

Contents

	Issue
Section 1	
Contents	February 2016
Section 2	
Foreword	February 2016
Preamble	
Vision and Values	
Heart and Calling	
Section 3	
3.1 BMI Guidelines and policies	November 2019
3.2 Ministerial Functions	September 2017
3.3 Churches as Members of BMI	September 2017
3.4 Credentialing Policy for Ministers	February 2016
3.5 International Policy	February 2016
3.6 Project Register	February 2016
3.7 Financial Policy	September 2017
3.8 Stipends for Ministers	July 2015
3.9 Discipline of Ministers	February 2016
Section 4	
BMI Constitution	June 2015
Section 5	
Model Constitution for Churches	July 2015
Appendixes	
A. LEGAL ISSUES	
Appendix A1 Confidentiality Guidelines	July 2015
Appendix A2 Legal Risks	July 2015
B. CHURCH POLITY	
Appendix B1 Lessons from the New Testament church regarding discipline	July 2015
Appendix B2 Relationship between Senior Minister and Eldership	September 2016

C. ADMINISTRATION

Appendix C1	Member church application form	July 2015
Appendix C2	Minister's credential application form	July 2015
Appendix C3	Service of ordination	September 2016
Appendix C4	Service for the induction of a new church into BMi	June 2017
Appendix C5	New minister appointments: letter and contract	November 2019

Foreword

Welcome to the Bethesda Ministries International (Australia) Minister's Manual.

The National Leadership Team has produced this manual to assist you in your leadership role.

One of our goals is to provide resources to the local church that will help you to function in your call, to build strong local churches and to impact our world for the Kingdom of Heaven.

With this in mind it is our intention that the manual will bring to you clarity and understanding of the various aspects of philosophy, policy, procedures and practices of BMi.

Several of the documents that we have included in the manual have been in circulation for many years; we believe that in bringing these documents together with more recent material, it will be of benefit to all.

From a practical perspective we have produced the manual in this format so that it will be easy to add other documents as time goes by. From time to time, replacement or new sections will be emailed to you. Please print and insert these replacements into your copy of the Manual. It is your responsibility to keep abreast of BMi policy and new additions.

We encourage you to regularly look at this manual and to keep yourselves aware of its contents.

Building together in the Kingdom of God,

National Leadership Team
Bethesda Ministries International

Preamble

Bethesda Ministries International (BMi) is a group of self-governing churches and ministries who have purposed to belong together through relationship. BMi began as a vision given to our founder, Peter Vacca in the 1980s. It was his desire to make provision for men and women in leadership of churches and ministries to be in a heart relationship through apostolic covering.

Through the 1970s and 1980s the need for input from the foundational ministries of Ephesians 4:11–12 became more sought after, resulting in the unfolding and establishment of the vision.

BMi provides opportunities for regular fellowship, encouragement, education and the dissemination of information, for all members.

BMi is by its nature an apostolic movement that is bound together in fellowship.

Many matters, theological stances and policies, which are considered best developed and handled at a local church level, are omitted from this Manual.

The BMi Constitution is found at Section 3, and describes the rules governing BMi, including the Statement of Faith.

The policies in this document form the basis for the function and operation of BMi. Certain labelled sections of this manual form the Standing Orders (Constitution clause 19).

The National Leadership Team has oversight of all BMi churches and ministries in Australia.

In the emerging and developing international stage, several nations have their own National Leadership Teams, which have the freedom to conduct 'BMi' (or the alternative name for that nation) in relationship with the BMi International Leadership Team.

There are a number of position papers planned to be presented in this Manual.

Members in need of information not covered herein are encouraged to contact a member of the National Leadership Team.

It should be noted that this document summarizes the historical and positional papers of BMi since its formation and function when the inaugural meeting of BMi was held on 4 May 1983.

Vision and Values

Bethesda Ministries International is overseen by the National Leadership Team, which functions in an apostolic/prophetic manner. The ministers of BMi are from many different backgrounds, yet hold common ministry vision and Biblical values, whilst relating to one another through ongoing relationship of mutual integrity and non-exclusive friendships.

Vision

Our vision is twofold:

Firstly, it is to see strong and healthy churches established and nurtured where the priesthood of all believers is exercised and believers are trained, equipped and released to grow to their full potential and maturity in God. In this context, it is also to nurture ministers to be skilful leaders, ministering with integrity of heart.

Secondly, it is to facilitate the vision and command of Jesus to disciple the nations of the world, by providing and encouraging leadership, church planting and training in various forms.

Values

Our foundational value is that the Bible is not only held to be the inspired and authoritative word of God, but it is also the accepted standard for life, ministry and conduct in the church.

This translates into BMi ministers being accountable to one another (in addition to their own respective churches) to direct their individual and corporate lives according to this standard.

Our mandate is to see God's truth established in the lives of ministers and their ministries, their churches, and the broader community.

Heart and Calling

Any organisation, of necessity, has a set of rules so that members understand how it operates and what is expected of members. We endeavour to ensure the rules and operating principles of BMi reflect the teaching of Scripture.

Definitions

In our day the meanings of words have often been distorted from their original dictionary meaning, resulting in some confusion. Some of the more common terms used in Christian circles that have been known to cause confusion are defined below. We have mainly used Noah Webster's 1828 dictionary as he defined words with the biblical usage and meaning in mind.

Affiliation	Adoption; association in the same family or society. To receive into a society as a member.
Autonomous	Independent in government. Having the right of self-government.
Denomination	The act of naming. A class, society or collection of individuals, called by the same name; as a denomination of Christians.
Independent	Not dependent; not subject to control of others; not subordinate. God is the only being who is perfectly independent. One who in religious affairs, maintains that every congregation of Christians is a complete church, subject to no superior authority, and competent to perform every act of government in ecclesiastical affairs.
Member	An individual of a community or society. Professed Christians are called members of the church.
Minister	Properly a chief servant. The pastor of a church duly authorised or licensed to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments.
Movement	Any change of position in a material body (Webster) but more particularly for this document; a group of people with a common ideology (Collins Australian Dictionary).

When any of the above words are used in this manual, it is with the above definitions in mind.

Brief Overview

Bethesda Ministries International Inc. is an association incorporated in NSW with its office at 200 Florey Drive, Charnwood ACT 2615. Credentialed ministers can apply to be registered with the Australian Commonwealth Government as a marriage celebrant through the rites of BMi.

Bethesda Ministries International is a movement of member churches in affiliation with one another. Each affiliated church is a member of the BMi family and in its own location is self-governing (autonomous). Each member church shall have a Senior Minister who will be credentialed by BMi, depending on need and size, individual churches may have more than one BMi credentialed minister.

Each member church will be accountable to the National Leadership Team of BMi on the basis of the BMi Constitution and Standing Orders.

Each credentialed minister will, in addition to the above, be accountable to the Eldership of that local church.

Ministry of Service

BMi seeks to serve member churches and credentialed ministers by providing:

- spiritual and administrative covering with care and concern
- financial advice, assistance and insurances
- credentials, and marriage licences, for ministers
- administrative compliance assistance according to biblical ethics and national laws
- a *Minister's Manual* of essential information and which includes Standing Orders
- a National Leadership Team to provide apostolic covering in the various areas of church life
- resources, training materials and programs to assist churches in fulfilling their mission.

Heart of Bethesda Ministries International

This has been expressed as the heart, or spirit, of Bethesda; which means to be embraced in the character of God, in particular his mercy and grace. This idea was taken from a vision of our founder Pastor Peter Vacca which was based on the scripture John 5:2.

Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches.

Commentator Gill says *Bethesda* signifies 'an house of mercy, or grace, or goodness'.

BMi aims to embrace this vision in seeking to bless and benefit member churches in covering protection; godly counsel and advice; rich relationships with fellow ministers and leaders through local and national gatherings; biblical training resources, etc.

This Heart of Bethesda is perhaps best summarised, but not limited, by the following Scriptures:

Dying to Self

Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. *John 12:24*

BMi churches and ministers embrace the biblical idea of dying to self and living in and to God.

Compassion

But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. *Matthew 9:36*

Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name, those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. *John 17:11*

BMi churches and ministers embrace the biblical idea of dealing with events and lives in grace, mercy and unity.

Unity in Christ

...that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.

And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

John 17:21-23

BMi churches and ministers embrace the biblical idea of being made one in and through the unity of the Holy Spirit, that we might walk together in the diversity of giftings and purpose God has placed amongst us.

1. National Leadership Team (NLT)

- a. All correspondence to the NLT regarding Bethesda Ministries International matters must be sent to the BMi Office, to be circulated to all members of the NLT at least two (2) weeks prior to a NLT meeting.
- b. NLT Meetings
The National Leader or his delegated authority will call NLT meetings, with the appropriate notice being given.
- c. NLT — Roles and Responsibilities
 - i. An NLT member must be willing to shoulder responsibility for BMi in addition to the responsibility he has for his own church or ministry.
 - ii. Ethical Responsibility
 - The information gained at NLT level shall be treated confidentially. It should not be used for any other than the intended purpose.
 - The NLT members are responsible to know or to obtain whatever information is necessary for wise decision making.
 - iii. The NLT members represent BMi and should bear the interests of BMi in decision-making. The National Leader carries executive responsibility.
 - iv. An NLT member can be appointed by the NLT to act on behalf of the NLT in local church matters. In such an event the National Leader and Executive Officer is to be kept informed and updated as appropriate. Should the implementation of any decision be deemed to have an effect upon member churches or ministries then they should receive appropriate notification of the decision endorsed by the NLT.
 - v. The legal obligations upon NLT members are equal, there being no distinction between ordinary NLT members and the National Leader.
 - vi. The National Leader and Executive Officer will set the Agenda for NLT meetings with additional agenda items being submitted by the NLT. (See 1a above)
 - vii. An NLT member's costs (travel, accommodation and conference fees) are to be paid by BMi's national fund when they are required to be at any approved regional, national or international conference.
- d. Executive Officer
The responsibilities of the Executive Officer are:
 - i. To receive and dispatch information to the members of the NLT. He/She is responsible to the National Leader particularly, then respectively to the NLT.
 - ii. To check that decisions made by the NLT are carried out, and to perform any work proceeding from NLT meetings.

- iii. To organize conferences at the request of the NLT.
- iv. To keep the NLT informed with financial reports and to submit an annual budget.
- e. Relationship between NLT and the Local Church
 - i. In the event of an unresolvable dispute in any church or ministry, the NLT may be called upon, as per the terms of that church or ministry's Constitution. In such case the BMi NLT may assume governance of that church or ministry for the purpose of restoring order. The church or ministry may be released to a local interim Board appointed by the NLT, for the purposes of ensuring continued stability of order; after which time the church or ministry may be returned to the autonomy of the local leadership in the event that the NLT is satisfied order has been restored.
 - ii. If the NLT becomes aware of questionable behaviour or activity of a BMi minister, the matter shall be examined by persons appointed by the NLT. After consultation, if the problem remains unresolved, the NLT may implement disciplinary action including the removal of the pastor's credentials.

2. Membership of BMi Council

- a. The BMi Council is composed of the appointed representatives of member churches — see details in BMi Constitution (Section 3 of Ministers Manual).
- b. Membership Status
 - Full Membership** — Each church is responsible to appoint a BMi Council member to participate at any AGM or SGM.
 - Initial Membership** — New member churches or ministries serve a one-year period before being eligible for full membership and a position on the BMi Council.
- c. Establishing a Church

The NLT encourages the planting of churches by local churches in consultation with the NLT. In the initial stages the church may be considered to be an outreach. Such outreach churches relate directly to the founding church, and the BMi levy is to be paid from the day the church is established with its own minister.

When the new church has reached regular attendance of approximately twenty (20) adults, and with the concurrence of the founding church, the minister (leader) may apply for the church's initial membership of BMi.
- d. Membership with BMi
 - i. Upon the recommendation of an NLT member, a church or ministry wishing to be a member of BMi can be admitted as an initial member. An NLT member should meet with the church leadership several times during the initial period to ensure all appropriate procedures are in place and functioning as per church application procedures outlined in section 3.3.
 - ii. A church and/or ministry needs to be in membership to use the name 'BMi'.

3. Meetings

It is expected that all BMi ministers attend the following meetings.

- a. National Leaders Gathering (NLG) (including the Annual General Meeting), attended by all credentialed ministers, plus spouses, where applicable.
- b. State and regional training conferences, some of which may also be attended by members of BMi churches.

It is important for the ongoing success of BMi that attendance be held as a priority. If a member is unable to attend a conference it is necessary for this to be discussed with an NLT member. Failure to comply may compromise credential.

Alcohol policy for BMi meetings

The NLT strongly recommends that alcohol not be consumed in public spaces at any time during a BMi event, and not just excluded at formal meeting times. We are fully appreciative that many (including members of the NLT) participate in the occasional glass of wine and the NLT draws no exception to the exercise of that personal choice. We are not addressing or questioning decisions which we may make for ourselves, our families or even our churches.

The NLT understands that the kingdom of God is not about meat and drink (Rom 14:17). However, rightly or wrongly, some amongst us find consumption of alcohol offensive, so let us pursue peace (Rom 14:19). Moreover, we are not to know which amongst us are susceptible to, or have become freed from, alcoholism. Hence, lest we cause a brother to stumble, it seems good to avoid being in a situation where alcohol is consumed (Rom 14:21, 1 Cor 8:11-13).

Aside from the care that we ought to exercise for those within our immediate fellowship, the consumption of alcohol by Christian leaders represents a poor public witness. It is true that God has given us wine to make our hearts rejoice (Ps 104:15, Prov 31:6). Even so, the fellowship fostered when accompanied by alcohol may disturb others and is often a surprise to those who are accustomed to Christians being keen to avoid even the appearance of worldliness (1 Thess 5:22).

Lastly, we note that child protection policies strongly advise the prohibition of alcohol use by both youth and leaders. Alcohol and its abuse are major causes of many disruptions and much misery in society (Prov 20:1, 23:29-32).

4. Credentials/Marriage Licenses

- a. Renewal of Credentials

NLT members oversee annual renewal of credentials of ministers, and issuance of credential cards, which is dependent upon payment of annual Professional Indemnity and Management Liability Insurance.

- b. Qualifications for Marriage Celebrant's License

A marriage celebrant's license may be issued to a Senior Minister of a church. There is provision for the issuance of additional marriage celebrant licenses where this is considered necessary by the NLT. Request for a marriage celebrant license can be made on the credential application form.

5. Guidelines for Ministers

A ministry credential carries with it certain responsibilities which you are obligated to observe. If credentialed ministers found by the NLT of BMi to be delinquent in any of these responsibilities, and fail to comply with the disciplinary requirements of the NLT, it may lead to the forfeiture of the minister's credential.

- a. Your church should conduct at least one service a week as a general rule. Ideally that service would include the Lord's Supper, collection of tithes and offerings, preaching and teaching the Word, and worship.
- b. You shall observe all normal business practices in running non-profit, charitable organisation.
- c. You shall have a Leadership Team of not less than three people. A new church may take a year or two to appoint such a team. Church leadership should comprise elders and deacons, who may be known under other titles in individual churches.
- d. You shall make yourself aware of the requirements and responsibilities you have to governmental authorities. If you are a marriage celebrant you must be aware of the requirements of the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages.
- e. You are strongly advised not to allow your pulpit or ministry to be used to promote party political matters, commercial ventures; anything of a lewd, immoral, corrupt or heretical nature; or to vent personal needs, injustices or angers.
- f. You shall not be a divisive influence in BMi nor in the church at large.
- g. You are expected to submit and discuss any other developments besides the maintenance of a normal Church life routine to the NLT, outlining necessary details. This would include such things as a Bible college, or Christian school. Details of personnel, funding, facilities must be supplied with your submission. The NLT should be notified of intention of purchase or long term lease of property for church use.
- h. You shall have a treasurer who is responsible to the Leadership Team for all financial matters. It is strongly recommended that ministers should not be signatories to church accounts.
- i. You should not secure any borrowings against houses or assets of any kind owned by members, individual or corporate, in your own or someone else's congregation. If you do borrow money, it must be established that your church or ministry can make the repayments.
- j. You shall use money given only for the purposes it is given or solicited.
- k. Consumption of alcohol (or any other substance of abuse) is not encouraged. Since ministry input may be required at any time of the day or night, a pastor must be able to drive to a pastoral call with 'blood alcohol' under the 0.05% limit (or the equivalent law in countries other than Australia). In light of the scriptures consideration must be given to public consumption of alcohol or substance of abuse by a minister of the gospel.

It is expected that ministers are aware of and comply with biblical standards for moral, spiritual, financial and ethical behaviour including, but not limited to:

Moral standards —there is an expectation of truthfulness, transparency and sexual fidelity.

Spiritual standards — accepting the BMi Statement of Faith, and holding to the Scriptures as the final authority in all matters of faith and conduct.

6. Guidelines for Appointment of Ministers

a. Preamble

These guidelines are designed to assist churches in the process of seeking to appoint a new minister. BMi recognises that every circumstance will vary from another, but we offer some basic thoughts to guide churches to wise selection of their next minister. BMi needs to support this process (as BMi issues the minister's credentials) and thus a minister cannot be credentialed to a member church without BMi NLT approval.

Ministers are called to a local church by the Eldership/Leadership Team of that church, in consultation with the BMi NLT. It is suggested that the minister is contracted by the church rather than be an employee of the church. Both parties should ensure there is adequate provision and information in the contract to avoid unnecessary difficulties. The minister as a contractor enables a church to draw up a contract to suit the unique requirements of a minister, without the additional requirements legislated for employees.

b. Call or Invitation

As BMi supports the autonomy of each local church, the responsibility for the appointment of a new minister rests with that local church. Thus in broader Christian circles this process is variously known as a *call* or *invitation*. The context of such is that any new appointment should be submitted to the wisdom and call of God. This call should be testified to by both the minister and the local church Eldership/Leadership Team.

