

Discontinuation of the Affiliated Churches Program 46/19 Fellowship with Anglicans outside the Diocese

(A report of the Standing Committee.)

Key Points

- The Affiliated Churches Program (the **Program**) was established by ordinance in 2005, to provide a mechanism whereby the Diocese could provide some basic services and support to independent churches outside the Diocese who sought affiliation. This has been a means of supporting gospel ministry around Australia. The Diocese is currently affiliated with 13 such independent churches.
- Since the commencement of the Program in 2005, the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (**FIEC**) has grown in strength and number. The FIEC, by its very nature, is well suited to provide much of the support and services to its members and has grown in recognition, which has removed much of the need for the Affiliate Program.
- A recent review undertaken by the Standing Committee found that many of the intended benefits of the Program are not actually taken up by the Affiliates, and the few services which are utilised by the Affiliates could be provided by virtue of a services arrangement directly with Sydney Diocesan Services (**SDS**).
- The Standing Committee has written directly to each Affiliate to foreshadow the possibility of discontinuing the Program and seeking comment. Feedback provided by the Affiliates indicated agreement and acceptance that the time had come to discontinue the program, and generally expressed their appreciation for the Program in its time and the desire to continue in fellowship with the Diocese.
- Standing Committee intends to discontinue the Program in 2024, while providing continued access for those independent churches who wish to access advice from SDS and the Office of the Director of Safe Ministry.

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to advise the Synod of the Standing Committee's intention to discontinue the operation of the *Affiliated Churches Ordinance 2005* (**the Ordinance**).

Recommendations

2. Synod receive this report.
3. Synod, noting the report 'Discontinuation of the Affiliated Churches Program', note that following discussion with and support from current Affiliated Churches, the Standing Committee intends to discontinue the Affiliated Churches Program in 2024.

Background

4. By Resolution 46/19, the Synod, among other things, requested the Standing Committee to review the operation of the *Affiliated Churches Ordinance 2005* and bring a report to the next session of Synod with any recommendations for amendment.
5. The Affiliated Churches Program (the **Program**) was established in 2005 by the *Affiliated Churches Ordinance 2005* to enable non-Anglican churches outside the Diocese to become affiliated with the Diocese and as a consequence to access benefits of affiliation, principally in the form of services not otherwise readily available to independent churches in Australia.

6. The Program has been a means for the Diocese to support gospel ministry around Australia. The Diocese is currently affiliated with 13 independent churches (**Affiliates**), and at its peak the Diocese was affiliated with 14 independent churches (one church closed and the affiliation agreement ended).

Discussion

Benefits of the Program

7. The Ordinance lists ten benefits available to churches that affiliate with the Diocese under the Ordinance. Briefly, these are –
- (i) membership of the Superannuation fund,
 - (ii) Long Service Leave continuity of service,
 - (iii) insurance cover as part of insurance cover obtained by the ACPT,
 - (iv) access to administrative, secretarial and accountancy services,
 - (v) participation in the sickness and accident fund,
 - (vi) participation in Sydney's Stipend continuance insurance,
 - (vii) participation in the Clergy Removals fund,
 - (viii) ability to take out loans from Sydney Anglican Loans,
 - (ix) expressing publicly their affiliation with the Diocese,
 - (x) access to advice from the Office of the Director of Safe Ministry (**ODSM**), and some element of participation on ODSM processes if required.
8. In practice, the thirteen Affiliates have only taken up benefits related to membership of the superannuation fund (i), accountancy advice (iv) and access to advice from the ODSM (x); as well as informal legal advice (not specifically provided for) and the benefit of credibility gained through a public expression of their affiliation (ix). Each of these benefits are able to be provided to independent churches without the formal Affiliation Program.

Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches

9. While the scope of benefits taken up by Affiliates has been limited, it has also become apparent that the need for benefits under the Program have reduced over time. A key consideration is the increasing capability and recognition of the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (**FIEC**). FIEC has grown significantly since the commencement of the Program in 2005, and is well-suited to provide support and services to its members. Most notably, the FIEC is now sufficiently well-known and regarded that Affiliates generally rely upon membership of FIEC, rather than Affiliation with Sydney, to establish 'credibility' as a Bible-based ministry. These factors have removed much of the need for the Affiliate Program.

Continued partnership in the Gospel

10. Affiliates frequently specify partnership, expressed by prayer and encouragement, as one of the more important benefits of Affiliation. This partnership is valued by the Diocese and intended to continue; but is not reliant upon the Ordinance and formal Affiliation under the Program.

Obligations resulting from the Program

11. The Program brings with it an obligation upon each Affiliate to provide annual returns, containing financial and ministry information, analysis and comment. These ongoing requirements are necessary as long as a formal affiliation continues; but are an unnecessary distraction for the Affiliates and the Diocese, given the benefits used and valued by Affiliates may be provided without formal Affiliation.

Consultation with Affiliates

12. The Standing Committee wrote directly to each Affiliate in June 2023, foreshadowing the possibility of discontinuing the Program and inviting comment. Feedback provided by the Affiliates indicated agreement and acceptance that the time had come to discontinue the program, and generally expressed their appreciation for the Program in its time and the desire to continue in fellowship with the Diocese. We received responses from 11 of the 13 Affiliates. Following are three comments typical of those received –

“Thank you so much for your past affiliation with [our church]. Thanks for the helpful information and fellowship. We agree to thankfully, wind up our affiliation with you, given where the FIEC is now and greatly appreciate our past affiliation.”

“We want to first acknowledge our gratitude to the Sydney Diocese for their support of independent churches like ours when FIEC was smaller. As FIEC has grown, so has their ability to provide advice and resources. Although we have rarely sought advice from Sydney Diocesan Services, their advice has been invaluable, and knowing we can access this advice/help has been a great comfort to us, so having access to these services would be beneficial into the future.”

“I concur with your sentiments. Over the years we had need to seek help from the Sydney Diocese and each time we have received that help. I suspect being an affiliated member did not matter. Your Gospel generosity is obvious. Into the future, informal Gospel partnership rather than formal affiliation makes sense. Please pass on our gratitude. Sydney Anglicans continue to be a great example of Gospel generosity.”

Discontinuation of the Program

13. Standing Committee intends to discontinue the Program in 2024, while providing continued access for those independent churches who wish to access advice from Sydney Diocesan Services and the Office of the Director of Safe Ministry.

For and on behalf of the Standing Committee.

BRIONY BOUNDS
Diocesan Secretary

14 August 2023