

# **Fresh Hope Armidale Church of Christ**

## **Constitution**

**A Biblical approach to church governance**

**January 2000  
Revised April 2015**

## **1 Preamble**

- 1.1 The Fresh Hope Armidale Church of Christ exists to be a fellowship of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and to bring people to faith in God. We believe it is the church's task to preach the gospel of the saving grace of the risen Lord Jesus Christ and to teach truthfully and faithfully from God's written word, the Holy Bible.
- 1.2 We believe that there is one living and true God, eternally existing in three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; that this triune God who created all, upholds and governs all.
- 1.3 We accept the New Testament as the authority for all the teachings of the church, for all matters concerning the spiritual oversight of the church, and for the qualities required for leadership. This constitution concerns governance and the conduct of business so that "everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" (I Cor. 14:40).

## **2 Church Name**

The church shall be known as Fresh Hope Armidale Church of Christ, and is referred to in the rest of this document as "the Church".

## **3 Authority to Conduct Business**

- 3.1 All transactions relating to ***land and buildings*** of which the Church has stewardship must be carried out in accordance with the *Churches of Christ in New South Wales Incorporation Act 1947 No 2*.
- 3.2 The authority for the transaction of all other church business shall be vested in the elders of the Church. The elders shall perform their duties under the guidance of God through the Holy Spirit, in accordance with this constitution and after consideration of information arising from business meetings and any other relevant source.
- 3.3 In general, the elders will adopt a consensus approach to decision making. This is because it is expected that God will make His will known, and the elders' responsibility is to discern that will as best they can. Where a consensus is not reached on a matter, then the matter should be set aside for a time, while each elder considers the matter further with prayer and contemplation. With discretion, an elder may also seek counsel or input from others. It has been the experience of the present elders (2015) that God honours this approach to decision making and makes His will known in a timely manner. If doubt continues (i.e. with a consensus not being achieved), then the matter should be set aside for consideration at a later time.
- 3.4 The elders may delegate to the minister, other paid staff or any member authority and responsibility to undertake any given role within the church. All people serving in such roles are ultimately accountable to the elders before God for how they serve.

- 3.5 Amendment to this constitution may be made by the elders. Prior to implementing any amendments, the elders must consult with members of the church and consider any matters raised during this consultation. Consultation should consist of the circulation of a draft revision to members, along with the calling of a special meeting of members to discuss the proposed changes. At least four weeks notice of meeting must be provided. Notice is to be given through insertion of the notice in the church newsletter and by circulation to the church's email contact list.
- 3.6 Notwithstanding the provisions of section 3.5, the elders may in exceptional circumstances temporarily suspend or amend any provision of this constitution should those circumstances so warrant.

## 4 Membership

- 4.1 Membership of the Church is both a privilege and a responsibility. Membership is not a means by which power or advantage is achieved. Rather, it is a commitment to Christian fellowship; to sharing experiences of faith; to the commonality in Christ; and to the goals and vision of the Church. Membership involves growing and supporting the body of Christ and worshipping God through service.
- 4.2 **Baptismal membership** of the church shall consist of those persons who, believing in Jesus Christ as the Son of God have confessed their faith in Him, have been baptized by immersion into<sup>1</sup> water and, having entered into the membership covenant, have been accepted by the elders into membership. Members names will be recorded on the official church roll. Baptismal members may contribute to the fellowship and work of the church in any capacity as approved by the elders.
- 4.3 **Confessional membership** is available to those persons who, believing in Jesus Christ as the Son of God have confessed their faith in Him and, having entered into the membership covenant have been accepted by the elders as such. Confessional members may contribute to the fellowship and work of the church in any capacity as approved by the elders.
- 4.4 **Inactive membership** applies to a member who does not regularly participate in worship or other activities organised in support of the body life of the church. "Regularly" means "at least once a month on average".

## 5 Membership and Attendance Records

- 5.1 A register of members shall be kept. This should include at least the following information: name, date accepted as member, whether baptismal or confessional, date left membership, reason for leaving.
- 5.2 The register of members will be reviewed at least annually and updated as required from time to time.

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<sup>1</sup> Whereas baptism involves literally being immersed into water, it is symbolic of being washed clean of sin through the work of Jesus Christ, and emerging from the water a new creation in Him.

