

# How to Research, Write and Publish your Church's Story

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An attractive well-presented history can effectively convey the testimony of your church as it has witnessed to the gospel message, seen lives transformed and contributed positively to your local community. A jubilee or other anniversary is a good occasion on which to publish a history. There are many options for publishing a church history today, but it takes time, effort and careful thought to produce a top class result. It is also important to allow plenty of time to research, write and produce the history – several months will be needed.

Here are some guidelines on how to achieve a good outcome! (See the BHQ website for our Guide Sheets which will give some additional assistance <http://dparker.net.au/barc.htm#Documents> This Guide can be adapted for a family history too!

## Background

### Sources of information

Locate and prepare your material. Make sure you have all the relevant records of your church, going back to the beginning of its life – and even its prehistory, showing the desire in the minds of those who started it to plant a church in your area. Find out about their background, goals and spiritual purpose.

*See our BHQ Guide Sheets for further assistance: Church Archives Register; Managing Church Records; How to set up and manage digital archives; What records should a church keep.*

Talk to your church leaders and administrators about access to these records. If you find that there are gaps in the records, try to locate the missing items or at least use other sources to fill in the details.

Consult other sources for information such as the Baptist Union office, Baptist Church Archives Qld, people currently and formerly connected with the church (especially former ministers and church officers), newspapers (especially <http://trove.nla.gov.au/> for newspapers generally up to 1954), local family history society libraries, council and state libraries etc.

### General Background

Gather information about the history and development of the area in which your church is located (and take account of any re-locations!) and the community in which it operates. Consult local libraries, tourist information centres, local and family history groups and museums, newspapers, museums and government sources to get an overall historical and cultural picture of the area. The aim is to show how your church fits into its local scene, what needs it has met and what contribution it has made.

## Planning the type of history production

Decide on the type of history you want to produce and how it will appear – perhaps a traditional hard-covered, well illustrated history or alternatively a small, low budget story, or one with lots of colourful pictures and diagrams produced by an on-demand printing service. You could have a digital version on a DVD or on-line with many photographs as a companion publication. A video or power-point version could also be produced to present during celebrations marking the publishing of the history. Make sure you know who has the final say in deciding the nature and form of the production.

Decide on page size, font style and size, number of pages, how many illustrations, and other graphical aspects of the book and/or digital work. Decide whether the book will use colour or be only black and white. Also decide on the type of binding – stapled, perfect, traditional binding, plastic/wire spiral etc.

Get estimates of the costs and a time-line for production. Be sure that you understand exactly what the printer's quote covers, especially the expiry date of the quote, and the time to be taken in producing copies after the final go-ahead is given by you. Clarify the costing and conditions of any extra copies you may require to be printed after the initial batch (Consider whether it is more economical to have these produced in the initial run, even though you may have some left over.)

Enlist people to assist in the various phases of the project (writers, graphic artists, web-producers etc)

Discuss the costs and other features of the project with your church leaders and interested people to produce a working proposal that will achieve the aim and also be a practical possibility. This plan can be adapted as needed, but it provides an effective program for the work and sets some limits on the costing and timing.

As part of the preparation of this working proposal, clarify all aspects of the printing and production process to ensure that you have a clear idea what is involved, the type of material you need to prepare and the schedule you need to follow to ensure a successful outcome in accordance with your time schedule.

Develop plans or work cooperatively with others for the celebrations and events that will accompany the publication of the history. Be sure that you harmonise plans so that all comes to fruition in a timely manner.

## Production

For books, decide whether you will have the work done by a *commercial printing company* or if it will be produced *in-house*, or perhaps a combination of the two. A printing company with suitable expertise may be able to do the entire job converting your text and original photographs (paper and digital) into the final product. This will obviously cost more than other options.

You will also need to check carefully at every point in the process to ensure that the job is as exactly you wish (eg do you want the printer to decide on the layout of pages, choice of fonts, colours etc, or do you want to specify these? Whichever the case, be clear about the choice and follow it through rigorously with the printer)

Alternatively you can produce '*camera ready*' copy, usually in the form of a PDF file, which is printed by the commercial firm. You do the entire layout from your text and prepare and place all the photographs and other art work.