Before a call is issued a church would contact BMi NLT to discuss the need and church's position to assure the suitability of the candidate to receive a BMi Minister's Credential.

The church leadership would negotiate with a proposed minister to discuss all relevant matters. If satisfied this was the will of God and if this were concurred by the BMi NLT the Church would then send a letter of call or invitation to the proposed minister.

Suggested proformas for an invitation letter and a contract form are contained in Appendix C5.

6. Miscellaneous

a. Mailing Lists

BMi will provide the BMi mailing list to all member churches and ministries for use within BMi.

b. Publicity, Public Statements

No member church, ministry or minister shall presume to make public statements of any kind, or about any matter on behalf of BMi, nor shall there be any publicity or promotion undertaken on behalf of BMi without the express permission of the National Leadership Team. Generally, where any statement needs to be made it shall be made by the National Leader or his representative.

1. Weddings

Marriage is a time to celebrate and is meant to be a joyous occasion. You as the minister ought to assist in the making of the arrangements that reflect such a celebration.

Marriage: Statement of Belief and Policy

STATEMENT OF BELIEF

Bethesda Ministries International, in seeking to conform to a Biblical understanding of the marriage covenant, holds marriage to be the union between a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, entered into for life.

STATEMENT OF POLICY

As such Bethesda Ministries International's celebrants, in conducting wedding ceremonies in conformance to the rites of Bethesda Ministries International, are able to provide such service only in conformance to this definition for marriage.

Weddings performed by Bethesda Ministries International celebrants, whether held at its premises or elsewhere, are undertaken for those church members who attend services regularly and are in conformance with the church's definition of marriage.

Notwithstanding, a celebrant may be called upon to conduct a wedding for persons who are in conformance with the church's definition of marriage but are not church members or regular attendees. In such cases, The Leadership Team may agree to waive the membership or attendance requirement.

Registration to Marry

A minister must be registered with the Registrar-General before he can legally solemnise marriages. A written application should be lodged with the BMi National Executive Officer if a credentialed minister wishes to be appointed as a marriage celebrant. The National Leadership Team nomination is to be made to the particular State Registrar.

Once a minister is appointed as a marriage celebrant he will be given a number preceded by a letter denoting the State in which he is registered. Whilst you are able to solemnise marriages anywhere in Australia your number will change if you move to another state.

It is the responsibility of the celebrant to advise the registrar of the State in which you are registered of any change of address. The registrar requires that your address given must ALWAYS be your residential address.

Ministers should possess a copy of *Handbook for Marriage Celebrants* which is available from the Registrar-General in your State or the Australian Government Bookshop.

Preliminaries

A *Notice of Intended Marriage* form (NOIM) must be completed no later than one calendar month and no earlier than 18 calendar months before the wedding date (downloadable from the 'resources' section of the BMi website).

There are provisions for the NOIM form to be lodged with the celebrant no later than one month before the date of the marriage, provided that a prescribed authority (details available from the registrar in your state) is satisfied that one or more circumstances set out in the Marriage Regulations are met. In general those circumstances are:

- Employment related or other travel commitments
- Wedding or celebrant arrangements, or religious considerations
- Medical reasons
- Legal proceedings
- Error in giving notice

This form must be sworn and together with birth certificates must be presented to the celebrant performing the marriage ceremony. If a person born outside of Australia does not have a birth certificate they may use their passport instead. If either party has been previously married then the celebrant must sight the divorce decree or the previous partner's death certificate. All these documents are to be returned to the parties after the details are recorded on the rear of the NOIM form.

The celebrant ought to seek an interview with the parties well before the wedding date, or if this is not possible, engage a fellow minister to do so. The purpose of this interview will include:

- Ascertaining the desires of the couple as to the ceremony
- Having them complete and sign the necessary forms
- Inquire about the spiritual and marital status of both parties
- Counsel them in matters concerning the step they are both about to take
- Conduct any pre-marriage counselling

Forms to be completed

NOTICE OF INTENDED MARRIAGE DECLARATIONS

NOIM forms must be completed and signed by both the bride and the groom BEFORE the wedding ceremony. It is an offence to conduct the marriage without first completing the declarations. The details need also to be entered on the stubs, together with the date on which the form is forwarded to the registrar. The book and/or the stubs remain the property of the celebrant.

THE CHURCH REGISTER

This is a maroon coloured book, which contains the church's record of the marriage. It has to be signed by the parties during the wedding service. This book remains the property of the church where the marriage was performed.

THE CERTIFICATE OF MARRIAGE

The tear out sheet is to be signed during the service. After the words 'According to...' you should insert the words 'the rites of Bethesda Ministries International'.

THE MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE

This card, which the bridal couple receives, is to be signed during the wedding service. The law now requires the purchase and use of numbered certificates and a log of usage to be kept and when completed and forwarded to the Registrar in your state. This log provides accountability for every individual certificate.

Any persons under the age of 18 but over the age of 16 must furnish a consent form signed by their parents or guardians and also apply to a Judge or Magistrate for an order authorising him or her to marry. This order and consent form must be shown to the celebrant. Under NO circumstances can two persons under the age of 18 marry each other.

As soon as possible, but no later than 14 days after the wedding ceremony, the completed *Notice of Intended Marriage*, the tear out *Certificate of Marriage* and declaration form and any necessary consent forms must be sent to the Registrar of Marriages in your capital city.

The bride and groom RECEIVE the numbered Marriage Certificate. There must be two witnesses to the signatures of the parties in the marriage and these witnesses must be at least 18 years of age.

Order of Service

Each service will be different according to the wishes of the parties. The service ought not to be so brief as to seem trifling and unimportant, yet not so long as to be tedious.

The bridegroom and his attendants should arrive at the church or venue early and be seated in the front seat on the right-hand side of the building when facing the front. The order for the men is for the bridegroom to be first, then the best man on his immediate right and then the groomsmen.

The minister will be advised on the arrival of the bridal party. It is a good idea for the minister to meet the party and reassure them prior to their entrance into the building.

Then the minister asks the congregation to stand for the entrance of the bridal party. It is a good idea for the groom and his attendants to turn slightly to watch the entrance of the bridal party. The musicians will commence to play the music decided upon until the bride takes her place on the left of the bridegroom and the bridesmaids to her left. The congregation remains standing until advised by the minister to be seated.

The service will then proceed in the order that has been decided on between the parties and the minister. The marriage is to take place under the rites of BMi, which are very flexible and wide ranging. However there must be; the charge to each party; the exchanging of vows between the parties and the pronouncement of the marriage by the minister and the prayer of blessing.

There are many variations that can occur with a wedding service and depend upon the wishes of the parties, the parents and the minister.

Some services commence with the singing of a song or songs followed by prayer, the charge, exchanging of vows and rings, the pronouncement of being married, prayer of blessing, a short address and the signing of the marriage register and the other papers.

During the time that the parties are engaged in signing the Marriage Register, it is usual for a special item such as a solo to be rendered to the congregation. After the signing has been completed and photographs taken it is usual for the minister to ask the congregation to stand and to present to the congregation 'Mr. and Mrs...'. They then proceed down the aisle to the music that has been arranged.

2. Funerals

The attendance to funerals is an important part of pastoral duties. During these times a minister can gain ready access to the hearts of people in a very intimate way as he ministers in prayer, counsel and consolation. Therefore it is important that these matters be attended to with compassion and knowledge of procedures.

Notice of Death

On receiving advice of the death of a person, the minister should make contact with and visit the nearest relative for the purpose of consolation, care and assistance. The aim is to serve the grieving people primarily and through this be a witness to Christ.

You should ascertain the following with gentleness and care:

- The requests of the relatives in arrangements as much as possible, giving advice where necessary
- The name of the undertaker
- The cemetery (or crematorium)
- The time of the funeral

Generally the undertaker will arrange the placing of notices in the newspapers.

The Service

The arrangements for the service will be made according to the wishes of the relatives and any prior requirement made by the deceased.

The service may consist of the following:

- Reading of Scripture
- Prayer
- Hymn or songs
- Family reflections or Eulogy
- Short sermon

As a general rule at the conclusion of the service the congregation stands and the minister precedes the coffin out of the church to the hearse. He also precedes the coffin from the hearse to the graveside and then should stand at the head of the grave to conduct the committal service.

The Cremation Service

The same general order as the burial committal may be used. Instead of the words 'We commit the body to the ground' the words 'We commit the body to the elements' could be substituted. There are helpful books that may assist in this process, e.g. *Conduct Gospel-Centred Funerals* by Brian Croft and Phil A Newton. Online Christian bookstores should contain helpful material, as well as your local Christian bookstore.

3. Dedication of Children

This is usually carried out in a brief ceremony during a regular service with the parents participating and congregation including family members as witnesses. An appropriate song may be sung as the parents bring their child to the front of the church.

There are a number of appropriate scriptures, which could be referred to in order to establish the Biblical mandate for presenting a child to the Lord such as the following:

- 1 Sam 1:20–28, 3:19
- Matt 19:13–15
- Mark 10:13–16
- Luke 2:21, 22, 25, 28–30, 33, 40

The child should then be prayed for and the blessing of God released upon the child's life.

This is also a time to remind and to charge the parents to bring up their child in the ways of the Lord. Scriptures like Genesis 18:19 and Deuteronomy 6:6–7 may be helpful. It is also appropriate to remind the church of its responsibility to watch over the family and render loving assistance as will prosper the child's growth in faith and grace.

There is a recent trend for Naming Ceremonies that provide opportunities for a Christian witness.

4. Water Baptism

This is one of the sacraments of the Christian church. It is an important step in the believer's life and is an outward sign of an inward work. It is also a demonstration of the believer's obedience and the beginning of the process of discipleship. However, there is also much more to understand about baptism and there are excellent studies available from Christian bookstores.

Checking the Candidate

Care should be taken to ensure that the candidate is familiar with the Biblical teaching of water baptism.

How to conduct the Baptism Service — some thoughts to consider

- Give a brief explanation of the significance of water baptism
Suggested Scriptures: Acts 8:35–40, Romans 6, Ezekiel 36:25, Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16, Titus 3:5–7
- Perhaps give candid opportunity to share testimony of the significance of Christ in their life
- Provide instruction on appropriate modest clothing avoiding material that can become see-through when wet and ask candidate to bring a towel
- Provide some towels as a back-up measure
- Ensure the provision of a Baptismal Certificate also.

5. Other aspects of Ministry

There are other important practices in the church including the Lord's Supper, Laying on of Hands, Impartation of the Holy Spirit, Prayer for Healing, Ordination etc. While no set forms exist for these special ministry times, care should be taken by the minister that they are acting in both faith and according to the Scripture.

Bethesda Ministries International, formerly Bethesda Movement, is a movement of self-governing, autonomous churches. Whilst initially many churches were fiercely independent we have found as the years have passed that we need a covering that is able to protect ministers, leaders and members whilst still retaining autonomy. An autonomous church is one that is governed by Elders or a Leadership Team, with a Senior Minister. That church governs its own affairs, raises and spends its own finances, etc.

A church can and should recognise its need for an authority beyond itself for its leaders and members' protection. For us that authority is BMi, which as part of its responsibility, is able to assist in resolving difficulties and unexpected challenges that may arise from time to time. It is this protective aspect of governance that BMi has come to appreciate as vital for our spiritual health and growth.

1. Being a Member of BMi

Full membership in BMi for churches and ministries is established after an initial one year membership. Unlike credentials, church and ministry membership will remain in place until or unless revoked by either party, according to the Constitution and Standing Orders of BMi.

Whilst BMi seeks primarily to be a relational body we understand that relationship of necessity brings responsibility and accountability. Being part of BMi brings with it the opportunity to actively pursue relationships with our member churches and ministries in the same way that we build relationally with the members of our local church.

What is relationship?

We may all have different expectations of the meaning of relationship and it is important to endeavour to spell out what it means for us as members of BMi. As an illustration, there is a difference between a 'network' (or 'fellowship') and membership.

- a. A **network** or **fellowship** has no members, as such. Those who participate in a network do so freely and without obligation. That is a good and useful model and many of us participate in 'networks' or 'fellowships'. We can give and receive freely with no obligation, but in such groups there is little assurance of protection, covering, support or care.
- b. **Membership** means a choice to identify with the standards and expectations of a particular organization/denomination. There must be certain conditions or requirements that we agree to in becoming members of such a group. There is a shared responsibility. We become members of a family and within any godly family there is love, authority, support and co-operation.

In recent years BMi has moved toward a structured relationship model. This has not so much been a deliberate decision of the NLT as a response to the perceived expectations of member churches and ministries.

BMi NLT has no desire to interfere in the internal workings of our local churches as we strongly support the principle of autonomous churches.

2. **BMi Services**

BMi churches benefit one another through the relationships, accountability, equipping, training and support to ministers and church leaders. Relationally there is the benefit of being a partner of the wider body that is BMi with encouraging and authentic relationships that are a distinctive of our pastors and churches. These benefits are built and nurtured through our National Leaders Gathering and State Gatherings which provide church leaders with practical teaching, personal ministry and fellowship.

a. **Accountability**

We recognize the value of holding ourselves and our churches accountable to one another through:

- **Relationships** — Sharing with one another as friends and peers
- **Visitation** — Our NLT will work with you to coordinate visits to enable discussion on progress and strategic plans you and your leaders have for your local church
- **Counsel** — Godly counsel and advice is available to ministers and elders from NLT members and respected leaders within BMi
- **Arbitration** — Should the need arise, member churches have the benefit of arbitration from BMi NLT and representatives when there is unresolved conflict at the local church level.

b. **Equipping and support**

BMi endeavours to disciple and equip both current and next-generation church leaders through:

- **Pastoral care** — relationally BMi provides ministers and church leaders with regular opportunities to receive personal ministry and care
- **Education** — Educational and training resources which ensure that ministers and leaders in BMi churches have easy access to resources which provide the best theological and practical foundation possible. These resources are available to support new, and strengthen existing, churches and ministries.

c. **The synergy of the many**

The benefit of being part of a larger group is that we can work with others of like mind and passion, on regional, national, and international levels, thus providing opportunity for ministers, leaders, and people to experience the synergy of working together in missions, church planting, and the fulfilment of our mission: Impacting the world for the Kingdom of God through building a network of strong churches.

We all pay levies which the NLT administers on behalf of member churches and ministries. The levy covers administrative costs and a small amount to BMi overseas missions. BMi provides administrative services including:

- assessing applications for membership and ministry credentials
- approving and administering marriage celebrants' licences
- arranging bulk insurance rates for PDI, PLI cover (which is compulsory)
- offering travel insurance for mission related activities
- organising state and national gatherings
- administering the BMi International department.

3. Responsibility to Ministers

Member churches have a responsibility to their minister(s) to:

- a. ensure they receive an adequate stipend (see 'Stipends for Ministers' section)
- b. ensure they enjoy adequate accommodation.

4. Minister's Tenure

- a. A minister should not move from his church without the prior knowledge, counsel and approval of the NLT, as a BMi credentialed minister. Any replacement of such minister needs to be approved by the NLT.
- b. It is highly recommended that a member of the NLT officiates at the induction service for any new credential holders to the office in their member church.

5. Church properties

As each member church is permitted to raise its own finances for the achievement of its purposes and to own assets appropriate to those purposes, it is highly recommended that:

- any acquisition of an asset, or
- any change to the ownership status of an asset or property; by way of transfer, sale, encumbrance or granting of right,

where that acquisition, transfer, sale, encumbrance or granting of right is of a worth greater than \$100,000, shall not be undertaken without the reasons for, and/or plans relating to, that acquisition or change in status being submitted to the National Leadership Team of Bethesda Ministries International (BMi) for their consideration and comment.

Input from BMi will be for the purposes of:

- ensuring visibility and accountability as to the proposed use of assets, and
- assessing the applicability and viability of the proposed use of the asset.

Consideration or comment by BMi is advisory only and does not impinge on the Church's autonomy or right to proceed with planned course of action.

6. Policy and Procedure for Application of BMi Church and Ministries Membership

Constitutionally the members of BMi are churches and ministries, not credentialed ministers. It is a responsibility of the NLT to process any applications from churches and ministries for membership of BMi and to appoint an NLT member to be responsible for each application.

Church Application Procedure

INITIAL CONTACT

An NLT member is to provide the enquiring entity with BMi brochure and explain the fundamental principles of BMi for consideration. If and when the enquirer wishes to continue to application, the NLT member will conduct them through the following steps:

- a. Go through church/ministry application form provisions explaining what is required and why.
- b. Provide a copy of the BMi Ministers Manual and go through the major content to provide more detailed understanding of BMi, including levies.
- c. Upon the recommendation of an NLT member, the church or ministry wishing to be a member can be admitted to a one-year interim membership, giving them access to BMi Gatherings. There is no representative to the BMi Council during that year. The NLT member is required, during that year, to observe various issues in the life of the church wishing to become a member. These issues include:
 - i. Visit services at least twice — not as speaker
 - ii. Regular fellowship with the Minister — 3-4 times in the year
 - iii. Ensure that the constitution of the applying entity is registered if an incorporation or company. Ensure that the constitution contains acceptable clauses relating to spiritual covering and matters unresolvable (see Ministers Manual — Model Constitution)
 - iv. Check that financial records and policies are in place; audited financial report must be submitted to BMi office annually
 - v. Explore how monies are accounted for — counting offering, access to accounts. It is inadvisable for the minister to operate church accounts
 - vi. Ensure leadership team, (elders, deacons) are in place and suitable persons appointed
 - vii. Ensure AGM and regular, formal, at least quarterly, minuted meetings of leadership are in place
 - viii. Ensure understanding of the levy system and the need for prompt payment
 - ix. Discuss church program, meeting schedule, training and other programs or ministries
 - x. Assess health of pastor and family, and that of leaders and church members
 - xi. Check insurances are in place and advise regarding compulsory PI and ML cover

Membership of applying churches will be assessed by the NLT after reviewing the NLT member's report. The NLT will make the decision regarding the status of the applying church or ministry.

