and ministry of Jesus.

The Churches of Christ Constitution states in clause 7, *Every Affiliated Church shall contribute each year to the annual operating Budget of Conference (including administration and ministry and mission support), and the Council of Churches of Christ in Australia, on a percentage basis of the Affiliated Church’s income (excluding giving designated for mission or building funds), as indicated on the statistical return of the previous year.*

Currently the Ministry Contribution is being modelled based on 2% of a church’s income. See the next page for a possible method of calculating a church’s income, and for a draft of the Ministry Contribution Calculation Report.

¹⁶ This is a proposal for delegates assembled at the May 2010 AGM.

¹⁷ For example, ‘Affiliation fees assist in funding the Conference-wide leadership provided by Conference and Mission and Ministry, the administrative activities of Conference Council, as well as the congregational activities of Mission and Ministry (M&M). These two bodies oversee the work of the Conference on behalf of churches in Victoria and Tasmania’.

The calculation of the Ministry Contribution is based on the church's income (for the church's last financial year) and ***one possible formula for its calculation*** is:

	Annual Church Income	Annual Ministry Contribution
A	\$0 to \$7 500	\$150
B	\$7 501 to \$67 139 (i.e. the amount equivalent to one minister's salary package)	2% of income
C	\$67 140 to \$1 000 000	\$1 342.80 plus 1.5% of income over \$67 140
D	Over \$1 000 000	\$1 342.80 + \$13 992.90

The Ministry Contribution goes towards the operating budget of Churches of Christ, and should be understood in the light of the Relationship Agreement paper. It contributes to meeting the costs of services like Conference administration, Mission and Ministry, including M and M staff (Youth, Children and Families, Multicultural, and Minister Care) as well as the other ministries and events that form part of our corporate life. The Ministry Contribution fee contributes to, but does not cover all, the administration, mission and ministry costs of Churches of Christ in Vic/Tas.

MINISTRY CONTRIBUTION CALCULATION

Church Name	
--------------------	--

Please complete the following information based on your church's last completed financial year

Total Church Income	
----------------------------	--

Less Excluded Income	
-----------------------------	--

Missions: Giving designated to be passed directly to a mission agency	
--	--

Building Fund: One off appeals and regular giving designated for the church's Building Fund	
--	--

Other 1	
---------	--

Total Excluded Income	
------------------------------	--

Total Income less Total Excluded Income	
Basis to calculate Ministry Contribution	

Please attach a copy of the audited financial statement used to complete this form.

Does the church wish to pay its annual Ministry Contribution in monthly or quarterly instalments during 20xx?	Monthly <input type="checkbox"/> Quarterly <input type="checkbox"/>
---	--

Treasurer Name

One other Board member Name

Treasurer Signature

One other Board member Signature

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