Note that the initial text is best prepared using a standard word processor, and images can be edited on graphics software. However, word processors are not suitable at all for layout involving images, text boxes and other graphics; for anything more than straight text, choose instead a desk-top publishing app which will facilitate the placement of items and the design of the pages. Microsoft Publisher is simple but effective.

Be careful in choosing a commercial printer. Not all of them are experienced or oriented towards producing small run low budget books of this kind – they may be not much more than photocopy shops focused on office supply needs or they may be big or highly specialised publishers accustomed to much more complex and sophisticated work than your project.

*On-line on-demand printing* is another option. You prepare the work as '*camera ready*' copy and upload it to the on-line provider, which then arranges for printing in the format you nominate – normal hard copy (sometimes with a choice of bindings), or e-book (choice of formats). You have the opportunity to buy copies (sometimes at '*author prices*') and you have a link to the book on the provider's website which you can advertise for sales. This is usually a very economical option; in particular, it allows you to print only the exact number of copies you require, and to print more later '*on demand*.'

Another feature of the on-line option is to employ the provider's editorial and graphics services to convert your raw text and images into a professionally executed product. There is of course extra cost for this service. Ordering and printing are the same as for the DIY version.

## ***Financing your publication***

Sometimes community grants are available for this kind of work, or you may find a donor/s who is prepared to underwrite the cost. If the work is of strong appeal to the community and very well done, it is possible that the regular bookstores (or specialist local history outlets) would be interested in carrying your book on their shelves. The same applies to selling through on-line providers and their marketing arms. Advertising in a book of this kind is not advisable, although it will be necessary to carry appropriate acknowledgements if a donor or grants are involved.

So the cost will usually have to be budgeted by the church. Prepare a budget early in the process which is realistically related to the nature of the project and resources available. Be careful to include all necessary expenses including graphic design, software purchases, editorial and copy editing expenses etc. If the budget is well constructed, you will not have to '*economise*' on various points in the process and thereby prejudice the quality of the outcome.

It may be possible to recoup some of the cost by selling copies on a commercial or charitable fund raising basis, but you need to decide whether such a procedure is appropriate for a project of this kind.

## ***Style – additional notes***

It is important to make a decision at an early stage about the style of the history. It could be a traditional chronological treatment of the development of the church, starting with its origins, the people involved, programs and property, and working through all of the developments since. It may be convenient to arrange the story around successive ministers and property developments. Alternatively, the story could focus on individual people and their involvement in the church – some effective histories feature the memories of key players and ordinary participants although to be properly meaningful, contributions of this type need to be provided with the framework of the organisation history of the church.

If you choose a more impressionistic style, note that it would be highly desirable to write a detailed factual history of the church as well, which would be placed on file for the record. This type of history can be in succinct style and should take care to include all relevant facts about people, programs and property which may be useful for later reference. Producing such a basic history means that the valuable information discovered during the process is not lost and would not have to be re-done at some later date (perhaps when some of the vital records have been lost).

It is also advantageous to produce a standard chronological history in printed form but to use a more personal style for additional media version such as DVD, Powerpoint and on-line.

Photographs and other illustrations will be a vital part of the history, especially for the more impressionistic personal styles. Use as many photos as possible, making sure that they are of good quality and adequately identified. Also ensure that correct permissions are obtained for any photograph, illustration or graphic used in the history. Make sure that any borrowed items are handled carefully, acknowledged properly and returned promptly to their owners.

## ***Writing the history***

### **Draft text**

Begin working through all of the source material and write an initial draft of the text. Make it a flowing narrative with human interest, not just a chronicle of unconnected events, or worse still, just a dot-point summary of the church minutes or other sources. Try to show why the various events, developments and ministry initiatives occurred in the way and at the time they did.