INITIAL ONE YEAR MEMBERSHIP

The NLT member assigned to the church will bring his recommendation after one year and the NLT will decide whether to accept Church/ministry as full member of BMi Council.

Membership for a New Church Plant

Requests to establish a new church come through the mother church to the NLT through the Executive Officer. Such new churches relate directly to the mother church, which may issue a local credential to their appointed leader. It is expected that tithes and offerings taken at the new church will be administered by the mother church and be subject to BMi levy.

When the new church has approximately 20 adults attending, and with the concurrence of the mother church, the locally credentialed minister may apply for a minister's credential through the NLT of BMi, and a marriage licence may be issued if considered appropriate by the NLT.

7. Responsibilities to BMi

Whilst not seeking to obviate or supervene other provisions of Standing Orders within this manual, it seems appropriate at this juncture to mention not only those services which a member church may expect of BMi (refer to paragraphs 2, 2a, 2b and 2c of this Section), but to reflect on those things which BMi and BMi Members might reasonably expect of their fellow members:

- payment of levies in a timely manner; ideally monthly
- participation at the annual National Leaders' Gathering
- readiness to share, to the extent that proximity and strength of relationship allow, in auxiliary activities, such as missions projects or special events (e.g. combined youth events etc.)
- readiness to receive NLT members or other ministries from amongst BMi members in their ministry gifting
- ensuring the good reputation and positive regard of the NLT and other BMi ministries amongst member churches/ministries
- contributing to the various journals and organs of BMi (such as Heart Beat)
- submitting audited copies of annual financial reports
- participating in the annual BMi census.

The BMi National Leadership Team (NLT) is the issuing authority for nationally recognised minister’s credentials. The credentials are issued at the discretion of the National Leadership Team, who may also withdraw the credential where there is a breach of the rules of BMi.

To hold a Minister’s credential is a high honour within the church and the community at large. A credential is BMi’s public recognition of the capacity of the minister to fulfil the requirements of a minister of religion. Holding a credential is a public office which ushers the holder into an arena of public scrutiny and accountability. To be credentialed obligates the holder to live a life beyond reproach as a representative of BMi and, more importantly, of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ministers are credentialed by BMi to practise in a manner acceptable to BMi as presented in this BMi Ministers Manual.

A Senior Minister’s credential is recognition of the call to provide leadership to a church or ministry and of a ministry gift as found in Ephesians 4 and Romans 12.

Ministry credentials are issued to members of BMi churches and ministries.

An applicant must complete and submit an application form to the National Leadership Team to be considered for a credential.

New credential holders serve a 12 month period under supervision of an appointed NLT member.

1. Categories

Senior Minister — should have the capacity to lead an average sized Australian Church by providing leadership, management and ministry, organisational abilities and other duties associated with that office.

Minister — operates under the authority of a Senior Minister and may be issued with a Minister’s Credential. This is recognition of an effective and fruitful ministry being performed in a particular area of service. The expectation is that this minister would have a close discipling relationship with the Senior Minister.

The NLT accepts the following guidelines for the appointments of multiple ministers’ credentials for a church or ministry.

Up to 50 adults	1 credential
50–100 adults	up to 2 credentials
100–200 adults	up to 3 credentials
200–300 adults	up to 4 credentials

2. Additional Categories

Without limiting the ministry categories a credential may also be issued in the following areas:

- **Missionary** — a person with ministry to a particular group either in Australia or overseas
- **Office Specific** — A credential limited to a named activity (e.g. Presiding Elder)
- **Retiree Minister** — a retired minister may continue to function on behalf of BMi. The minister will be required to maintain relevant liability insurance. A credential fee of \$100/annum applies if not a member of a BMi church.
- **Sabbatical Credential** — this has been created for ministers who are temporarily unable to perform in their role. BMi will hold their status but they will not have voting rights or insurance cover, nor be able to function in a ministerial capacity. A full minister's credential can be restored when the temporary impediment has passed and at the request of the minister concerned. An annual retaining fee of \$50 is applied which will also ensure the minister receives all BMi communications.

The following categories are usually reserved for appointment by the local church

- **Teacher** — a person with a significant teaching ministry
- **Youth Leader** — a person with particular responsibility for youth
- **Social Worker/Visitation Officer**
- **Worship Leader**

3. Policy Considerations

Interim credentials are issued for a 12 month period, which then becomes a full credential upon satisfactory review by the appointed member of the NLT.

Ministers who have been previously credentialed by another authority must have been in good standing with their previous credentialing authority in order to be considered for a BMi credential.

A credential issued by the BMi National Leadership Team carries significant weight as a public office and indicates the confidence of the BMi National Leadership Team in the person's capacity to provide godly and quality leadership and ministry in the name of BMi.

It should be noted that a separate charge is not levied for each additional minister's credential in a church, as it is expected that increased levies from growing churches will cover increased costs in servicing additional credentials.

Where there is a demonstrated need for additional credentials in a particular church or ministry an additional levy may be required on behalf of each extra credential at the discretion of the BMi National Leadership Team.

Administration

Credentials will be automatically renewed on an annual basis unless there is some reason for the BMi National Leadership Team to withhold renewal. There is no charge for credentials within a local church as the cost is covered by the church's levy.

Credentials for ministries will be charged as per Finances section of the BMi Ministers Manual.

It is a condition of renewal of any Minister's credential that their church or ministry holds current, Professional Indemnity and Directors and Officers Liability Insurance policies issued through BMi. It is highly recommended that ministers also hold a police check and working with vulnerable persons certificate.

Local Church Credentials

Local churches are encouraged to issue local credentials where appropriate. BMi credentials are reserved for those who hold significant responsibility in a local church or member ministry or have a demonstrable need for such a credential.

Small Groups

Where a small group of less than 20 adult members wishes to join BMi, the BMi NLT may issue a Presiding Elder credential if considered appropriate.

4. Ministers Credential Application Procedures

Procedure is same as for a church, but the questions are more personal. This is not an application for membership in BMi, but rather a Minister's Credential.

A member of the NLT will be assigned to process each application. Generally, where a church membership is involved in this process, the same NLT member, generally, will be involved in both applications to ensure a seamless process.

As part of the consultation process the NLT member should:

- Ascertain motive and desire to be part of BMi, including the congruence of heart and vision
- Attend a service, hear preaching, talk with leadership and answer any questions
- Be satisfied of the call to ministry and the gifting of the applicant and observe on aspects listed below:
 - willingness to submit
 - general fruitfulness
 - private financial status
 - current marital status, previous relationships, etc.
 - commitment to attend BMi meetings
 - theological training and perspective, and ministerial experience
 - two external references re suitability of applicant
 - whatever else NLT member considers appropriate and necessary
- Consider personal matters concerning life and history:
 - as a Christian
 - church affiliations; which denomination(s), and whether a credential has been held with another denomination
 - previous Christian connections (with other organisations, etc.)

- standing both in community and in relation to other churches
- any compromises morally or ethically such that he/they may be disqualified from ministry
- any emotional or physical weaknesses
- any present or past connections with secret societies (e.g. Freemasonry)
- any history of dependency upon drugs, alcohol, etc.
- ascertain social skills, maturity level and background
- ascertain the response/suitability/desire of applicant's spouse
- clarify what type of credential is being sought, i.e. ministerial credential (designation to be determined) and/or marriage celebrant's license

Upon the recommendation of an NLT Member, the applicant wishing to be credentialed can be admitted as an interim minister, for a one-year period, giving them access to all BMi services. The NLT member is required, within the year, to observe various issues in the life of the minister. The applicant will be given full status as a credentialed minister in BMi upon satisfaction of points listed above.

International Policy

This policy document has been developed to aid the operation of the BMi ministry in the various nations. BMi believes that the international mission of the Church is a vital component of the Great Commission.

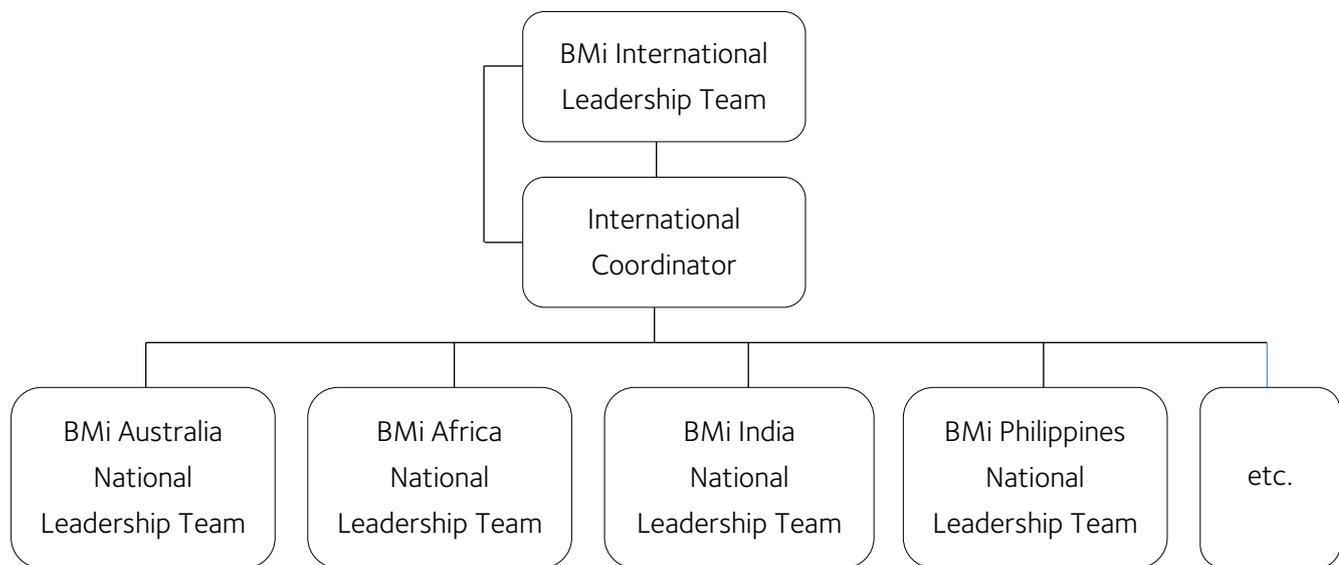
We appreciate that individual BMi churches may have international involvement outside the framework of BMi and this policy does not apply to such. We do, however, encourage churches and ministries to focus their international activity within the BMi family.

This policy has been designed to enhance and protect churches' involvement in international works and it is expected that all churches will familiarise themselves with the document and its provisions.

1. Leadership Structure

In due course it is planned that International affairs will be administered by the BMi International Leadership Team (ILT) through the International Coordinator. (The International Coordinator will be appointed by the ILT, but currently the Australian NLT acts as the ILT.) This International Leadership Team:

- a. Provides the framework to facilitate fellowship for international leaders.
- b. Coordinates an occasional gathering of international leaders for policy development, prayer, fellowship, interaction, etc.



2. Role and Responsibilities of International Leadership Team

The role and responsibilities of the International Leadership Team are administered through the International Coordinator.

- a. Formulation and implementation of vision and international policy pertaining to BMi and its affiliate ministries.
- b. To vet and arbitrate applications for membership with BMi from new national locations.

- c. To advise BMi churches of all international matters/policies and encourage support for member churches and ministries.
- d. Provide a report for the preceding calendar year to the Annual General Meeting of each national leadership team.
- e. Communicate with the various National Leadership Teams to ensure all monies donated for use in another nation are sent, ideally, quarterly to the National Office of each country for distribution as directed. International ministries and churches will submit annual financial returns including details of any monies received from international sources.
- f. The International Leadership Team of BMi is the final arbiter giving policy direction to International Coordinator.

3. Procedures for Membership with BMi

Ideally BMi works to see a single entity, with its own Leadership Team, in each nation as the affiliating authority. For example, BMi Philippines has its own National Leadership Team which runs the affairs of BMi churches and ministries in the Philippines.

Any church or ministry seeking membership with BMi does so through the Leadership Team of the nation in which they reside. Notwithstanding individual churches may become members of BMi, through the Australian NLT of BMi, if there is no structure existing in a particular nation.

- a. Requests for membership from international churches and ministries, in nations where there is no BMi presence, will be investigated through the office of the International Coordinator prior to submission to BMi International Leadership Team for final decision.
- b. Instigators of a new international contact should provide an introductory assessment of a potential affiliate church or ministry to the International Coordinator.
- c. There is the option for some international churches to become affiliate churches of BMi, rather than members. This would provide opportunity for prayer support and fellowship while still maintaining an independent structure and ministry.

4. Funding International Operations

There is no present plan to levy national entities for affiliation with BMi, although donations are desirable and always welcome.

It is expected that each nation will bear the financial cost of ensuring its representatives attend scheduled gatherings of the International Council. It is acknowledged that this would be beyond the financial capacity of some nations. In such cases the ILT may request donations be made by various member churches to facilitate attendance.

Our expectation is that national bodies become self-sufficient through strategic planning to that end.

5. National Responsibilities

a. National Leadership Teams

BMi churches and ministries in each nation (or national grouping — such as East Africa), is to form its own National Leadership Team (NLT). This team will function in a similar manner to the Australian NLT (see Australian BMi constitution). Initially, the National Leader of a nation will be appointed by the Australian NLT and this National Leader will appoint the NLT of that nation. Subsequent appointments will be made in consultation with the other members of that NLT.

Each BMi nation shall have an NLT which will function as the governing body for BMi in that nation, and is responsible for all policy and financial matters. Each NLT is accountable in its decision making to the International Leadership Team (which at present is the Australian NLT).

b. Membership Certificate

The Australian BMi office will issue a Membership Certificate at the behest of the International Leadership Team (presently Australian NLT) for each new national BMi. Subsequent membership certificates for national churches and ministries will be issued by the NLT of that nation.

c. Credentials

The credential of each national leader will be issued by the International Leadership Team from the BMi Australia office. Initial one-year ministry credentials may be issued from the BMi Australia office, with subsequent credentials issued from the National offices at the behest of that nation's NLT. Requirements for credentials will be as presented in the BMi Ministers' Manual.

d. Funding

Each nation is responsible for financing its NLT and its operations. The NLT is responsible for administering all national finances. This includes being responsible for financial records and expenditures. Annual financial reports should be forwarded to the ILT.

Recommendations

- Each nation should implement a method of raising finances for the operation of the NLT in a manner acceptable to the Australian NLT.
- It is recommended that a levy be imposed on each member church to cover costs of administering a BMi office. The Australian practice has been to set a levy at a percentage of tithes and offerings (excluding mission giving). In Australia the rate is 3.3%, but this could vary according to needs.
- In addition, national NLT members should receive some minor financial assistance to cover costs of serving as a member of that nation's NLT. National BMi offices should also be planning to cover costs relating to BMi International; for example, covering or contributing to the costs of their representatives attending BMi international conferences.

6. Ministry Visits to BMi Churches and Ministries

The following are expectations for those visiting, for ministry purposes, BMi member churches internationally.

- a. Liaise with the International Coordinator concerning any intended or proposed visit requesting assistance and advice as appropriate.
- b. Visits must be:
 - as a result of a bonafide invitation; or
 - at the instigation of a BMi National Leadership Team.
- c. Visitors must be able to carry all expenses in the country of destination, unless alternate arrangements are made by the host nation.

7. International Financial Assistance

There are two categories for international financial assistance:

- local church support
- specific projects, through the Project Register (see 'Project Register' section).

Local Church Support

Local church support may be sponsored through local churches in another nation, but it is highly recommended that such support should be channelled through the Australian international office of BMi.

All requests for assistance from BMi in another nation should be made through that nation's office. It is not appropriate to solicit direct support from local churches in another nation from within BMi. In addition, no commitment shall be made to an international church leader by an individual on behalf of BMi without prior consent of the BMi National Leadership Team.

Specific Projects

Proposals for BMi international assistance for specific projects must apply on the appropriate form to be included on the Project Register. Approved projects will be promoted through BMi to assist local churches plan mission giving.

On completion of the project a detailed accounting schedule should be provided by the project organiser, via the International Coordinator, to contributing churches.

8. International Travel

- a. BMi is not responsible for travel or other costs of any ministry, but may assist with costs of official visits.
- b. The International Coordinator and other members of the Australian NLT may claim travel costs for an approved international visit as funds are available.
- c. An individual church may invite international personnel to visit for whatever reason at their own expense and full responsibility.
- d. The International Leadership Team, through the International Coordinator, is responsible for the coordination, including the best available advice, on local customs and culture, for any approved international visit.

Project Register

The Project Register provides listing and information on projects for all BMi churches both national and international.

Purpose

The Project Register is to provide information to all our churches of project plans throughout BMi so that each church can assess the proposed projects. This would enable churches to:

- pray for individual projects;
- have information on projects to present to their leadership teams when considering future mission and outreach giving.

Input

Churches are asked to provide basic information relating to any projects they are planning or even have begun, that they wish to be considered for the Project Register. Registration of projects is not obligatory as churches may want to keep certain projects 'in house'. In addition, some projects will be quite small and not appropriate for the Project Register.

Administration

The database of projects is administered through the Australian BMi office and information on projects is available through BMi News (Heartbeat).

Accountability

The Australian NLT are responsible to review projects submitted, to ensure they are achievable and likely to succeed before placing them on the Project Register for recommendation to our churches for support. The NLT will also monitor projects to ensure satisfactory completion.

Any financial gifts to projects should be processed through the BMi National Office in Australia.

Projects

The Project Register will include all approved BMi projects both in Australia and overseas. The Project Register will provide details of projects enabling churches to make wise decisions with their mission giving. As a church expresses an interest in a particular project, the BMi office will furnish fuller details for final consideration and decision making at the local church level.

1. Budget

The National Leadership Team administers BMi finances according to policy and sets the next year's budget.

Financial Accounts

At the end of each calendar year a copy of the financial statements will be distributed to the Senior Minister of each church and ministry. When the draft accounts are presented to the National Leadership Team, they will have a printout of the previous year's accounts as comparison.