## **6 Eldership**

- 6.1 Elders are those who have been accepted and appointed into positions of overall leadership and pastoral care within the life of the church. It is their role to uphold, develop and progress the corporate life and total ministry of the congregation. They are those who have a vision of the church united, alive, and bearing witness to God's life and love in the community. To that end, they are committed to seeing individual worshippers and the church as a whole reach their full potential in Christ.
- 6.2 The fact that elders are entrusted with such high office and responsibility speaks of their Christian character, wisdom and maturity, and of the membership's faith in their ability to care and lead. In their humanness, candidates for eldership and elders are painfully aware of their inadequacies. Nevertheless, they undertake eldership responsibilities with the assurance that:
  - (a) Christ who calls them will also equip them and enable them for the task;
  - (b) they are called into an eldership or "team ministry" so that together the elders may encourage and supplement each other, building on each others' strengths and compensating for each others' weaknesses;
  - (c) the church will be understanding, supportive and encouraging of their ministry.
- 6.3 Elders are accountable to each other under the headship of Jesus Christ to help Him build His church.

## **7 Appointment of Elders**

- 7.1 Elders shall be those appointed to the Church as members willing to serve as elders and approved by the Church in the light of the qualifications as set out in I Tim. 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9 and I Peter 5:1-3 and in accordance with the procedures outlined herein.
- 7.2 Except in exceptional circumstances, a candidate would have been a member of the Church for at least two years before being eligible to serve as an elder. This will generally mean that a newly appointed minister would not take up eldership within the first two years of their term.
- 7.3 Elders will be nominated by the existing eldership. In addition, any member may request that the elders consider a particular person for eldership, however the ultimate decision rests with the elders before God.
- 7.4 Where there are fewer than two serving elders then suitable senior person(s) from within NSW Churches of Christ deemed to have sufficient knowledge of the Armidale Church of Christ should be co-opted to assist with nomination. Such suitable person(s) would be:
  - (a) minister or elder from another Church of Christ;
  - (b) retired minister or senior representative of Conference.
- 7.5 Nominees for eldership shall be prayerfully considered by the existing elder(s) and such co-opted persons as required by 7.4 and tested in accordance with the Scriptures referred to in 7.1<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> For a treatise on this see:  
Deuble, J. 1988. *Effective Eldership*. Vital Publications.  
p.17 ff.

- 7.6 Nominees for eldership shall be further interviewed by the existing elder(s) and such co-opted persons as required by **7.4** to establish their calling and their spiritual giftedness in teaching, preaching, administration, attention to doctrine, leadership, pastoral care or other New Testament roles (see for example 1 Tim 4:14, 1 Tim 5:17).
- 7.7 Nominees meeting the above provisions shall be recommended to the members by the elders, who shall have nominees' names published in the church's Newsletter and by public announcement in a Sunday service. The elders shall call the church to prayerful consideration of the nominees and seek the counsel of the Holy Spirit. Members of the Church will have until the fourth Sunday following the initial announcement to advise the existing eldership in writing of any reasons why those persons nominated should not hold office.
- 7.8 Every reasonable effort should be made to provide members with the opportunity to submit objections. Should objections be received the validity of these objections must be prayerfully considered by the existing elders and such co-opted persons as required in **7.4**. If no valid objections are received, then those nominated will be appointed as elders. The existing eldership shall commission the new appointees before God and the congregation by prayer and laying on of hands.
- 7.9 Elders will be appointed for a period of up to three years, whereupon, should they desire to continue to hold the office, they should subject themselves to the scrutiny of the congregation as described in 7.7 and 7.8. Terms of eldership should be staggered so that not all elders are reviewed at the same time.

## **8 Resignation or removal of elders:**

- 8.1 A person shall cease to be an elder by submitting a written resignation.
- 8.2 A person shall disqualify themselves from eldership by consistently exhibiting behaviour contrary to the requirements of eldership and the Bible. Any two members of the congregation witnessing the behaviour may bring the matter to the eldership (2 Cor. 13:1). The remaining elder(s) shall evaluate the evidence and prayerfully seek the full counsel of God on the matter. Where the matter brought against an elder is confirmed as a matter of disqualification, the remaining elder(s) shall counsel the erring elder to stand down. The erring elder will covenant to stand down from the position, whereupon the remaining elder(s) shall cover him in prayer and provide every possible means of support and restitution (Gal. 6:1-2).
- 8.3 Where matters of dispute arise from the above procedures the Church should make every effort to solve the issue in a prayerful, Biblical and gracious manner. Matters remaining unresolved may be arbitrated upon by suitable senior person(s) from within NSW Churches of Christ deemed to have sufficient knowledge of the Armidale Church of Christ to assist in this manner.