Be careful to give a good balance to the story, covering as much of the overall life of the church as possible, including work amongst women, men, youth and others. Take account of all the main developments (new buildings, expansion of program, additions staff, ancillary activities such as schools, op shops etc) and significant special events (evangelistic missions, special outreaches and community service). Include key figures (such as ministers, deacons, departmental leaders) but try also to cover the contributions of members and other participants. Include material about people from the church who have entered the ministry, become missionaries and have carried out important work in the community.

Do not cover up the negatives and disappointments in the life of the church, but do not use a 'warts and all' approach which could be offensive; take a subtle or indirect approach, and also explain why and how church recovered from these set-backs.

Use full names and correct titles. Avoid privacy issues. Make sure your grammar, punctuation, capitalisation, abbreviations and spelling are all perfect. (If in doubt, have it read by a copy editor and proof reader.)

Be fully consistent with formatting of text (fonts for text including emphasis, chapter headings and sub-headings (use Word style for consistency), and photograph captions; alignment of text – whether left aligned or fully justified (like this Guide Sheet), and size of margins. To acknowledge sources of quotations and information, use either academic-style footnotes or an informal approach (e.g. a list of specific acknowledgements at the end of the book)

Divide the story into suitable chapters and have additional sections at the end to include lists of key dates (first services, constitution, opening of buildings etc), people (ministers and officers and their dates of office) and key events.

## **Photographs and Illustrations**

Select photographs and illustrations to ensure as wide a coverage as possible, including suitable illustrations for the cover and for promotional purposes. Clear, close up and uncluttered pictures showing people, important buildings and key events are the best. Consider also other illustrations such as reproductions of commemorative brochures, lists of foundation members, church plans and maps.

Prepare the photographs so that they are cropped effectively and are neither too dark or washed out; do not use poor quality photos or those whose subjects are hard to recognize. Identify people, places and events, and indicate the relevant dates.

When placing the photographs in the book, make sure they are large enough and appear well on the page. Place a thin border around each illustration. Decide whether to place them in the text at appropriate points or collect them together on special 'photo pages'. (The latter procedure may enable you to reproduce them on higher quality paper and in colour for better effect.) Consider getting professional help from a graphic artist to design an attractive cover.

## **Final working draft**

Prepare a final working draft of the production on the final page size and fonts, and with all photographs. Make sure there is a proper title page, list of contents and, if it is a larger book, an index. It may also be helpful to have an introduction and preface. Ensure that all help received is fully acknowledged. The back cover can include author information including a photo and some brief idea of the contents and significance of the book. (See how good books from prominent publishers are set up with these features and follow their example.)

Check this draft against the original plan for size, cost and timing, making any necessary adjustments.

Consult interested people and the church leadership for advice on this version. Then taking into account comments, finalise the draft, double checking all facts, coverage, illustrations etc. Check to see that the production time-line and budget considerations are met.

Send the final work to the printer and check the product carefully before taking final delivery. (Once you take delivery, the printer will usually not accept responsibility for any errors or problems.)

If preparing multiple productions (eg, a book plus DVD and on-line versions) repeat the above processes with all the different media.

If publishing a traditional book, make arrangements for an ISBN to be obtained ([https://www.myidentifiers.com.au/isbn/US\\_isbn\\_agency](https://www.myidentifiers.com.au/isbn/US_isbn_agency)) and for legal deposit copies (<https://www.nla.gov.au/legal-deposit/what-is-legal-deposit> - note provisions for material other than traditional books) to be forwarded to relevant authorities. As well as abiding by legal requirements, these measures will also ensure that your book is publicised more widely which means your effort in preparing the history is maximised.

Also include the Baptist Church Archives and Baptist college libraries and local council and school libraries in the distribution.

## **Finalising**

Assemble all of the source material, identify it fully, and place it in approved storage for future reference. (See our Guide Sheet: *Managing Church Records*)

Prepare a promotional campaign covering the church, denomination and community to draw attention to the book.

Launch the history in conjunction with celebrations marking the event in the life of the church.