2. Levy

The levy is 4% (inc GST) of gross tithes and offerings.

The minimum contribution for any church is \$550.00 per year.

The levy is to be paid on the tithes and offerings (excluding building offerings, missions, any designated income or sales, or any special offerings) and paid monthly.

To assist with administration of the levy and our cash flow requirements, ideally, the levy is to be paid within thirty (30) days from the beginning of each month, using a standard payment slip (the format of which can be provided to members). Alternate arrangements may be made in consultation with the Executive Officer.

Payment may be made by various means, and cheques should be made payable to **Bethesda Ministries International** and mailed to **200 Florey Drive, Charnwood, ACT 2615**.

In relation to ministries (as distinct from local churches) holding membership with BMi, the minimum levy is \$500.00 + GST = \$550.00 per annum, payable on 1 January and due by 30 January each year. This fee includes one credential. Any additional credentials issued on behalf of the ministry will cost an additional \$550.00.

Churches are encouraged to pay levies each month, but other arrangements may be entered into. Should a church not make its regular payment, a NLT member may contact the Senior Minister to discuss the non-payment. Ongoing non-payment of levies may incur forfeiture of membership. If there is a genuine difficulty the National Leadership Team will review the situation, whose decision shall be final.

The levy will fund the administration expenses, secretarial and National Leadership Team costs of BMi. The levy does not include compulsory insurance (i.e. professional indemnity and officers' and directors' insurance).

Tithe on Levy Income

BMi will tithe on its levies to the International (Mission) Fund.

3. Church Finances

It is strongly recommended that the minister is NOT a signatory to church accounts.

Overdraft

It is strongly advised that the church or ministry does not go into overdraft, and also that the minister's personal finances do not become so highly geared, via debt, that there is danger of he/she and their household being unable to meet their debts.

Personal Bankruptcy

A minister's access to the finances of the church is to be limited until bankruptcy is discharged.

Church Liquidation

Bankruptcy, insolvency, liquidation and receivership are terms and circumstances subject to Federal law. In particular the appointment of a receiver is a formal process consequent on a governing board recognizing that the entity for which they are responsible is unable to meet its obligations to staff and creditors in a timely manner. Therefore this Standing Order urges that church administration will be conducted in a manner which forestalls such formal winding-up provisions. For this reason this section uses the term 'functional insolvency' to reflect a circumstance preceding that which would necessitate the implementation of the provisions of law.

In the case of a church going into liquidation due to functional insolvency:

- The church leadership must provide notice to the NLT of the situation
- The minister (where he/she is a signatory) is unable to sign cheques for a 1–2 year period and two other people need to be appointed to sign cheques. These people would need to relate to the NLT regarding all financial decisions.
- The minister and/or spouse are to be removed from any financial control of church finances until bankruptcy is discharged.
- The church is to work at repaying all outstanding debts.

There is to be a veto on spending and a monthly financial report is to be sent to the NLT. If these terms of discipline are violated the minister is to be placed on probation for not heeding the advice of the National Leadership Team. If violated one more time the minister will lose his/her credentials and the use of the name 'Bmi'. Discretionary areas would include the minister's salary and counselling.

Disposition of assets received following the formal dissolution of a member church

Where a member church of Bmi moves to dissolution and acts, either as a result of a specific requirement of its constitution or as a freewill expression of solidarity with the purposes and objects of Bmi, to remit surplus assets to Bmi, the National Leadership Team will:

- for total assets not exceeding \$50,000 determine the purpose to which those assets will be applied,
- for total asset in excess of \$50,000 recommend to the Bmi Council, for their approval, a course of action appropriate to the sale, use or disposition of the assets or the proceeds thereof.

Stipends for Ministers

BMi does not make recommendations for the amount of stipends, rather we recommend that pastors' stipends should reflect the median income of the church community. Generosity should be a guideline for church boards in setting stipends.

It is unwise for a pastor to set his own stipend and we recommend a board be set apart for this task (it may be the church board or a specially convened board). It is an expectation that the pastors' stipend is paid after all outstanding accounts are settled. It is not appropriate for a pastor to be remunerated more than the church income provides.

Contract or Employment

If pastors are employees of the church, their salary is subject to legislated conditions of employment. We recommend pastors be contracted to their church which allows greater freedom in the conditions of. Thus the stipend is set by the local church board in consultation with the pastor as part of their contract and not a salary tied to government endorsed employment conditions, which include a number of mandatory requirements.

Composition of Stipend

Exempt Benefits

The government has recognised that pastors provide a community service and thus allow tax exempt benefits to be added to a pastor's remuneration. The legislation relating to exempt benefits states: 'who are engaged in pastoral duties or activities that are directly related to the practice, teaching or propagation of religious beliefs'.

The amount of the exempt benefits component seems to vary significantly between denominations. Some denominations have adopted a very generous interpretation of the legislation, which can tend to put benefits at risk if there is perceived abuse of the system. We understand the intent of the legislation is that income used in performing the pastoral role is considered an exempt benefit.

Items considered as exempt benefits should include house costs (mortgage repayments or rent), telephone, utilities, council rates, school fees, private health contributions and unrecouped medical expenses, office expenses (including equipment and office furniture), continuing education expenses, transport, insurances, hospitality, and a book/periodical allowance.

These exempt benefits are not considered income for the Pastor in relation to income tax.

Procedure

It is wise for the church to pay exempt benefits into a Pastoral Expenses Account, which may be exclusively linked to a credit card in the name of the church. Signatories may be the same as for other church accounts and may include the Pastor.

The church and pastor should decide the expenses that can be paid from this account and establish the amount to be periodically credited. Properly authorised supporting documentation must be maintained as for any other church account. Since it is a church account, any GST included in payments from this account may be claimed back through the church's Business Activity Statement (BAS).

No cash withdrawals may be made from this account as this contravenes legal requirements.

It is strongly recommended that items such as food, clothing and personal expenditure not be claimed against this account.

Part of this benefit can be paid directly into a pastor's home mortgage or other loan account.

Taxable Income

The second component of the pastors stipend is taxable and the pastor will be required to maintain records and complete an income tax return. The church should issue the pastor a PAYG Payment Summary at the conclusion of the financial year, which shows their taxable income. Exempt benefits do not appear on this PAYG Payment Summary and thus do not need to appear in the tax return.

Declarable Income for Pensioners

There are several special conditions for those entitled to full or part age pensions who are still functioning in ministry.

If a pensioner had to move location to undertake the position as pastor (that is, if they are living in their current location in order to fulfil their role as a pastor), then the pastor's exempt benefits (under ATO definition) are not declarable as income for Centrelink purposes. This means that when calculating the pension, the non-taxable portion of income is not included and should net a higher payment. This is an unusual category which may require pressing the point with Centrelink staff.

Ancillary Benefits

There are various employee benefits mandated by government regulation, such as leave and superannuation. If the pastor is contracted to the church, they are not considered an employee at law and thus these benefits are not mandated. However, it is strongly recommended that allowance be made in these areas, but not necessarily in line with government regulations. A contract allows for the creation of quite different benefits that better suit the needs of both parties. For example, a pastor may choose to take one or two weeks annual leave, but ask that provision be made for a year of study leave every seven years.

Annual Leave

Legislation allows 4 weeks of accumulative annual leave.

Sick Leave

Legislation allows 10 days of accumulative sick leave per annum.

Long Service Leave

Current legislation allows 13 weeks long service leave after 10 years service. It is recommended that significantly more generous allowance be made, which should include provision for study leave and may be better considered on a seven year rotation.

Superannuation

Current legislation requires 9% of an employee's stipend to be paid into their superannuation account. Churches should ensure their level of retirement benefits would enable the pastor to live comfortably in their retirement years. Financial limitations for pensions should be considered in setting amounts of contribution.

Additional Benefits

Churches should consider the applicability of personal and sickness insurance for pastors.

Workers compensation policies are mandatory and churches should ensure their policies are current

We define **Minister** as a person who holds a ministry office and carries a credential of Bethesda Ministries International.

1. Discipline of Ministers

Disciplinary action may be undertaken at the discretion of the National Leadership Team where it is ascertained that a minister has failed morally, ethically, domestically, mentally, emotionally, doctrinally, spiritually, practically or ecclesiastically.

The Nature and Purpose of Discipline

Discipline is an exercise of scriptural authority for which the 'Church' is responsible, both of its members and its ministers. Discipline is that course of biblical action applied to offenders (where moral or other breakdown has been determined — see 'Scope of Failure') with a view to repentance, restoration and reformation of lifestyle. Discipline would include training that produces self-control, orderliness, obedience and capacity for cooperation.

It is believed that discipline can only be adequately implemented where accountability and monitoring requirements are to be implemented.

The aims of discipline are:

- that God may be honoured
- that the church's welfare and purity may be preserved in the fear of the Lord. (e.g. 1 Corinthians 5:7–8)
- that obedience may be given by the church's membership to the leadership/authority exercising the discipline (members are not to have fellowship with one who is excluded from the local church, 2 Corinthians 2:9; 7:12)
- that the offender under discipline may experience personal restoration and where deemed possible restoration to some level of ministry.

Restoration of Ministers

Where a person leading a church fails morally, or for other reason, is subsequently under discipline by BMi and seeks to fellowship elsewhere, the Australian Pentecostal Ministers' Fellowship (APMF) will be notified as part of our agreement as members of that group.

Restoration is possible if a person(s) voluntarily confesses and is repentant toward God. When confession and repentance has taken place an appropriate restoration process can be implemented.

Discipline is to be administered for the restoration of the minister (not for the purposes of retribution) whilst fully providing for the protection of the spiritual welfare of the local church.

Discipline is to be redemptive in nature, corrective in purpose, undertaken 'in a spirit of gentleness' (Galatians 6:1) and restorative in result. It is considered that however badly an individual may have fallen they can, upon genuine repentance (as far as we can judge) be restored to fellowship in the Christian Church, but this does not guarantee restoration to ministry. The primary purpose of this policy statement is the exercise of discipline in relation to moral failure of a sexual nature.

2. Expulsion from BMi

Where a situation of prolonged moral breakdown (sexual, financial, etc.) has been ascertained and where there is not acknowledgement of guilt, or where unrepentant and resistant attitudes to correction are demonstrated, then such a person will be dis-fellowshipped (ex-communicated) from the member church and BMi. Should subsequent events require consideration be given to restitution to fellowship within BMi then such shall be handled at the discretion of the National Leadership Team or their designated representatives in a manner and with due investigation as may be required by them (genuineness of confession, fruits of repentance, emergence of good reports, etc. would be sought).

Exclusion From Ministry

Where a minister has committed repeated acts of sexual immorality with one or more persons they may be restored to fellowship contingent upon the genuineness of their confession and repentance being ascertained, yet the minister by their conduct and moral failure may exclude themselves from the ministry.

Restoration to Ministry — A Single Moral Lapse

It is agreed that in such cases some concession may be deemed proper and restoration to ministry may be a possibility upon the following conditions:

- Their life up to the time of the offence has been above reproach (1 Timothy 3:2).
- Their confession upon being charged is immediate and complete and repentance is judged to be genuine. (The scope of confession will depend upon whether or not the offence has become public or is private knowledge.)
- Their ministerial credentials be withdrawn immediately the charge is proven.
- They willingly come under discipline and faithfully attend a local church for a stipulated period of time (probably one or two years) and are monitored and counselled in their response as part of the restoration process. This may include special provision of help for their spouse and family as part of the restoration process.
- After the 'stipulated' period of time they may be permitted to minister the Word in the local church for a period of twelve months as a probationary step.
- At the expiration of the probationary period during which the one under discipline has fulfilled the required conditions, the National Leadership Team or their designated representatives may recommend the minister be restored to an appropriate ministry level and be credentialed accordingly. (It is worth considering whether the knowledge of restoration should be as widespread as the knowledge of the moral fall.)

It should be noted that the principles of discipline and/or restoration as outlined above be applicable to all forms of deviant sexual behaviour, such as adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, rape, paedophilia/child molestation, incest, indecent exposure and any other form of sexual perversion. It may be that the spouse of a minister sins and brings disrespect to the Lord's Name, work, or the ministry. Under such circumstances there would need to be implemented disciplinary action geared towards restoration. The minister should be stood down while the marriage is restored.

3. Investigation of a Complaint

Where a complaint has been brought against a minister of BMi it should preferably be in writing, be signed, and be confirmed by two or three witnesses. Initially the matter shall be investigated with a minimum of delay by two members of the National Leadership Team appointed for the task or by senior ministry delegated with the responsibility by the National Leadership Team.

Where necessary and possible the involved parties shall be brought before the National Leadership Team members (not necessarily all the National Leadership Team) and the matter thoroughly and biblically concluded.

Discipline in general should not be implemented until the case has been heard and judged. Where an evident breach of ethics, morals or doctrine is known the member shall be stood down from all ministry, pending a full investigation and final decision and the implementation of discipline if found guilty.

Every endeavour should be made to resolve such matters as quickly as practical.

Complaints must be handled within the constraints of prevailing legislation. Any complaint made on the grounds of sexual abuse or the abuse of children must be referred to relevant police authorities.

4. Biblical Basis

A minister is to be an example to the flock (1 Timothy 4:12; 1 Peter 5:1–3). Where it is ascertained that a minister has failed ethically, domestically, mentally, emotionally, doctrinally, spiritually, practically or ecclesiastically in line with 1 Timothy 3:2–13; Titus 1:5–11; Galatians 5:19–21, then discipline shall be undertaken at the discretion of the National Leadership Team members (or other authority delegated by the NLT).

Where a person is stood down from ministry on a proven charge then the credentials of that minister shall be rescinded.

Constitution

of Bethesda Ministries International Incorporated

1. Name

The name of the Association upon incorporation in New South Wales shall be Bethesda Ministries International Incorporated.

The Association may also be identified by the letters 'BMi' or 'BMI'

2. Origins

2.1 BMi commenced as a result of the ministry emanating from Bethesda Christian Outreach Incorporated, Mitchell Park, South Australia, and more particularly from the Apostolic Leadership of Pastor Peter N Vacca, the Founder of that Outreach.

3. Vision Statement

3.1 Our vision is two-fold:

Firstly, it is to see strong and healthy churches and ministries established and nurtured where the priesthood of all believers is exercised and believers are trained, equipped and released to grow to their full potential and maturity in God. In this context, it is also to nurture ministers to be skilful leaders, ministering with integrity of heart.

Secondly, it is to facilitate the vision and command of Jesus to disciple the nations of the world, by providing and encouraging leadership and church planting training in various forms.

4. Aims and Purposes

4.1 To generate interest and understanding within each Local Church and ministry of the BMi vision statement.

4.2 To foster regional interaction and meaningful relationships between local Churches with the goal of church planting and ministry development.

4.3 To provide national fellowship for training, equipping and releasing of gifted ministries.

4.4 To establish and develop local churches and ministries in Australia and the nations of the world.

5. Definitions

5.1 Without limiting the generality thereof and unless the contrary intention exists the following definitions shall be used.

5.2 'Apostle or Apostolic Ministry' shall mean a person whose life and ministry function is consistent with the Apostles of Scripture and who displays the obvious spiritual and natural talents.

5.3 'Council' shall mean the National Leadership Team and accredited delegates from member churches or ministries established under rule 8.

- 5.4 'National Leadership Team' shall mean those appointed under the provisions of rule 9.1
- 5.5 'Executive Officer' shall mean the person appointed by the National Leadership Team to oversee the administrative functions of BMi.
- 5.6 'Senior Minister' shall mean individuals recognised as an authentic Christian ministry and issued with ministry credentials by the National Leadership Team of BMi.
- 5.7 'Ministries' shall mean individuals or organisations, which have been granted membership to BMi by the National Leadership Team.
- 5.8 'Local Church' shall mean self-governing churches, which are admitted to membership of BMi by the National Leadership Team.
- 5.9 'BMi' shall mean Bethesda Ministries International Inc. established under these rules.
- 5.10 'National Leader' shall mean some person acknowledged and appointed by the National Leadership Team and approved by the Council as a person with an apostolic calling to lead BMi in the position of National Leader.
- 5.11 'Standing orders' shall mean policy documents and guidelines currently contained in the minister's manual.
- 5.12 A reference to the singular number shall include the plural number and visa versa and a reference to any gender shall include the other genders.

6. Statement of Faith

A brief summary of the principles of faith embraced by BMi includes:

- 6.1 The Holy Scriptures — their inspiration and infallibility.
- 6.2 The Godhead — Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- 6.3 The Lord Jesus Christ — His eternal co-existence as the Son in the Godhead, His incarnation, His vicarious death and resurrection for our sanctification and justification, His ascension, His personal future return to this earth.
- 6.4 The work of the Holy Spirit producing:
 - 6.4.1 Salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.
 - 6.4.2 The fruit of the Holy Spirit, which manifests the character of Christ in the believer.
 - 6.4.3 The gifts of the Holy Spirit for fulfilling of the ministry of Christ in, and flowing out from, the church.
- 6.5 The work of the Lord Jesus Christ producing:
 - 6.5.1 The Spirit-filled Christian life.
 - 6.5.2 Divine healing on the basis of His atoning death and resurrection.
 - 6.5.3 Liberty from bondages originating in Satan.
- 6.6 The observation of the ordinances of baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper.

- 6.7 The essential spiritual unity of the Universal Church, comprising all believers regardless of organisational affiliation.
- 6.8 The involvement of every believer in the life and outreach of the church under Scriptural leadership.

