Queensland Baptists Administrative Services - Factsheet

How to fill in your 2018

ACNC Annual Information Statement

The Annual Information Statement for those churches whose financial year ended on 30th June last year would normally be due for submission to Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission (ACNC) at 31st December. This year, the pressure is not on because of the launch of the new ACNC Web Site. In the announcement of this change on 19th October last year, the Commissioner of ACNC advised that the due date for AIS's would be extended to 31st March 2019. It is an extremely complex on-line form to complete so if well prepared, it will take you around 30 minutes to do but could take longer if the site is busy.

Fundamentally, the AIS is very similar to last year's submission, in keeping with ACNC's stated objective to keep some consistency in the process. But the new web site means that virtually everything looks and responds differently! Thankfully, it also runs a lot faster – so this process is far less time consuming than it has been in the past. The biggest change with the new web site is that you need to have your own login, not login using the ABN of the church.

As you complete the process, I don't think it is a great idea to put your Annual Report on the charity portal. By doing so, you are making it a public document. Most church Annual Reports are internal documents containing lots of personal information and references that are not suited to publication on-line. Another section asks if you are incorporated or fundraising. The guide below explains how to answer these questions (it may not be obvious!) but I think it is a good thing to answer this section. One area of under-achievement by ACNC to date has been their attempts to eliminate "red tape" between government departments. These questions are a good start to prioritising the resolution of this issue. We unfortunately will not get much benefit out of this in the short term – but longer term I would hope these steps would lead to everyone categorising an organisation as "charitable" based on ACNC.

So here it is then – step by step all you need to know about the Annual Information Statement this year.

Logging In:

Go to the ACNC web page: https://www.acnc.gov.au/ If you don't have a password to log in, you need to establish this first. I dealt with this process in a little more detail in Network 341. You will not be able to get into the Charity Portal until you do this. To begin, click on the "Charity Portal log in" button, and then select "Sign up now" at the bottom of the login box. This will step you through the process. Once you have a login, please log in. Then the magic happens… or not. In my case "not", but I might have been unlucky. What is supposed to happen is that at the bottom of the screen, you should not have a heading "Charities", and your church ought to be automatically listed. If you have multiple charities you are responsible for, they should all be there. For me – they were missing, and I had to ring the Help Desk to get reconnected. Anyway – let's assume you are set up, you can log in, and you can see your church.

Stage 2: Doing your AIS:

Using the new web site makes a huge difference to your AIS experience! It will be noticeably quicker, and there is a lot more interactive validation built in. For example, each time you enter an email, phone number, or street address, you run a validation on your information to ensure it is accurate. This is particularly

interesting with addresses… as you will see as you are going through.

Click on your church's name (in the list from above), and then click on the icon for "Submit the 2018 AIS". Don't accidentally pick 2017 (not sure why that is there… but it doesn't mean you haven't done it)!

There is a screen of information about the process. At the bottom right, click on "Next". This step takes a little while. For one AIS we did, we then got an error message, but when we tried again using Firefox browser instead of Explorer, we could continue. If you get an error at this stage, please call the ACNC Help Desk (13 2262) who will get you sorted out.

It displays your churches name and that you are doing an AIS Submission. Click Start. It then takes you through a series of 18 questions across several pages. Click Next to move between each page. Each question is explained briefly below.

1. Confirm the church's name.

2. Contact details. Insert its email and physical address (it does not prompt with these). These are the first validation fields you have encountered… with the email, after you have entered click on the search button to validate. With the address, type the street address into the one field, and it will attempt to match your entry from a drop-down list. Pick the address, and it will automatically populate all the following fields.

3. (check) Leave as default…

4. Indicate your charity size – small, medium or large. You can determine this from your turnover… <$250,000 is small, and over $1,000,000 is large.

5. Are you an incorporated association? Most churches are unincorporated, so answer "no". Some are incorporated by Letters Patent, so still answer "no".

6. Do you fundraise? Answer "no". This definition of fundraising is if you are a registered fundraiser asking the public for donations. A church taking up an offering is exempt.

7. Are you a religious charity? For most churches, the answer to questions (a) through to (e) will be "no" in each case, and the system will then declare you are a religious charity. I would imagine very few churches would have to answer "yes" to any of the questions.

8. Who is the primary contact? This is your personal contact information. Again, validate your email and phone number.

9. Responsible People? This is a list of who are your Responsible People. This is generally speaking the church board/council/deacons or whatever leadership you have. If any names are missing, you can add them in here, as well as remove any who are no longer in those positions. When you have made all the changes, click on the "confirm" check box and move on.

10. Did you operate in 2018? Answer "yes".

11. Main activities? In part (a) of this, select "Religious Activities" from the pull-down list. In part (b), you don't need to do anything! But if you feel like mentioning up to three other activities, you may.

12. How do you do this? You might want to put in a long and complicated answer to this, but I suggest you keep it simple… something like "conducted regular church services and other religious activities including acts of kindness and mercy in the community as a part of those religious activities."

13. Where? Like many of these questions, last year these

were pre-filled, but this year you need to do them from scratch. You need to tick the box for Queensland, and you may need to tick another state or "overseas" if you are directly supporting any charitable activity in an overseas country (that is – not through a formal mission organisation). You then need to list the countries you are helping. If you are supporting works through a mission, ask that mission whether they are a "prescribed organisation". If they are – you don't need to list anything, if not – you need to again list the countries where support is being provided. For example, both GiA and BWA are both prescribed organisations and so if you are sending your support overseas through them, you do not need to indicate this to the ACNC.

I was a bit nervous about that question when it first appeared 5 years ago, because I thought it may get used against a church under the now-defunct "In Australia" legislation. That threat is gone, but it would now appear we may face a new challenge in the future, as we may be required to verify any money we are sending overseas is being used for its proper purpose. There is no problem for this year, but I remain extremely nervous about how this data is going to be used, and therefore strongly encourage you only to report those countries where you directly send money without any agency involvement.

14. Will you change? I suggest you answer "no". Of course some things will differ next year to this year, but that will show up in due course when you fill in the 2019 AIS.

15. Beneficiaries? To keep it simple, I suggest you pick "General Community in Australia".

16. Attach your annual report? I suggest you don't bother. A church's annual report is generally intended to be an inward facing document for the benefit of members, not an outward facing document for potential givers. As such, I don't see any benefit of providing the report.

17. How many employees? Firstly record how many full time, part time and casual employees. Then, you need to work out the number of full-time equivalent employees. There is a calculator built in, but you can probably do this for yourself. If you have 3 full-time and 2 staff half-time, then the answer will be 4.

18. How many volunteers? We would encourage you to capture everyone who volunteers to do anything around the church. If that sounds like a lot of work, I suggest put in the number of members – who are hopefully all doing something around the place. A healthy number here is helpful.

You are nearly done. But it then asks you to check if your constitution is up to date, and if your "religious" subtype is correct. Then, you need to make a declaration that the information you have entered is accurate (again entering your name, email and phone), and click on "submit".

(Note that at the time I did the research into this issue – the ACNC web site had a technical fault which meant that the viewer of your AIS return was not available. This meant you could not do an on-screen preview or get a copy afterwards of what you had submitted. I assume this is only a short-term issue…)

And… then log out. You are done for another year.

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