

Constitutional Review Update

In 2024 our Church Leadership Team (CLT) committed to reviewing our church constitution. This work began alongside the Senior Pastor transition – something we now realise was a very ambitious plan!

As we started, it became clear that we also need to review our legal structure, as our constitution must match our organisational structure. This extra step has slowed the process, but it's important for the future health, protection and vision of our church.

Why we're doing this

Georges River Life Church (GRLC) has grown significantly since our constitution was first adopted in 1997 and last updated in 2018. With larger ministries, significant assets, community partnerships and a bigger budget, we need to ensure our governance keeps pace with:

- **Protecting our leaders** – volunteers on the CLT currently carry personal liability for church debts, contracts and incidents.
- **Supporting ministry growth** – our structure needs to handle partnerships, grants and property in a way that's legally sound.
- **Maintaining our values** – we want a structure that maintains our Baptist identity and congregational decision-making.

Our Current Structure

Right now, GRLC operates as an **unincorporated association** within the Baptist Association of NSW & ACT. This has served us well and keeps things simple and low-cost. However, it also means the church itself can't enter contracts or own property, and CLT members are personally responsible for any liabilities.

Best option for GRLC

Through research, and comparison of alternative structures, the CLT believes a **Company Limited by Guarantee** is the most suitable option to investigate further. This structure would:

- Provide limited liability protection for members and leaders
- Allow the church to enter contracts, own property and apply for grants in its own name
- Align with current governance standards while keeping our Baptist identity and congregational model

- Other options (e.g. remaining an unincorporated association or becoming an incorporated association) don't give enough protection or don't fit the size of our church. Further detail about each of the structures can be found in the [Appendix](#).

Key Considerations for GRLC

- **Baptist identity** – any new structure will be written to preserve congregational decision-making and biblical authority.
- **Leadership protection** – a new model should remove unnecessary personal risk for those serving on the CLT.
- **Cultural Impact** – we recognise that some may worry about increased formality. We are committed to keeping our culture of partnership and shared ministry strong.
- **Future ministry** – we want a structure that enables, not limits, new opportunities and partnerships.
- **Regulatory responsibilities** – we want to operate in accordance with relevant laws, regulations, and governance requirements.

Proposed Timeline and Process

- **Nov 2025 – Feb 2026:** Ongoing research and legal advice, draft constitution prepared.
- **Mar – Apr 2026:** Draft shared with the congregation, information sessions and feedback opportunities.
- **June 2026 ACM:** Final recommendation presented for a church vote.

More detail about this timeline can be found in the [Appendix](#).

What This Means for Our Church Family

This review is about administration, not doctrine. It will not change our beliefs, worship, or mission. Our commitment to Baptist principles, biblical authority and congregational decision-making would be protected. The goal is a safer, stronger foundation that supports ministry, protects leaders and allows GRLC to grow with confidence.

No decisions are being made at the ACM. There will be plenty of opportunities to ask questions, give feedback and be part of the process before any vote takes place.

Questions & Feedback

We want to hear your questions and concerns throughout this process.

- Contact any of your Church Leadership Team
- Email - CLT@grlc.org.au

Appendix

Current Organisational Structure: Research Findings

Unincorporated Association Status

Georges River Life Church currently operates as an unincorporated association under the Baptist Association of NSW & ACT. Research highlights both benefits and limitations of this structure.

Current Benefits

- Simple, low-cost operation with minimal regulatory burden
- Strong alignment with Baptist congregational governance
- Access to Baptist Association support, resources, and frameworks
- Familiar structure that has served the church well to date

Limitations and Risks

- **Personal Liability:** CLT members and the Senior Minister carry personal liability for debts, contracts, and incidents
- **Legal Capacity:** The church cannot hold property, sign contracts, or trade in its own name
- **Limited Protections:** Fewer legal safeguards in an increasingly litigious environment
- **Scale Mismatch:** Designed for small organisations, not a church of our current size and complexity

Alternative Structures Under Review

Company Limited by Guarantee – Preliminary Recommendation

Early investigations indicate this structure may best meet our needs.

Key Benefits

- Limited liability for members and leaders
- National legal recognition and ability to contract and own property directly
- Governance standards aligned with post-Royal Commission expectations
- Eligibility for grants requiring a corporate entity
- Flexible and scalable for future ministry growth

Considerations

- Higher compliance requirements, including director duties and annual reporting
- CLT members would need to serve as registered company directors
- Oversight by ASIC and ACNC in addition to Baptist Association affiliation
- Transition planning and legal support required

Other Options Considered

- *Incorporated Association*: GRLC exceeds recommended size thresholds
- *Proprietary Limited Company*: Not suitable for a religious not-for-profit
- *Maintain Current Structure*: Increasingly inadequate for our size and responsibilities

Indicative Timeline

Research & Development (Nov 2025 – Feb 2026)

- Legal consultation with Baptist Association and external advisors
- Draft constitution prepared, maintaining alignment with the Baptist Association of NSW & ACT
- Risk assessment of transition impacts

Communication & Consultation (Mar – Apr 2026)

- Circulate draft constitution and recommendations for congregational review
- Hold information sessions to explain proposed changes
- Gather feedback and address questions
- Prepare CLT for potential new responsibilities

Voting (June 2026)

- Present final recommendation for congregational consideration and vote.