7. Membership

- 7.1 Only local Churches and Ministries whose application for membership is accepted by the National Leadership Team and is in accordance with the National Leadership Team's requirements, (in standing orders), shall be members of BMi.
- 7.2 The National Leadership Team shall have the power to cancel the membership of a Local Church or Ministry.
- 7.3 Member churches or Ministries may resign their membership by tendering that resignation in writing.
- 7.4 The Public Officer of the Association shall cause to be established and maintained a register of members which will be kept at the principal office of BMi available for inspection by members at a reasonable time upon request.
- 7.5 Disciplinary guidelines shall be those set forth in standing orders in the Ministers Manual.
- 7.6 Disputes between members shall be settled by the National Leadership Team or its appointed representatives.
- 7.7 In the event of a dispute between a member and this Association, a party to the dispute may request a hearing with all members of the National Leadership Team present by giving to the National Leadership Team written notice of the dispute and relevant details of it, (allowing due time for the meeting to be convened).

8. Council

- 8.1 The Council shall consist of the National Leadership Team and appointed delegates from local Churches or Ministries.
- 8.2 Member local Churches or Ministries may nominate one credentialed person to represent that local Church or Ministry at duly convened meetings of the Council. However the National Leadership Team shall have power to increase representation for larger local Churches where it deems it is appropriate. This person has the right of proxy voting at duly convened meetings of the Council.
- 8.3 The Council shall meet at least once in each calendar year at such place and at such time as the National Leadership Team determines. Such a meeting to be known as the Annual General Meeting of which appropriate written notice shall be given to members.
- 8.4 The Council may hold other meetings during the year upon the resolution of the National Leadership Team. Such meetings shall be known, as special general meetings of which 21 days notice in writing shall be given to members and such notice shall contain a concise statement of the matter to be resolved at each meeting. (see 11.1-4)

- 8.5 a. A vote may be taken at the AGM or SGM. Appointed council members only may vote.
- b. The NLT will give 28 days notice of matters on which a vote is taken.

9. National Leadership Team

- 9.1 The National Leader shall nominate to the existing National Leadership Team for approval and appointment those who shall serve upon the National Leadership Team. These appointments are to be ratified by the Council every two years.
- 9.2 For the purpose of these rules, the office of a National Leadership Team member becomes vacant if the member:
 - a. Dies, or
 - b. Becomes an insolvent under administration within the meaning of the Corporation Law, or
 - c. Becomes of unsound mind, or
 - d. Resigns his office by writing under his hand addressed to the National Leadership Team, or
 - e. Fails, without leave granted by the National Leadership Team, to attend three consecutive meetings of the National Leadership Team, or
 - f. Is removed from office under rule 7.5, or
 - g. Is asked to vacate their position by the National Leader after consultation with, and with the approval of, the remainder of the NLT.
 - h. The National Leader may be removed on the unanimous decision of the remainder of the NLT.
 - i. In either 9.2g or 9.2h, a decision to remove an NLT member may be appealed by that member to an agreed independent arbiter whose decision shall be final.
- 9.3 The National Leadership Team shall consist of no less than 4 persons including the National Leader who shall act as Chairman. Any 3 members of the National Leadership Team, including the National Leader or his nominated representative, shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of the business of a meeting of the National Leadership Team.
- 9.4 The National Leadership Team shall cause to be kept, at the principal office of BMi, proper books of accounts and records of the affairs of BMi and its meetings, which will be available for inspection by members at a reasonable hour.
- 9.5 The National Leadership Team shall be responsible for the day to day running of BMi and for the issuance of ministry credentials to ministers, pastors and workers within BMi.
- 9.6 The National Leadership Team shall have the responsibility of approving and appointing the Executive Officer upon such terms and conditions as the National Leadership Team decides is appropriate and the appointment shall be made or confirmed annually. The Executive Officer may be the Public Officer.
- 9.7 The National Leadership Team shall have the responsibility of appointing the Public Officer in accordance with the requirements of the various Acts of the State or Federal Parliaments.

9.8 Subject to these rules, or any act of parliament or regulation there under, the National Leadership Team has the power to perform all such acts and matters as appear to the National Leadership Team to be essential or expedient for the proper management of the business and affairs, spiritual or otherwise of BMi.

9.9 The Association may effect and maintain insurance.

10. Annual General Meeting

10.1 BMI shall hold a general meeting each year measured from the date of incorporation at such place and at such time as the National Leadership Team thinks fit, with notification of no less than 28 days. The first Annual General Meeting shall be held within 15 months of the date of incorporation and thereafter within each successive 12 monthly period. The annual general meeting shall be specified as such in the notice convening it.

At this meeting:

10.2 Financial Reports shall be presented.

10.3 Members will have opportunity to present reports.

10.4 Members may submit to the National Leadership Team in writing, until 14 days prior the AGM, any matters for discussion. Such matters will be placed on the agenda for the annual general meeting.

10.5 The National Leader or his nominee shall preside as Chairperson at each annual general meeting of the association.

10.6 No item of business is to be transacted at an annual general meeting unless a quorum of members entitled under these rules to vote is present.

10.7 Thirty percent of members present and entitled to vote under these rules constitute a quorum for the transaction of business at an annual general meeting.

10.8 On any question arising at an annual general meeting a member has one vote only. Proxy voting is allowed according to rule 8.2.

10.9 Determination of a resolution arising at an annual general meeting is to be resolved by a show of hands.

10.10 In the case of equality of votes on a question at a general meeting the chairperson is entitled to exercise a second or casting vote.

11. Special Meetings

11.1 The National Leadership Team may, whenever it sees fit, according to rule 8.4, convene a special general meeting of the association. The business conducted at such a meeting must be specified in writing to the members at least 21 days prior to the meeting.

No other business may be conducted at such a meeting.

11.2 The National Leadership Team may, due to the dispersed membership, whenever it sees fit, call for postal ballots on resolutions. Postal voting slips will be retained for recording purposes.

11.3 A special resolution may be passed by a majority which comprises three quarters of such members who being entitled to vote under these rules, do so.

12. Finances

12.1 Finances may be raised by the means the National Leadership Team deem appropriate from time to time, including such things as gifts and donations, legacies or beneficiaries as well as levies and subscriptions according to standing orders.

12.2 The National Leadership Team shall cause accounts to be opened, with such financial institutions as the National Leadership Team selects, in the name of BMi.

12.3 The administrative staff of BMi shall receive all monies paid to BMi and after the receipt thereof issue official receipts as required.

12.4 All cheques drawn on the account of BMi and all drafts, bills of exchange, promissory notes and other negotiable instruments, including internet banking, and documents shall be approved by any two signatories of the administrative staff as appointed by the National Leadership Team.

13. Publication

13.1 The National Leadership Team shall have the right to approve or disapprove any literature published or proposed to be published in the name of BMi.

14. Formation of Other Committees

14.1 The National Leadership Team shall have authority to form such Regional Overseers, committees or executives as may be necessary to carry out the duties related to specific regions.

14.2 Such Regional Overseers, committees or executives shall be responsible to the National Leadership Team.

15. Power of Administration

15.1 The National Leadership Team shall have the authority and power to make rules and regulations for the administration of its affairs and for the administration, management, provision and disposal of all monies, revenues, legacies, donations and documents of every description under its control or under the control of any officer elected or appointed, consistent with the provisions of this constitution, but always subject to the trusts if any, affecting the same.

16. Common Seal

16.1 The common seal of the association shall be kept in the custody of the public officer.

16.2 The common seal must not be affixed to any instrument except by the authority of the National Leadership Team and the affixing of the common seal must be attested by the signatures either of two members of the National Leadership Team or of one member of the National Leadership Team and of the public officer.

17. Amendments

- 17.1 This constitution may be repealed, altered, varied, amended or added to at a special general meeting or the annual general meeting of the Council called for that purpose provided that the appropriate notice has been given for the calling of that meeting. 75% of the vote will be required to pass changes to the constitution.
- 17.2 Such changes to this constitution shall be effected by a vote by Council members with a majority of at least 60% of members voting.

18. Winding Up

- 18.1 If upon the winding up or dissolution of the association there remains after satisfaction of all its debts and liabilities, any assets whatsoever, the same shall not be paid to or distributed amongst the members, but shall be given or transferred to some other institution or institutions having objects similar to that of the association and which shall prohibit the distribution of its or their property amongst its members.
- 18.2 The liability of a member towards the payment of the debts and liabilities of the association or the costs, charges or expenses of the winding up of the association shall be limited to the amount, if any, unpaid by the member for membership fees, levies and subscriptions imposed by the National Leadership Team, pursuant to standing orders.

19. Standing Orders

- 19.1 Standing orders may be issued by the National Leadership Team as necessary and accepted by a majority vote of the BMi Council, which are binding upon it and upon members of BMi. These standing orders take the form of policy documents and guidelines, which are noted as 'Standing Orders' in the BMi Minister's Manual.

Model Constitution for Churches

Please note:

This model constitution is not obligatory upon churches/ministries. The provisions and clauses herewith should be carefully considered by church leadership in arriving at their own constitution.

Churches requiring more information should contact the BMi office, who may be able to make other constitutions available for review.

All BMi churches/ministries should include clauses 21 and 22 in a form acceptable to the NLT.

<Insert appropriate state legislation title here>

<insert name of church here> INCORPORATED RULES

1. Name

The name of the Church shall be the <insert name of church here> INCORPORATED, (hereinafter referred to as 'the Church').

2. Interpretation

In these rules, unless the contrary intention appears, the following definitions shall apply:

- 2.1 'Congregation' means all persons who do or may hereafter attend meetings or services of the Church.
- 2.2 'Council' means the Council of Officers as constituted in accordance with the rules and referred to as the Business Council.
- 2.3 'General Meeting' means the general meeting of members convened in accordance with Rule 9.
- 2.4 'Bmi' means Bethesda Ministries International.
- 2.5 'Oversight' means the leadership team of pastors and elders as defined in accordance with rule 6 and known as the Oversight.
- 2.6 Words and expressions used shall be interpreted in the usual and normal meaning of the word and with the assistance of the Acts Interpretation Act.

3. Office

The office of the Church shall be at <insert place name> in <State>, or such other place as the Council in consultation with the Oversight, may from time to time determine.

4. Objects

The objects and purposes of the Church are as follows:

- 4.1 To propagate the message of the Word of God.

- 4.2 To engage in evangelism by all means.
- 4.3 To establish self-governing, self propagating, self supporting churches as the opportunity affords.
- 4.4 To uphold the family as the basic unit of society.
- 4.5. To provide Christian education for all age groups and to encourage training for active ministry at home and abroad.
- 4.6 To release the divinely bestowed ministry gifts of Christ into full operation.
- 4.7 To support missionary enterprise in other lands with the view to establishing and or strengthening indigenous local churches.
- 4.8 To encourage an attitude of the Christian fellowship toward all believers in Christ irrespective of doctrinal or denominational differences
- 4.9 To honour all civil governing authorities according to the Bible.

5. Membership

- 5.1 The membership of the Church shall comprise such persons who are approved for membership from time to time by the Oversight and in accordance with Standing Orders and listed in the register of members of the Church.
- 5.2 The minimum age of a member shall be sixteen years.
- 5.3 A right, privilege, or obligation of a person by virtue of their membership of the Church is not capable of being transferred or transmitted to another person and shall terminate upon the cessation of their membership, whether by death, resignation or otherwise.
- 5.4 The Oversight may, in accordance with Standing Orders, remove a name from the register if the member, in the opinion of the Oversight, has been guilty of conduct detrimental to the interests of the Church and contrary to the moral standards of the Bible. That person then ceases to be a member of the Church.
- 5.5 A member of the Church may resign from the Church by first giving twenty eight (28) days notice in writing to the Secretary of their intention to resign and upon the expiration of that period of notice, unless, pursuant to rule 7 hereof the Oversight has determined, notwithstanding the notice of resignation, to expel or suspend the member, the member shall cease to be a member.
- 5.6 Unless the member giving the notice has been suspended or expelled as provided in these rules, upon the expiration of a notice given under sub-clause (1), the Secretary shall make in the register of members an entry recording the date on which the member by whom the notice was given ceased to be a member.

- 5.7 Subject to these rules, the Biblical principles set out in Matthew 18:15–20; 5:23–26 and Galatians 6:1–5, and the moral standards set out in 1 Corinthians 5:9–3, Romans 1:18–32 and Leviticus 18, the Oversight may determine to expel, suspend or remove a member from membership of the Church for a specified period if they are of the opinion that the member has refused or neglected to comply with these rules or failed to uphold and maintain the aforementioned moral standards or has been guilty of conduct unbecoming a member or prejudicial to the interests of the Church and shall advise that person of the decision if appropriate.
- 5.8 The Oversight may delete a member from the Register of Members if such member has not, without reasonable excuse or leave of absence granted by the Oversight, attended for any consecutive period of at least 13 weeks, the normal and regular worship meetings of the Church.

6. Church Leadership

6.1. Senior Minister

- 6.1.1 The appointment of the Senior Minister shall be in consultation with the BMi NLT. The appointment shall be in recognition of their ministerial gift, initiative and teaching and in accordance with Standing Orders.
- 6.1.2 The Senior Minister with the Oversight shall exercise leadership, discipline, preserve sound doctrine, teach, minister to the sick, and initiate the spiritual program and vision of the Church.
- 6.1.3 Without limiting the generality thereof the Senior Minister shall be the senior governmental leader of the church, the overall spiritual leader of the Church and the chairman of all councils or sub-committees within the Church unless otherwise delegated to another.
- 6.1.4 Should the Senior Minister resign his position he shall, in conjunction with the Oversight, recommend to the Church a suitable replacement, and make every effort to ensure that the replacement Senior Minister is installed with as little delay as possible.

6.2. Oversight/Leadership Team/Eldership

- 6.2.1 The Oversight is the governing body of all matters pertaining to the Church.
- 6.2.2 The Senior Minister may appoint in consultation with the existing Elders such persons as Elders who:
- Have the scriptural and spiritual qualifications detailed in Standing Orders
 - Reflect a stable and mature Christian lifestyle
 - Have ability to give senior counsel and take care of the members of the Church
- 6.2.3 Elders will be required to assist and cooperate with the Senior Minister, exercise leadership and discipline, and preserve sound doctrine, teach, minister to the sick and assist to initiate the spiritual program and vision of the Church.
- 6.2.4 Each position of Elder shall be reviewed by the Senior Minister annually.
- 6.2.5 The Oversight will operate under the authority and leadership of the Senior Minister.

7. Business Council

- 7.1 The Oversight shall appoint a Business Council to assist in the management of the affairs of the Church.
- 7.2 The Council in consultation with the Oversight may exercise all such powers and functions as may be exercised by the Church, other than those powers and functions that are required by these rules to be exercised by general meetings of members of the Church and subject to the Act and these rules and has power to perform all such acts and things as appear to the Council to be essential to the proper management of the business affairs of the Church.
- 7.3 The Council shall consist of:
- The Senior Minister
 - Elders appointed by the Oversight
 - Such other persons appointed by the Senior Minister
- 7.4 Without limiting the generality thereof, the Council, in consultation with the Oversight shall have power to appoint from within the Church the following officers:
- a director
 - a secretary
 - a treasurer
 - a public officer
 - an administrator
- 7.5 Each Council member shall retire at the date of the next general meeting following the expiration of two (2) year(s) from the date of their appointment, but the retiree shall be eligible for re-election to the office which they previously held or election to any other position which may be vacant.
- 7.6 A Council member may hold two or more positions detailed in rule 7.4.
- 7.7 The Council shall have authority, only upon the recommendation of the oversight, and when deemed necessary, to appoint such staff members as are needed for the effective management of the Church, whether on a casual or full-time basis.
- 7.8 In the event of a casual vacancy in any office mentioned in sub-rule 7.4 of this rule, the Council, in consultation with the Oversight may appoint any person to fill such vacancy and any person so appointed shall serve until the end of the unexpired term of the officer so replaced.

8. Standing Orders

- 8.1 The Council, in consultation with the Oversight, may establish 'Standing Orders' which are binding upon it and upon members of the Church.
- 8.1.1 To confirm or otherwise the recommendations of the Senior Minister of appointments of ordinary members to the Council.
- 8.1.2 To receive reports from the Senior Minister and/or the Council and/or the Council and/or Department leaders.

- 8.1.3 To notify members of the appointment of the various Department leaders and their assistants.
- 8.1.4 To appoint the Auditor.
- 8.2 The annual general meeting may transact special business of which notice is given in accordance with these rules.
- 8.3 The annual general meeting shall be in addition to any other general meeting that may be held in the same year.
- 8.4 All general meetings other than the annual general meeting shall be called special general meetings.
- 8.5 The public officer of the Church shall at least seven (7) days before the date fixed for holding a general meeting of the Church, cause to be inserted in the weekly bulletin published by the Church a notice specifying the place, day and time for the holding of the meeting, and the nature of the business to be transacted thereat.
- 8.6 No item of business shall be transacted at a general meeting unless a quorum of members entitled under these rules to vote is present during the time when the meeting is considering that item. Fifteen (15) members personally present (being members entitled under these rules to vote thereat) constitutes a quorum for the transaction of the business of a general meeting.
- 8.7 Council Meetings
- 8.7.1 Special meetings of the Council may be convened by the director or by any three members of the Council.
- 8.7.2 At least three days' notice shall be given to the members of the Council of any special meeting specifying the general nature of the business to be transacted and no other business shall be transacted at such meeting.
- 8.7.3 The secretary shall ensure that a full and complete record of all resolutions and proceedings of the Council are kept in a Minute Book provided for that purpose.
- 8.7.4 Two thirds of the membership of the council shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of the business of a meeting of the Council.
- 8.7.5 Each member present at a meeting of the Council is entitled to one vote and, wherever possible decisions made by the Council shall be unanimous although a two thirds majority shall be sufficient unless otherwise stated.
- 8.7.6 Notwithstanding the above provision, if a sufficient majority cannot be achieved to matters essential to the effective management of the Church, the matter shall be taken to the congregation where a two thirds majority of the members present and voting shall be required.
- 8.7.7 Where the decision to be made by the Council is of such a nature as to affect all members, the Council may refer the matter to the congregation and a two third majority of the members present and voting will be necessary.

