



27 March 2013

Dear Marriage Celebrants,

**Re: Baptist Marriage Rites**

I write this letter in response to some recently received enquiries seeking clarity around the nature of Baptist Marriage Rites.

In an endeavour to empower those registered to minister on behalf of the Baptist Union of Victoria in performing marriage ceremonies, I wish to provide some relevant information on the current requirements of the Commonwealth Marriage Act, and Australian Baptist Marriage Rites.

In 2004 the Australian Commonwealth Marriage Act (1961) clarified what had not previously been defined in the Act, by providing a definition: "Marriage means the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life."

Australian Baptist Marriage Rites are consistent with the Commonwealth Marriage Act.

The Australian Baptist Ministries National Council in November 2011 adopted a resolution 11030 (attached) which specifies that The Baptist Union of Australia defines marriage as being the union between a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life.

The Baptist Union of Australia is the recognised religious denomination for all Baptist Union Ministers of Religion registered as Authorised Celebrants, including those registered through the Baptist Union of Victoria. As a consequence registered Ministers of Religion are required to conduct ceremonies in accordance with both the Commonwealth Marriage Act and regulations, and the Marriage Rites of the Baptist Union of Australia.

Can I highlight along with this regulatory framework that as Baptists, we believe in freedom of conscience under the direction of the Holy Spirit. We also value the autonomy of the local church.

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As followers of Jesus, we are part of a Kingdom for all – a great reversal of the world's value system. This understanding of the Kingdom of God needs to inform our approach to mission and relationships, including how we deal with questions and concerns around marriage.

With a mandate from Jesus to be people of hospitality, we encourage churches to be compassionate, respectful, honest in conversation, and welcoming in practice, so that Victorian Baptist Churches are places of love, welcome and inclusion.

Thank you for the leadership role you play as a person empowered with the responsibility to perform marriage ceremonies. The BUV wants to support you in this ministry and to help equip you to advance the Kingdom of God in your local setting.

Please feel free to contact me or others at the BUV office at any time, and I'm hopeful the information provided here provides a timely clarification.

With my regards,

**Rev. Daniel Bullock**  
Director of Mission & Ministries

\*attachment: ABM Marriage Rites