## **9 Appointment of Minister**

- 9.1 We accept the Biblical notion of the “priesthood of all believers” i.e., that all God’s people are called to be ministers of the Gospel. The Bible nevertheless speaks of pastors (shepherds) and teachers who are called by God for particular ministries in His church (Eph. 4:11-12). The purpose of these particular gifts is not to monopolise ministry, but to multiply ministries.
- 9.2 According to its needs, the church may appoint a person with these ministry gifts for the purpose of building up the body of believers.
- 9.3 The negotiations for the calling and appointment of a minister shall be entrusted to the elders, who shall make recommendations to the church membership.
  - 9.3.1 The elders shall call the church members to prayerful consideration of the candidate and seek the counsel of the Holy Spirit. The person must meet the scriptural requirements of elder as outlined in **7.1**.
  - 9.3.2 Members of the Church will be given a period of two weeks to consider the candidate and advise the eldership in writing of any reasons why the candidate is inappropriate for the role of minister. Should reasons be received, the issues arising must be prayerfully considered by the elders.
- 9.4 It is the elders who are charged with the responsibility of appointing or not appointing the candidate.
- 9.5 The eldership shall cause to have a new minister appointed before God and the congregation by prayer and laying on of hands.
- 9.6 During negotiations, a term of appointment shall be agreed upon. Any extension of term shall require the endorsement of the elders and the opportunity for the members to scrutinise the candidate as in **9.3**. Decisions concerning future ministry should, in the normal course of events, be made at least six months prior to the expiry of a current term of ministry.
- 9.7 The person appointed to the role of minister would normally be accorded the title “Pastor”.
- 9.8 Any termination of a ministry prior to the expiry of term shall be subject to the same provisions as for elders (**Section 8**).

## **10 Appointment of other Staff**

- 10.1 Elders may appoint other members to serve in various leadership and support roles within the church as required.
- 10.2 People desiring to serve in roles as ministry coordinators or leaders must be members of the church and generally meet the Biblical requirements for a deacon as specified in 1 Tim.3:8-13.

## **11 Annual General Meeting**

- 11.1 The purpose of the AGM is to provide a review of the year just gone, and to look forward to the year ahead.
- 11.2 The AGM should be held in the first three months of the year. At least four weeks notice should be given by insertion of a notice in the church newsletter and by other convenient means (e.g. email, social media and the like).
- 11.2.1 A written report should be provided by each ministry leader which provides a summary for their ministry area.
- 11.2.2 The elders will receive all ministry reports and compile into an annual report.
- 11.2.3 The annual report will also include a financial statement prepared by the treasurer.
- 11.3 As the Church does not embrace a voting model, there is no formal need for the election of office bearers at the AGM.
- 11.4 All current participants in the Church are welcome to attend the AGM.

## **12 General Meetings**

- 12.1 The elders recognise the critical importance of providing a suitable forum for church members to participate in discussions about church life.
- 12.2 A monthly forum should be held for this purpose.
- 12.3 This forum will be chaired by an elder or nominee. Minutes will be taken and circulated to attendees and any other members who express an interest in receiving them. The minutes will be referred to at the following meeting and any outstanding matters followed up.
- 12.4 Forum minutes will be reviewed by the elders at their regular leadership meeting, and any matters needing further decision or action will be addressed.
- 12.5 An agenda will be prepared by the chair for each meeting. Members may request an item to be put on the agenda for discussion. This request should be made to the Minister or Forum Chair at least 24 hours before the meeting.
- 12.6 Active participation in the forum is generally intended for those who have formally taken up membership of the Church, although others are welcome to attend and observe/participate at the discretion of the elders.

## **13 Leadership Meetings**

- 13.1 The elders shall ensure that they meet on a regular basis with the minister and other staff as appropriate.
- 13.2 It is expected that leadership meetings will occur at least once a month, and that minutes will be taken.
- 13.3 The minutes will be treated as confidential for circulation only to members of the leadership team.

13.4 Members of the leadership team who participate in meetings would normally include:

13.4.1 The elders

13.4.2 The minister

13.4.3 Associate minister(s) if appointed

13.4.4 Deacon(s) supporting the elders (as co-opted by the elders on an as-needs basis)

13.4.5 Anyone else invited by the elders.

## **14 Auxiliaries**

14.1 No auxiliaries or associated committees shall be commenced in the name of the Church without the prior approval of the elders.

14.2 No important alterations shall be made in the activities or objectives of any auxiliary without the prior approval of the elders.

14.3 All auxiliary equipment and records are the property of the Church and must not be disposed of without the approval of the elders.

14.4 All auxiliaries should present an annual report with a financial statement (if relevant) to the Church annual general meeting.

## **15 Definitions**

Member – a person who has met the specified requirements of membership and whose name is recorded on the Register of Members