- 8.7.8 Questions arising at meetings of the Council or any sub-committee appointed by the Council shall be determined on a show of hands or, if demanded by a member, by a poll taken in such manner as the person presiding at the meeting may determine.
- 8.7.9 Each member present at a meeting of the Council or a sub-committee appointed by the Council (including the person presiding at the meeting) is entitled to one vote and, in the event of an equality of votes on each question, the person presiding may exercise a second or casting vote.
- 8.7.10 The Council may at any time appoint a sub-committee from the Council as it may think fit and shall prescribe the powers and functions thereof and the size of a quorum for meetings of the sub-committee shall be fifty per centum (50%) of the members of that sub-committee.
- 8.7.11 The Council may co-opt as members of a sub-committee such persons as it thinks fit but at least one member of the Council shall be a member of every sub-committee.
- 8.7.12 Written notice of each special meeting shall be served on each member of the Council by delivering it to each member at a reasonable time before the meeting or by sending it by post in a prepaid envelope addressed to the member at their usual or last known place of abode in time to reach the member in due course of post before the date of the meetings.

9. Accounts

Proper accounts and records of the financial administration of the Church shall be kept, showing all monies received and expended by the Church, the manner in which such receipt and expenditure takes place and the proper credits and liabilities of the Church.

10. Bank Accounts

- 10.1 The Council shall cause to be opened with such bank or banks as the Council selects banking accounts in the name of the Church into which all monies received shall be paid by the treasurer as soon as possible after receipt therefore.
- 10.2 The treasurer of the Church, shall on behalf of the Church, receive all monies paid to the Church and forthwith after the receipt thereof issue official receipts therefore.
- 10.3 All cheques drawn on the account of the Church and all drafts, bills of exchange, promissory notes, and other negotiable instruments and documents shall be signed by any two members of the Council, one of whom shall be from the following:
- Director
 - Secretary
 - Treasurer
 - Public Officer
 - Oversight Member

11. Property Ownership

In addition to all the powers of property ownership as laid down in the Associations Incorporation Act 1964 as amended and without limiting the generality of the same, the Church shall have the following powers:

- 11.1 The Church may in its corporate name hold, purchase or take on lease any land, and may sell, exchange, mortgage, lease or build upon the same (with power to alter and pull down buildings and rebuild) and otherwise deal with the same as fully and effectually as a natural person could do.
- 11.2 In the event of the winding up or dissolution of the Church if there remains after satisfaction of its debts and liabilities any surplus or property, the same shall not be paid or distributed amongst members but shall be given or transferred to a non profit Church having objects similar to those of the Church as is determined by the Council by a majority vote at or before the winding up or dissolution and the Church will comply with the Income Tax Assessment Act Section 78 (1) (a) and ever person who, within the period of twelve (12) months immediately preceding the commencement of the winding up, was a member of the Church, is liable to contribute to the assets of the Church for payment of any debts or liabilities of the Church to an amount not exceeding two (2) dollars, as may be required. A former member is not so required to contribute after they ceased to be a member.

12. Seal of the Church

- 12.1 The seal of the Church shall be in the form of a rubber stamp inscribed with the name of the Church encircling the word 'seal'.
- 12.2 The seal of the Church shall not be affixed to any instrument except by the Authority of the Council and the affixing thereof shall be attested by the signature of two members of the Council or of one member of the Council and the public officer of the Church or such other person as the Council may appoint for that purpose and the attestation is sufficient for all purposes that the seal was affixed by the authority of the Council.
- 12.3 The seal shall remain in the custody of the public officer.

13. Finance

- 13.1 The Church shall have power to raise money or secure payment of money required for any of the objects of the Church or for the satisfaction and performance of any of the obligations or liabilities incurred or undertaken by the Church in such manner as the Council may from time to time think fit.
- 13.2 Money may be borrowed or raised by any means that the said Council may determine from time to time and without limiting the generality of the foregoing may include any or all of the following:
- Gifts and donations
 - Subscriptions
 - Interest free loans
 - Low interest loans

14. Auditor

- 14.1 At each general meeting of the Church, the members present shall appoint a person as the auditor of the Church.
- 14.2 A person so appointed shall hold office until the annual general meeting next after that at which they are appointed, and are eligible for re-appointment.

- 14.3 Except as provided in sub-rule (3) of this rule the auditor may only be removed from office by special resolution of the members at a general meeting.
- 14.4 If a casual vacancy occurs in the office of auditor during the course of a financial year of the Church, the Council may appoint a person as the auditor and the person so appointed shall hold office until the next succeeding annual general meeting.

15. Audit of Accounts

- 15.1 At least once in each financial year of the Church, the accounts of the Church shall be examined by the auditor.
- 15.2 The auditor shall certify as to the correctness of the accounts of the Church and shall report thereon to the members present at the annual general meeting.
- 15.3 In the auditor's report, and in certifying to the accounts, the auditor shall state:
- 15.3.1 Whether information required has been able to be obtained.
- 15.3.2 Whether, in the auditor's opinion, the accounts are properly drawn up so as to give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the Church according to the information at their disposal and the explanations given to them and as shown by the books of the Church.
- 15.3.3 Whether the rules relating to the administration of the funds of the Church have been observed.
- 15.4 The public officer of the Church shall cause to be delivered to the auditor a list of all the accounts, books and records of the Church.
- 15.5 The auditor:
- 15.5.1 Has a right of access to the accounts, books, records, vouchers and documents of the Church.
- 15.5.2 May require from the servants of the Church such information and explanations as may be necessary for the performance of their duties as auditor.
- 15.5.3 May employ persons to assist them in investigating the accounts of the Church.
- 15.5.4 May, in relation to the accounts of the Church examine any members of the Council or any servant of the Church.

16. Custody of Books and Documents

- 16.1 Minutes of meetings and a record of all inward and outward correspondence will be kept in a proper manner by the secretary of the Church.
- 16.2 All records of financial transactions will be kept in a proper manner and are subject to audit in accordance with rule 17 hereof.
- 16.3 All other securities, documents and books of record will be kept in safe custody and under the joint control of the director and secretary of the Church.

17. Income and Property of the Church

- 17.1 The income and property of the Church however derived shall be applied solely towards the promotion of the objects and purposes of the Church and no portion thereof shall be paid or transferred directly or indirectly by dividend bonus or otherwise to any member of the Church.
- 17.2 The property of the Church shall be held in the name of the Church rather than in the names of members as trustees of the Church.
- 17.3 Nothing in the foregoing provision of this rule prevents the payment in good faith to a servant or member of the Church for:
- 17.3.1 Remuneration in return for services actually rendered to the Church by the servant or member or for goods supplied to the Church by the servant or member in the ordinary course of business.
- 17.3.2 Interest at a rate not exceeding the current ruling bank rates on moneys lent to the Church by the servant or member.
- 17.3.3 A reasonable and proper sum by way of rent for premises let to the Church by the servant or member.

18. Alteration to Constitution

- 18.1 Alterations or additions to this constitution shall be made by way of a resolution passed by a three quarters majority of members present and voting at a meeting.
- 18.2 Notice of the proposed alteration or additions and of the above meeting shall be in writing and given to each member of the Church by delivering or sending the same by way of post in a prepaid envelope addressed to the member at their usual or last known place of abode at least one month prior to the holding of the said meeting.

19. Spiritual Covering

- 19.1 Upon application in writing and acceptance by BMi into membership, this church shall keep current the membership until such time as a notice of resignation is given in writing to the National Leadership Team of BMi.
- 19.2 The Senior Pastor shall, upon application to and acceptance by the Movement as a credentialed pastor within BMi, keep in regular fellowship with BMi.
- 19.3 BMi may provide advice and become a board of reference to both the church and its pastor(s). BMi may also provide advice in areas relating to administration and may act on behalf of the church in dealing with Local, State and Federal Governments and their requirement.

20. Matters Unresolved

- 20.1 In the event of circumstances occurring not envisaged or unresolvable according to this Constitution, then the National Leadership Team of BMi is authorised to appoint a committee to resolve the impasse. The Committee's decision is final.

- 20.2 The Committee referred to in Section 20.1 shall have ready access to all documents, records minutes, resolutions notes memo's and other correspondence of the church needed to resolve the matter in question.
- 20.3 This clause shall be instituted at the request of either the Senior Minister or a minimum of one third of the Oversight, or by the National Leadership Team of BMi receiving substantial report of unresolvable circumstances.

1. Presentation of the Concern

Litigation cases against breach of confidentiality are increasing in Australia. Several have concerned churches and church staff at various levels. Pastors, counsellors and churches must not only be doing the right thing concerning confidentiality, but seen to be doing the right thing.

2. Best Practice Principles

In the continual pursuit for excellence the church should strive for the highest standard in every area of its ministry, not the least the aspects surrounding personal confidentiality of all information with which it comes in contact. The church needs to adopt best practice principles that include the following aspects:

- a. The guarantee of confidentiality in all information conveyed verbally, or conveyed and retained in written, electronic or other formats.
- b. Having the confidence of others is understood to be a privilege.
- c. Respecting that a person's privacy is invaded through keeping of unnecessary information.
- d. Understanding that at law people have a right to access information held about them in any form.
- e. Individuals have a right to challenge the accuracy of information held about them in any form.
- f. Churches should adopt a policy of best practice procedures, which *seek* to fully implement the safeguards itemised immediately below.

3. Recommended Confidentiality Procedures

Churches would be wise to consider the implementation of principles that facilitate safety from breach of confidentiality. These may include some of the following elements:

- a. A clear written policy as to who is authorised to counsel, including all pastoral staff with such responsibilities. That such be kept current. That in terms of a counselling department or facility a written Volunteer or Employee Contract determines their authority in relation to access and use of confidential information.
- b. Professional indemnity insurance be secured for all authorised pastors and counsellors.
- c. Written, printed or electronically stored confidential information should not be left unattended or on display where unauthorised persons may access such.
- d. Electronic storage should be secured by a password accessible only to the relevant counsellors concerned.
- e. Written, video or audio records/files should be kept in a locked filing cabinet, or other secured cabinet, when the office is unattended.
- f. Access to the filed records should be detailed in a written policy, updated regularly as to relevant staff.

- g. When confidential information is given verbally, ministers and counsellors should ensure unauthorised persons cannot overhear.
- h. It is recommended that case files should be indexed with a coded system which protects the confidentiality of individuals.
- i. Case files may only be removed from the church premises/counselling environment by individuals needing to further the case in hand. It would then be the responsibility of that individual to secure such files in a way that guards against unauthorised access or theft. In the rare circumstances that files are removed from where they are held a written record of their removal should be made, noting date removed, returned, the individual responsible and, in some cases, the reason for removal. Such a record should be put in place of the file until their return.
- j. Case files should be held for as brief a time as possible.
 - i. Having the confidence of individuals is a privilege. When counselling ceases files should be destroyed except for requirements listed below.
 - ii. Where statutory requirements are to be met, case files must be held for a period of seven years after the file is closed. Files must be secured for that entire period.
 - iii. Responsibility for shredding, electronic deletion or other file destruction rests with the church or counselling centre.
- k. Any break-in and tampering with files, or theft of files, should be immediately notified to the local police service.
- l. The quality of information should be monitored. Some recommended procedures:
 - Avoid judgemental attitudes and comments (written or verbal), e.g. 'Jack is a hopeless, drunken husband'; rather, 'Alcohol is an issue in Jack's life'
 - Don't record opinions as facts
 - Record accurately and impartially
 - Ensure actions taken are recorded
 - File notes in chronological order
 - Minimise information in the case file
 - Limit the use of jargon or shorthand.
- m. When individuals desire to examine information held about them they are made aware that the files remain the property of the church/counselling centre etc, and may not be removed from that place. Clients may obtain photocopies of information that relates only to them. It would be advisable that all requests for access are in writing. Access to files should be made in the presence of the case worker, so that terminology may be explained.
- n. Counsellors will submit to the supervision and operational procedures put in place by their church and/or senior minister, inclusive of professional debriefing/supervision.

4. Breaching Confidentiality

Clients need to be aware that confidentiality can be breached by issues relating to subpoenas or mandatory reporting. Over and above subpoenas and mandatory reporting a decision to breach confidentiality may be taken in the following situations:

- a. Suspected abuse and neglect.
- b. Actual or possible overdose situations.
- c. Where an individual issues substantive threats of intended violence or harm to themselves or others.

Apart from the above, confidentiality should be regarded as a sacred trust by any minister or counsellor. It would be advisable that such breaches of confidentiality are made only after the pastor/counsellor has consulted with their supervisor or professional associate.

In response to any subpoena provide only material stated, in whatever form it might be held. Legal advice is recommended.

Released material must only be delivered to official individuals (e.g. Clerk of the Court), and an official receipt provided.

Breach of any confidentiality could be grounds for a church to dismiss the offender and such matters should be clearly stated in appropriate job descriptions or contract.

These 'Confidentiality Guidelines' are adopted as the BMi position paper with acknowledgement and permission granted by Ivan Herald.

Significant legal risks facing churches and church leaders today

1. Negligent Selection of Church Workers

Hiring and volunteer issues are at the centre of many legal actions involving churches. Negligent selection suggests carelessness or a failure to exercise reasonable care in choosing workers, for instance, bus drivers and bookkeepers. But the most significant risk occurs in the selection of employees and volunteers who will be working with minors.

Many churches have been sued on the basis of negligent selection because an inadequately screened worker sexually molested a child. Remarkably, despite all the media publicity that has been devoted to this issue over the past several years, only one-third of churches do any screening of volunteers who will work with children.

This means a staggering number of churches are exposing their most innocent members to potential abuse, and the church itself to potentially astronomical jury verdicts that may not be fully covered by liability insurance.

The good news, however, is that you can take relatively simple yet effective steps to significantly reduce the likelihood of such an incident.

2. Negligent Retention of Church Staff

A church may have used reasonable care in selecting youth workers, for instance, but still be responsible for their misconduct if it 'retained' them after receiving information indicating that they posed a risk of harm to others.

Say a church employs an associate pastor, and a few years later church leaders learn that the pastor was dismissed by another congregation because of inappropriate sexual contact with an adult church member. The church takes no action regarding this allegation. A few months later, a church member informs leaders that she has had a sexual relationship with the pastor for several months. That woman could later sue the church, claiming that it is responsible for her injuries on the basis of negligent retention. That is, the church retained the pastor after receiving information suggesting that he represented a risk to others. While churches cannot eliminate this risk, they can take steps to reduce their liability.

To begin, whenever a church leader receives credible information suggesting that a church employee or volunteer may represent a risk of harm to others, an immediate and thorough investigation should be initiated. Once such information is received, the church is 'put on notice' of the risk and may be legally responsible if it does nothing to investigate or respond to the information.

If the church's investigation results in credible evidence to support the victim's allegations, then the church can reduce its risk of negligent retention by imposing appropriate restrictions on the alleged wrongdoer. The nature and extent of such restrictions will vary depending on the nature and severity of the alleged wrongs and the strength of the evidence.

If a church ignores credible evidence of wrongdoing and imposes no restrictions on the alleged wrongdoer, it is exposed to liability based on negligent retention from the time it learned of the allegations.

Churches that ignore such allegations face a number of risks in addition to negligent retention, including liability based on 'ratification' of the minister's actions; punitive damages, which are not covered by insurance; and possible personal liability for members of the church board or hiring committee.

3. Negligent Supervision of Church Staff and Activities

Churches can use reasonable care in selecting workers but still be liable for injuries sustained during church activities on the basis of negligent supervision. This refers to a failure to exercise reasonable care in the supervision of church workers and church activities.

Churches have been sued on the basis of negligent supervision in several contexts, including child molestation, injuries to children participating in church-sponsored events, and injuries to infants in a church nursery. Churches are not 'guarantors' of the safety and well-being of those participating in their programs and activities. Generally, they are responsible only for those injuries that result from their negligence.

There are a number of precautions that churches can take to reduce the risk of liability based on negligent supervision. For example, adopt a 'two-adult' policy specifying that no minor is ever allowed to be alone with an adult during any church activity. This rule reduces the risk of child molestation and also reduces the risk of false accusations of molestation. Be especially careful in planning off-site youth activities such as trips and camping. It is essential that an adequate number of adults be present.

4. Negligent and Irresponsible Counselling Practices

Most churches offer some form of counselling services. The most common example is counselling of church members by a minister. Many churches also offer lay counselling. Some limit these services to members of the congregation, while others target the general public. Some churches use counsellors or psychologists who are licensed by the state, while others use unlicensed lay persons with little if any professional training.

Counselling ministries can provide a needed service and represent a 'point of contact' with the community. However, there are a number of important legal concerns, including negligent counselling, sexual misconduct, maintaining confidences, and the unauthorized practice of psychology or counselling by unlicensed persons who are not serving as pastoral counsellors.

Churches that offer counselling services can reduce these legal risks in various ways, including:

- Adopting a policy prohibiting any male minister or counsellor on staff from counselling privately with an unaccompanied female. Since the vast majority of cases of inappropriate sexual behaviour involve male counsellors and female counselees, churches can significantly reduce their risk by using women to counsel women.
- Installing a window in the pastor's office, making all counselling sessions clearly visible to office staff. Of course, such a precaution is effective only if other staff are present and visible throughout the counselling session. This means that the church should implement a policy limiting counselling sessions to office hours when other staff are present.

- Both pastors and unlicensed lay counsellors should have a clear understanding of those cases that should be referred to a professional counsellor.

5. Failure to Report Child Abuse

Child abuse is of epidemic proportion in our country. Ministers often learn of incidents of abuse in the course of counselling, or from reports they receive from nursery or youth workers. It is essential for ministers to understand clearly their responsibilities under state law to report known or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse.

In many states, ministers are 'mandatory reporters', meaning that they can be criminally liable for failing to report. Several states now permit a minister who is a mandatory child abuse reporter under state law to be sued for monetary damages by a victim of child abuse who discovers that the minister was aware of the abuse but did not report it.

A number of courts have rejected the defence made by some ministers that they failed to report abuse because they wanted to deal with the problem 'within the church' as a matter of discipline. Some states, however, excuse ministers from the reporting obligation if they learn of child abuse in the course of a confidential 'privileged communication.' Be sure to check your state law at least a few times each year, since this is an area of law that changes often.

Church officers can be sued personally on several grounds.

6. Securities Law Violations

Violating securities law represents the second highest source of damages in civil litigation involving churches. The *Uniform Securities Act*, which has been adopted by a majority of states, defines a security to include a wide range of instruments, including bonds, promissory notes, and many other investment vehicles used in church fundraising campaigns.

Enacted to protect the public against fraudulent and deceptive practices in the sale of securities and to provide full and fair disclosure to prospective investors, most securities laws impose the following conditions on the sale of securities:

- Registration of proposed securities with the federal or state government in advance of sale
- Filing of sales and advertising literature with the federal or state government
- Registration of agents and broker-dealers who will be selling the securities
- Prohibition of fraudulent practices.

Although the federal government and most states exempt from registration securities offered by any organization 'organized and operated not for private profit but exclusively for a religious... purpose', it is important to note that some states do not exempt religious organizations; others impose conditions on the exemption; and many require that an application for exemption (or 'notice' of exemption) be submitted and approved before exemption will be recognized.

Church securities always will be subject to some degree of regulation. The question is how much. Church leaders should not consider securities as a means of raising funds without the counsel of a securities attorney.

7. Violating Employment Laws

The risk of liability for employment practices increases with the number of employees.

One practice that can result in liability is 'wrongful termination' of an employee. Let's say a church dismisses an employee who later sues the church, claiming that his or her termination was wrongful. In most states, employees who are hired for an indefinite period are considered 'at will' employees. This means that the employment relationship may be terminated at will by either the employer or employee, with or without cause, and with or without notice. The courts and state legislatures have created several exceptions to the 'at will' rule.

These exceptions limit the right of an employer to terminate an at will employee. Employees who are hired for a specific term are not at will employees, and they may be terminated only if the employer has 'good cause.'

Churches also may face liability for violating state and federal discrimination laws that prohibit certain employers from discriminating against employees on the basis of several grounds, including race, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, and the off-duty use of lawful products such as tobacco and alcohol. Keep in mind: churches must be engaged in interstate commerce and have at least 15 employees to be subject to federal laws banning discrimination in employment on the basis of race, national origin, sex, or disability. No federal law prohibits churches from discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation. Several states have such laws, but they exempt churches. (The courts have ruled that religious organizations may discriminate on the basis of religion in their employment decisions, but they must be consistent. A church that dismisses only female employees on the basis of adultery could not justify this practice as permissible religious discrimination.)

Church leaders should seek the assistance of an attorney when considering the termination or discipline of an employee, or any employment action that may violate a state or federal discrimination law. Remember, employment practices are not covered under most church insurance policies.

8. Exerting Undue Influence in Estate Matters

Over the next several years, more wealth will be transferred intergenerationally in this country than at any time in human history. There has never been a greater opportunity for churches to benefit from this wealth by emphasizing stewardship. Recognize, however, that gifts to churches may be challenged by the donor's family if they believe that the church exerted 'undue influence' on the donor. Courts will consider several factors in deciding whether undue influence occurred, including the age and mental health of the donor, the donor's prior giving practices, and the presence of independent legal advice. Many 'disinherited heirs' who bring such lawsuits often recognize that they have a weak case, but they sue anyway, hoping that the church will quickly settle with them in order to avoid the adverse publicity associated with such lawsuits. After all, what church wants to be accused publicly of coercing elderly members into making gifts to the church?

But keep in mind these considerations. Undue influence usually is very difficult to prove, particularly when the donor was in reasonably good mental and physical health at the time the will was executed. If you become aware that an elderly or infirm person is considering leaving the church a portion of his or her estate, you can reduce the risks even further by ensuring that the person obtains the independent counsel of an attorney in drafting the will or trust. Ideally, the attorney should not be a member of the same church.

Finally, recognize that church leaders have a moral obligation to assist in implementing the estate plans of deceased members so long as they are satisfied that no improper influence was exercised. In fact, if a deceased member intended that a portion of his or her estate be distributed to the church, and church leaders too quickly succumb to threats of attorneys hired by disgruntled family members, then they have violated a sacred trust.

9. Personal Liability of Church Board Members

Traditionally, the officers and directors of non profit corporations performed their duties with little risk of personal legal liability.

In recent years, however, church officers and directors have been sued personally on several grounds, including:

- Tort liability for such actions as negligent operation of a church vehicle, negligent supervision of church workers and activities, copyright infringement, and wrongful termination of employees
- Contract liability for executing a contract without authorisation
- Violating one of the 'fiduciary duties' that every officer or director owes to a corporation, including the duties of due care and loyalty to the corporation
- Selling securities without registering as an agent, or engaging in fraudulent activities in the offer or sale of church securities
- Wilfully failing to withhold or pay over federal payroll taxes to the government
- Approving a loan to an officer or director.

A number of states have adopted statutes limiting the liability of uncompensated directors of non profit corporations for their ordinary negligence. These laws do not protect officers and directors who are compensated for their duties, or who engage in gross negligence or intentional misconduct.

'Directors and officers' insurance provides coverage for various acts committed by board members in the course of their official duties. Such insurance may offer coverage for claims that are excluded under a church's general liability policy. It also may cover acts not protected by the federal and state charitable immunity laws.

Though the church is in the business of redemption, pastors and church leaders must remember we live in a decidedly fallen and litigious world. So we must make every effort to protect our churches and their members from legal (and potentially physical) danger. A working knowledge of the legal issues affecting church life will better equip leaders to blamelessly and compassionately minister to their people.

10. Know Your Recruits

Before you put to work a church employee or volunteer, protect yourself by implementing these rules.

- a. Require written application forms. All prospective workers and volunteers should complete one. At a minimum, it should ask for the applicant's name and address, the names of other youth-serving organizations in which the applicant has worked as an employee or volunteer, a full explanation of any prior criminal convictions, and the names of two or more references.

- b. Contact every reference. Follow up with each person and organization listed as a reference in the application, and specifically request a reference addressing the suitability of the applicant to work with minors.
- c. Do criminal records checks. No court has found a church liable for a youth worker's sexual misconduct on the ground that it failed to conduct criminal records check, and so relatively few churches use them. But such checks will further reduce a church's risk of being found liable for the negligent selection of youth workers.
- d. Conduct interviews with candidates. This allows the church to inquire into each applicant's background and make a determination as to each person's suitability.
- e. Use the six-month rule. Adopt a policy restricting eligibility for any volunteer position involving the custody or supervision of minors to those persons who have been church members in good standing for a minimum period of time, such as six months. Such a policy gives the church an additional opportunity to evaluate applicants, and will help to repel persons seeking immediate access to potential victims.
- f. Limit 'second chances.' Church leaders often 'err on the side of mercy' when making employment decisions. This attitude can contribute to a negligent selection claim — if a church gives an applicant a 'second chance' despite knowledge of prior sexual misconduct, and the conduct is repeated. What the church views as mercy may be viewed as gross negligence by a jury.

Richard R Hammar

editor of the Church Law & Tax Report

serves as general counsel to the Assemblies of God

1445 Boonville, Springfield, MO 65802

Lessons from the New Testament church regarding instances of discipline

Acts 5:1–11 — The case of Ananias and Sapphira

Their sin was hypocrisy and the practice of deception, which involved lying to God. In this case God judged the offenders and initiated discipline with Ananias and he fell down dead. Then Peter in his apostolic capacity, when Sapphira came in several hours later followed through with the discipline God had initiated and Sapphira fell down dead.

Result — the offenders separated from God’s people and the fear of the Lord descended on the church.

Romans 16:17–18

These offenders were causing strife and division amongst the people of God. They were setting people against the sound doctrine taught them. Their speaking, smooth talk and flattery was tainted with deception. The submitted saints were instructed to avoid the offenders, i.e. to have no fellowship with them.

Result — offenders separated from God’s people.

1 Corinthians 5:1–13

The sin of sexual immorality within the church became evident and the matter was not originally handled properly. Paul passed judgement on the offender. The Christians at Corinth were told to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the sinful nature.

Result — he was removed from the protective care of the household of God for a time.

1 Corinthians 5:9–11

Instruction is given concerning intra-church discipline. Paul is not speaking concerning our disciplining the sinful people of this world, but to disciplinary action concerning those in the church. The action is against one who calls himself a ‘brother’. Where there is being practised sexual immorality, greed, idolatry, reviling, drunkenness or robbery we are not to associate with such people.

Result — we are to totally remove ourselves from any fellowship with such a person.

2 Thessalonians 3:14–15

Paul’s teaching exhorted the individuals to be diligent in working for a living, not be loafers, idlers or freeloaders. Some were not busy. They were busybodies. The Christians at Thessalonica were told to disassociate themselves from such a person. They were not to treat him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother. The punishment was intended to make the person feel ashamed.

1 Timothy 1:18–20

Speaks about leaders who failed to hold to the faith and a good conscience, who through erroneous teaching brought dishonour to the Name of the Lord in things done and said. They blasphemed the Lord (perhaps through their conduct as well as speech). Paul handed them over to Satan single-handedly.

1 Timothy 5:19–20

Paul covers the possible discipline of elders when they sin. A charge brought by two or three, investigated and proven (v. 20 may indicate that he has sinned a number of times). The punishment is that he be rebuked publicly.

Titus 3:10–11

Paul deals with the offender who is a divisive person who stands against and works against the legitimate (God-backed) leadership. The offender is to be warned twice and after that reject him. Have nothing to do with him. It is up to God to bring that person around to his senses.

Senior Minister and the Eldership (Leadership Team)

This relationship is one of the more difficult in terms of defining roles and responsibilities biblically. It is an area that can cause serious disruption and contention in churches. For the purposes of this paper we are addressing the issue of the relationship between the Senior Minister and his eldership.

The common model in our churches is that of a Senior Minister and an Eldership, often called a Leadership Team. Various churches adopt different names for these entities, but we have chosen those we perceive most commonly used and/or that seem to reflect biblical usage.

It seems interesting and perhaps important that the Bible does not speak much about Senior Ministers. It speaks frequently of elders (plural) in terms of government, whether teaching or ruling, in the church. Somewhat uncertainly it speaks on several occasions of apostles as governmental officers carrying authority (Acts 15), but much less of the four other ministry gifts of Ephesians 4.

And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the **apostles and the elders**.

Acts 15:4

Adding to this uncertainty in terms of government, the Apostle Peter refers to himself as an elder:

The elders who are among you I exhort, **I who am a fellow elder** and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed.

1 Peter 5:1

It seems commonly understood that the five ministry gifts of Ephesians 4 are set in the wider church, whilst elders seem to hold their governmental authority only in a local church. It seems it is a better approach to view the Ephesians 4 ministries as other than governmental; certainly they describe function and not necessarily governmental authority.

From that general comment we look at what the Bible says about the Senior Minister (BMi terminology for the leader of a local church), and the elders.

Senior Minister

The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: **The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches**, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.

Revelation 1:20

The 'angel of the church' may be interpreted as the senior minister, who may be seen as holding authority in that church. Apart from this reference there seems to be little in Scripture to support the idea of one man, alone, being the authority in a church (as is sometimes the case in Pentecostal churches). This seems to give little credence to the idea that the Senior minister as the vision bearer, initiator, etc. should have almost full authority in decision making.

In the Jewish system of synagogues there were rulers, but we also find there were chief rulers:

Then Crispus, the **ruler of the synagogue**, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.

Acts 18:8

This seems to indicate that Crispus was the chief ruler amongst other rulers. This aligns quite well with our general model of church government.

Elders

There seems to be a more compelling case for local church authority being in the hands of the elders:

So when they had **appointed elders in every church**, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. *Acts 14:23*

Let the **elders who rule** well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and doctrine.

1 Timothy 5:17

Plotting a course

The above points provide a basic biblical case to begin exploring church government with good biblical warrant. It seems from scripture that local church government should be in the hands of the elders. The subsidiary issue is about the Senior Minister — what is his authority and how does he fit amongst the elders?

Peter wrote to the churches advising that he was a fellow elder; he was also an apostle:

The elders who are among you I exhort, **I who am a fellow elder** and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. *1 Peter 5:1-3*

It seems there is no other *local church governmental* office in scripture than the elder. We should thus proceed with caution in creating some other entity.

BMi has used the term 'Minister' to describe credentialed leaders. BMi considers the credentialed minister (typically the Senior Minister) to be the leader of the church.

From 1 Peter 5:1 the Senior Minister could best be described as the chief elder. It seems Revelation 1:20 above gives some credence to this position.

It could well be said that the credentialed minister, by church tradition (including BMi tradition), is the stipended leader of the congregation.

We believe that scripture is deliberately rather vague on detail in this matter, because the fundamental matter for Christians is to work together in the love of God, rather than flaunting authority:

For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but **through love serve one another**. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: **'you shall love your neighbor as yourself'**. But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another! *Galatians 5:13-15*

As the Bible teaches us that we are the bride of Christ, we should relate one to another in the church in a similar manner to which we would relate as husband to wife.

Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife.

Revelation 21:9

This should help define what it means to love one another. In this relationship there is no place for biting or devouring one another. Thus God's plan would preclude a leader becoming a dictator rather than a servant of the people. So then, as the husband is the head of the wife, so too the Senior Minister is the head of the local church. He does not 'Lord it over' the other elders; nor do they 'Lord it over' him; but support and protect him as the head of the church.

Potential Problems

This is a beautiful and simple plan – the problem is that we are all in the process of sanctification and it is a lack of saintliness that causes leadership problems in the church. In biblical terms the problem is sin and selfishness.

Solutions

Appointment to the office of elder and then Senior Minister are significant enough for Paul to list requirements – which we neglect to our pain and perhaps peril:

This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop (elder), he desires a good work. A bishop then must be:

blameless,

the husband of one wife,

temperate,

sober-minded,

of good behaviour,

hospitable,

able to teach,

not given to wine,

not violent,

not greedy for money,

but gentle,

not quarrelsome,

not covetous,

one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?),

not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.

Moreover, he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

1 Timothy 3:1-7

It is for this reason BMI has developed a somewhat complex credential application form, asking many questions in a process to be undertaken for those who aspire to become a minister credentialed by BMI.

On this basis it is strongly advised that churches undertake a similar process when appointing elders. As they say in the classics, unwise appointments 'often come back to bite us'.

We have considered the formal application process but John also advises us to 'test the spirits':

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

1 John 4:1

Whilst this verse does not particularly relate to appointment of elders, it underlines a principle that we need to test the character of anyone being considered for church office. This testing is both objective and subjective. Above we considered the objective; but it is wise also to listen to the prompt of the Holy Spirit, which should be considered in the counsel of fellow elders.

Preventative measures

As church leaders are of vital importance in the success of any church, we must ensure we incorporate measures to help prevent relationship breakdowns. We will not eliminate difficulties, but we can minimise them. There are principles we can build into our churches that will enable stability, strength and effectiveness.

Team

Build a team through relationship, working together in unity for the glory of God.

Trust

Trust comes through experience and thus takes time. We need to grow in trust of our leader – that he will not abuse his authority. The leader needs to trust his elders will not attempt to undermine or override him.

Transparency

Transparency in relationship is 'what you see is what you get' (WYSIWYG). That was a revolution in computing and will be a revolution in church leadership. Transparency is dependent upon trust and a team.

Teach authority

The Senior Minister has authority from God to fulfil his role. This is why it is important that not only the leader but also the church sees that their leader is approved for that role by God (and not himself). The elders need to know they are approved by God – that is, everyone knows their authority to function is from God and will be outworked according to God's Word.

This team will give the church a chance to function in a godly manner. The effectiveness of the team will only be as good as the weakest member — because one 'difficult' member can hold the church and its ministry to ransom.

Success in fulfilling this purpose (the work of the gospel) is not the product of just one gifted person, but the sum of the whole team/church working together as one, motivated by the enduring love of Christ for His church and the people of this world.

Resolving Conflict

Commonly conflict in a leadership will relate to demarcation of authority. Final authority should rest with the leader, but the use of that authority is difficult to define as it is, in some measure, dependent on relationship between the members of the Leadership Team.

Generally, a Leadership Team should expect to make unanimous decisions. Often a matter is not pressing and time can be given for further consideration, which in practice resolves a majority of issues and allows for a unanimous decision.

On occasion a member who is not fully persuaded of a decision will allow a decision to be made, in some cases, with a minuted reservation or dissension recorded.

If a Senior Minister believes it is in the strong interest of the church and a majority of the Leadership Team, that a decision be made without unanimity, he should do so, but with the awareness that he may be creating problems for himself in the future. One aggrieved member can harbour resentment which can cause serious disruption in the church.

Even with the best processes in place we will still face challenges in authority structures. For this reason, we counsel strong and careful biblical procedure in appointing anyone to an office carrying authority. In addition, careful thought should be given to methods for the removal from office members who prove inadequate for the task.

Any Leadership Team position requires significant maturity in the faith and such positions will see maturity grow in those called to leadership. That is to say that an appointee cannot reasonably be expected to function in a mature fashion without experience in the position. Other members then should be willing to patiently nurture such new members to maturity.



APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

by a Church or Ministry

In completing this form you will note there are a significant number of questions requiring a response. As you are aware, we live in an increasingly regulated society. For Bmi to provide the protection we seek to offer and for us to be faithful to the ethical demands of Scripture, we need to know many things about you. If, however, you find some aspects difficult, we encourage you to contact the Bmi office for clarification.

DATE OF APPLICATION:

NAME OF CHURCH/MINISTRY:

POSTAL ADDRESS:

WEBSITE ADDRESS:

NAME OF ADMINISTRATIVE CONTACT:

EMAIL ADDRESS:

OFFICE PHONE:

NAME OF SENIOR PASTOR/MINISTER:

ADDRESS:

PHONE NUMBERS:

EMAIL ADDRESS:

NAME OF ASSISTANT PASTOR/MINISTER:

ADDRESS:

PHONE NUMBERS:

EMAIL ADDRESS:

CHURCH DETAILS

Address for meetings/worship services:

Times of weekly worship services:

Details of any associated ministries (e.g. opportunity shop, youth ministry):

Number of people on fellowship list:

Average weekly attendance at worship services:

Number of official members:

In the past 1-2 years, have you noticed a growth or decline in weekly attendance?

CHURCH HISTORY

1. How long has your church/ministry existed?

2. How was the church founded, and by whom?

3. Has the church been, or is it still, affiliated with any other group or denomination?

4. Please describe why your church is making this application to Bethesda Ministries International (Bmi), and what were the issues that precipitated your decision to approach Bmi?

CHURCH GOVERNANCE

1. Describe the nature and structure of your church governance:

2. How are your officials placed in position (i.e. Presbyterian, democratic, or other process)?

3. Please provide names and positions of officials:

4. Please note, you **must submit a copy** of your church/ministry constitution with this application. Do you presently have a constitution?

5. Are you unincorporated, an incorporated association, company, or other?

6. What is your Australian Business Number (ABN)?

7. Do you have a 'Matters Unresolved' clause in your Constitution? Please note that if accepted as a member church of BMi, that clause must nominate the National Leadership Team of BMi as the body having authority to resolve matters. *Refer to the Model Constitution in the BMi Minister's Manual.*

8. Has your church initiated police checks—or your state/territory equivalent—on workers and volunteers? Please briefly describe the process.

CHURCH PROPERTY

1. Does your church/ministry own property? If so, please describe location, nature of buildings, size, etc. Is it owned freehold or do you have a mortgage? If renting property, please describe the location, details, costs, etc.

2. If renting, are you endeavouring to raise finance to purchase a church property? If so, describe how you are progressing with this project.

CHURCH FINANCES

1. Describe how you maintain financial records:

2. Please provide the name and address of your external auditor:

3. Are audited annual financial reports made available to church members? If there is no formal membership, how do congregants participate?

4. What financial safeguards are in place? Please note that we strongly recommend that paid ministry staff not be involved directly with finances.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that all of the information contained within this application is correct according to the best of my knowledge, and I have authority to act on behalf of my church/ministry group.

SIGNED:

DATE:

NAME:

Thank you for your application for membership of Bethesda Ministries International. Please remit the form to:

Bethesda Ministries International
200 Florey Drive
Charnwood ACT 2615

FAX: (02) 6259 3945

PHONE: (02) 6112 8527

EMAIL: info@bmi.org.au

OFFICE USE ONLY

Application received [date]:

Responsible NLT Member:

Approved/Not Approved for interim membership/credential on [date]:

Approved/Not Approved for Full Credential/Membership on [date]:

By

[on behalf of BMi National Leadership Team]



APPLICATION FOR CREDENTIAL

(Minister or Ministry Worker)

In completing this form you will note there are a significant number of questions requiring a response. As you are aware, we live in an increasingly regulated society. For Bmi to provide the protection we seek to offer and for us to be faithful to the ethical demands of Scripture, we need to know many things about you. If, however, you find some aspects difficult, we encourage you to contact the Bmi office for clarification.

Please type or print legibly. If there is insufficient space, please write your answer on a separate sheet indicating the question number answered and attach to this application.

DATE OF APPLICATION:

FULL NAME OF APPLICANT:

SURNAME

CHRISTIAN NAMES

RESIDENTIAL ADDRESS:

POSTAL ADDRESS (if different from above):

PHONE NUMBERS: HOME

OFFICE

MOBILE

FAX

EMAIL ADDRESS:

DATE OF BIRTH:

NATIONALITY:

TYPE OF CREDENTIAL (please tick): SENIOR MINISTER MINISTER

SPECIALIST MINISTER IN THE FIELD OF:

Please attach current
photograph here

APPLICANT DETAILS

1. Are you married? Yes No

If 'yes', when were you married?

Christian name of spouse (if applicable):

2. Have you ever been divorced? Yes No

If 'yes', when were you divorced?

3. Has your spouse been divorced? Yes No

If 'yes', when was he/she divorced?

4. Have you and your spouse ever been separated since conversion? Yes No

If 'yes', when and why?

5. Is your spouse in full support of this application? Yes No

6. If you have children, please record their names and dates of birth:

Name D.O.B.

Name D.O.B.

Name D.O.B.

Name D.O.B.

7. Are you satisfied with the Christian growth and development of your family? Please explain.

CHRISTIAN LIFE PARTICULARS

1. Are you a member of a local church in Australia? Yes No

If 'yes', which congregation?

When did you join this congregation?

2. In what year were you saved? In what year was your spouse saved?

3. Have you been baptized in water? Yes No Your spouse: Yes No

4. Have you and your spouse received the baptism in the Holy Spirit evidenced with 'speaking in tongues'?

Yourself: Yes No Your spouse: Yes No

GENERAL PARTICULARS

1. What is your present means of support and financial situation?

2. List your trade or profession and/or business:

3. Indicate levels of education (please list the institutions):

PRIMARY:

SECONDARY:

TERTIARY:

THEOLOGICAL:

OTHER:

5. Have you carefully read the Policy Documents of BMi? Yes No

6. Have you read the Statement of Belief of BMi? Yes No

7. Do you have any doctrines or beliefs which conflict with the Statement of Belief of BMi?
Yes No (If 'yes', please state your beliefs on a separate sheet.)

8. Will you accept the oversight of the National Leadership Team of BMi and abide by its decisions? Yes No

9. Do you wish to be considered for a marriage celebrant's license at this time? Yes No

10. Please include the names, addresses, email addresses and phone numbers of two referees.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that all of the information contained within this application is correct according to the best of my knowledge.

SIGNED:

DATE:

NAME:

Thank you for your application for a credential within Bethesda Ministries International.
Please remit the form, **along with supporting documentation**, to:

Bethesda Ministries International
200 Florey Drive
Charnwood ACT 2615

FAX: (02) 6259 3945

PHONE: (02) 6112 8527

EMAIL: info@bmi.org.au

OFFICE USE ONLY

Application received [date]:

Responsible NLT Member:

Approved/Not Approved for interim membership/credential on [date]:

Approved/Not Approved for Full Credential/Membership on [date]:

By

[on behalf of BMi National Leadership Team]

This is the recommended procedure when conducting an Ordination to the BMi ministry.

Ordination to the ministry is a most significant occasion, both spiritually and administratively, for a new BMi minister and this service is generally conducted by a member of the NLT.

Where a couple is to be ordained the pronouns used below will need to be changed.

Prayer

Almighty God and loving Father in our Lord Jesus Christ, we offer You thanksgiving and praise for having revealed to us the good news of Christ Jesus, Your Son. When we were dead in our sins He died our death and paid the price for our transgressions. On the third day He rose from the grave that we, by the power of His Holy Spirit, might be participants in His eternal life.

We thank you too that at His ascension, Jesus Christ gave ministry gifts to His Church, amongst which is that of pastor. To this end we thank you for who has consented before You, the eldership of this church and the leadership of BMi to accept the responsibility and sacrifice which accompanies the role of pastor. We present him before You this day in the fervent expectation that you will bless and anoint him for the most solemn and onerous duties of pastoring Your church here on earth.

We set him aside today to serve You in faith and humility, to shepherd Your saints in love and wisdom and to steward Your Word, the resources of this Church and their lives in all prudence and faithfulness.

Lord, Scripture tells us that those who enter into the task of preaching Your word are the more answerable before You and will be held to account for the instruction that they give. It is for this reason that those who labour in the Word are said to be worthy of double honour. Therefore O Lord not only do we pray that You will grant wisdom and insight in their preaching and in their times of counsel, we also pray that Your Spirit will flow so that his ministry is conducted with all joy and in expectation, not only of reward to come, but of fruitfulness in his life today. May he see Your grace, sovereignty and power manifest in their lives as will bless the lives of those whom You grant him to care for.

Charge

..... as a fellow servant of our Lord Jesus Christ, I charge you, dear brother:

- to preach the Word, whether convenient or not, as will encourage, correct and rebuke, doing so with great patience and careful instruction,
- to preach not only for the sake of those who know Christ but to do the work of an evangelist, reaching out to those whose lives, but for the fruitfulness of your ministry, would be set for a Christless eternity.

I charge you:

- to keep your head in all situations, enduring hardships, discharging all the duties of your ministry, with encouragement and good counsel as befits an elder of Christ's church; not forgetting to speak the truth in love since admonition and correction are at times amongst those responsibilities which will now fall to you, and
- to do your best to present yourselves to God as ones approved; workmen who do not need to be ashamed, correctly handling the Word of truth, not lording it over those entrusted to you but setting an example for believers and all men in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.

..... do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, but take your share of suffering for the sake of the gospel, by the power of God who saved us and called us with a holy calling. And when the Chief Shepherd appears you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

Lastly I charge you to pray continually for the church.

Vows

..... would you come and stand with me as I present the vows of office for your response?

As I conclude each vow I would ask for your response:

By the grace of God, with all my heart, I do.

To express your acceptance of the office of Minister in Bethesda Ministries International, please stand here in the presence of God and this congregation and answer the following questions:

1. Do you believe you are being called by God Himself to serve in this holy office of minister in New Covenant Church under the auspices of BMi?
By the grace of God, with all my heart, I do.
2. Do you believe the Bible is the Word of God and accept the statement of faith of BMi?
By the grace of God, with all my heart, I do.
3. Do you promise to defend and proclaim this Word of God and reject all contrary teachings that contradict God's Word?
By the grace of God, with all my heart, I do.
4. Do you promise to carry out the work of the ministry faithfully, to love the church and its members, to live a life worthy of your calling and in submission to the government of this church and BMi?
By the grace of God, with all my heart, I do.

Lord, You promised that where two or more are gathered in Your Name, that You too would be in the midst. We petition You therefore, to witness to Your call upon the life of by the release of Your Holy Spirit for the duties of ministry. Anoint him for the tasks with which he has been charged and sustain him in the promises which he has made.

Grant nothing less than on that last day when he must give an account of his life and ministry, that he will have earned the accolade: 'Well done good and faithful servant.'

Charge upon the Congregation

Since the ministry of pastor is Christ's gift to His Church, it is appropriate that those who are members of this assembly,, should acknowledge their part in the exercise of Christ's gift amongst them. It is a salutary truth that the anointing of God on a pastorate is determined not only by the heart of the pastor but by the hearts and cooperation of those who are in his care. Therefore, I call upon the members of this church to prayerfully indicate their love for, acceptance of, and submission to their new pastor.

Will you all please stand and those who are members of affirm their commitment to at the end of the following with the words:

By the grace of God we do.

I would ask Ps if he would join me in setting before the people of this assembly and asking their support for their new pastor (to be used where a second or subsequent pastor is to be ordained).

People of God, members of this church:

- Do you receive this servant of Your Lord and Redeemer as being from His Hand and called by Him?
By the grace of God, we do.
- Do you promise to receive the Scriptures from his lips in love and obedience and to remember him in your prayers and encourage him in his work and care for you?
By the grace of God, we do.
- Do you promise to work together with him as he, in unity with the authority structures of this church make known the love and power of the gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ?
By the grace of God, we do.

Final Exhortation

Given that all ministry involves teamwork and is an expression of Christian unity, we ought conclude with Paul's instruction from the book of Romans which was written for the benefit of both Jew and Gentile that they should learn to be of one heart and one purpose.

To and to the people of this church:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Rom 12:1-5 ESV

Service for the induction of a new church into BMi

Opening prayer

Almighty God, we give thanks for the grace and love, forgiveness and life which has been extended to us by the death and resurrection of your Son, our saviour, Jesus Christ. We acknowledge that our confidence in this truth comes to us from Scripture and from the faithful ministry of the Holy Spirit, without whom no person can truly know or love Christ.

We give thanks too that it is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to place persons within the Body of Christ, according to both their needs and their abilities as He sees fit; and to place Churches within the Body in the same way. Therefore Father, having prayerfully waited upon the leading of the Holy Spirit, and having given careful consideration to your calling and purpose for this church as well as to the articles of membership for Bethesda Ministries International, we the leadership of BMi and the eldership of this [Insert Name] church believe that it is your will that there be a formal bond of love and commitment between us beyond that which characterises all persons and churches in Christ's Body.

Accordingly we come to you today to seek your blessing and the seal of your anointing on this church's membership of BMi. Be gracious, Lord, to hear and heed our prayers today.

Charge to the eldership

Pastors and elders please stand:

The ministration of God's Word, the care of His saints and the loving discipline of His Church are onerous and sacred responsibilities. Have you read the Articles of Association as relate to this church's membership with Bethesda Ministries and are you content that it seems good to the Holy Spirit and to you that this church should be received as a member of BMi?

By the grace of God, we do.

In particular, do you affirm a commitment to the Statement of Faith within those Articles?

By the grace of God, we do.

Do you affirm that the hallmarks of a Godly church are the preaching of God's Word, the administration of Christ's ordinances of Baptism and Communion and the conduct of loving discipline? And do you commit yourselves to humbly and cooperatively ensure that these matters are undertaken in good order according to the rules and practices of this church?

By the grace of God, we do so affirm and commit.

Are you content to avail yourselves of the fellowship, prayers, guidance and resources of BMi, its leaders and the leaders of its member churches?

By the grace of God, we are.

Are you content to participate in the life, ministry and decision making of BMI and thereby render in like form the fellowship, prayers, guidance and resources of this church, as the Lord leads?

By the grace of God, we will.

Prayer for Unity & Blessing

Therefore as a member of BMI National Leadership Team and as delegate for all the churches within BMI, I pray:

- that the God of all endurance and encouragement will grant you to live in harmony with one another and in accord with Christ Jesus that together you and we may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 15:5–6)
- that our God may make you worthy of His calling and fulfil every desire for good works and every work of faith by His power so that the name of Jesus Christ will be glorified in you and you in Him (1 Thess 1:11–12)
- that Jesus Christ, according to riches of His glory, will grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may lead, protect and serve His church (Eph 3:16 & 21).

To Him be glory in the church, both now and forever more. Amen.

Charge to the elders

All who have been called to leadership within the Body of Christ are called to a task of eternal significance and of great reward. Whilst the rewards are great, so too are the challenges. Therefore in Christ's Name I charge you:

- to keep your head in all situations, enduring hardships, discharging all the duties of your ministry, with encouragement and good counsel as befits a leader of Christ's church; not forgetting to speak the truth in love since admonition and correction are at times amongst those responsibilities which fall to a leader
- to do your best to present yourselves to God as ones approved; workmen who do not need to be ashamed, correctly handling the Word of truth, not lording it over those entrusted to you but setting an example for believers and all men in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity
- to remember we who are in leadership, committing yourselves to pray for us that God would grant us the wisdom and love required for our responsibilities as leaders to the movement in general and to this church in particular.

Charge to Church Members

All who have been baptised and have faith in Christ are called to study the Word, pray faithfully and regularly, and participate in the life of the Christ's church. Furthermore every Christian is called to share with others by word and example the love of Christ, the good news of His atoning sacrifice and the hope of eternal life in Him. I invite all of you to commit yourselves anew to this calling.

In the strength of the Holy Spirit, we will gladly do so.

Closing Exhortation

A service such as this has a sense of a new beginning. When a church makes a commitment as significant as is being made today, there can be a tendency to think that we have undertaken a matter of great relevance to God's eternal purposes. Indeed we trust that this will truly be the case. But it serves us well to remember that we are not the first to form an allegiance of faith, nor will we be the last.

Perhaps therefore we should take a moment to stand and assume our place as part of the Church universal by reciting a creed for which devout men suffered, in order that the truths of the Gospel would be preserved. The year is 325AD. The place is Nicea, Turkey. The cost is the disfavour of the Emperor Constantine and forced exile. At stake are the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation.

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
The only Son of God,
Begotten of the Father before all ages,
God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,
begotten, not made;
of the same essence as the Father.
Through Him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
He came down from heaven;
He became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and was made human.
He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;
He suffered and was buried.
The third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.
His kingdom will never end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord the giver of life.
He proceeds from the Father and the Son,
and with the Father and the Son He is to be worshipped and glorified.
He spoke through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.
We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look forward to the resurrection of the dead, and to life in the world to come.

Amen.

New Minister appointments

Suggested invitation letter to call a minister

We, the undersigned members of the Eldership/Leadership Team of Church, in conjunction with Bethesda Ministries International, invite, call and entreat you to undertake the office of minister amongst us in the promotion of our spiritual welfare.

We undertake to contribute to your fitting maintenance as God may prosper us.

This call is duly attested by:

.....

For the Eldership/Leadership Team

..... Church

Date:

Suggested terms of contract form

From Church

To Minister

Terms of contract

Remuneration type	Stipend
Taxable component	\$ pa
Non-taxable component	\$ pa which includes house rent; utilities; travel expenses; professional expenses; children's education, etc. (see BMi Ministers Manual section 3.8 for further information) (The non-taxable component is best made available through a church account operated by the minister. All transactions must be recorded and available for audit as necessary.)
Total agreed minimum remuneration	\$ pa
Annual leave weeks pa
PD and study leave weeks pa
Superannuation provision % of remuneration
Sickness leave days pa

Job description

The minister will be expected to:

1. occupy the pulpit for Sunday services (the church leadership can vary this requirement upon request, e.g. 'apart from holidays and for visiting ministries and local ministry')
2. provide pastoral care for church attendees
3. oversee the church's teaching program
4. chair the church's Eldership/Leadership Team
5. to provide a godly example, together with their family, of the Christian life.

Finalisation

The terms of contract can only be finalised by:

1. approval in writing of the Eldership/Leadership Team of Church and
2. approval in writing of the BMi NLT.