

## Religious right roadmap to Liberal Party control revealed as internal ructions over church groups increase

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Peter Killin was a Liberal Party candidate in the 2019 federal election. *(Supplied: Liberal Party)*

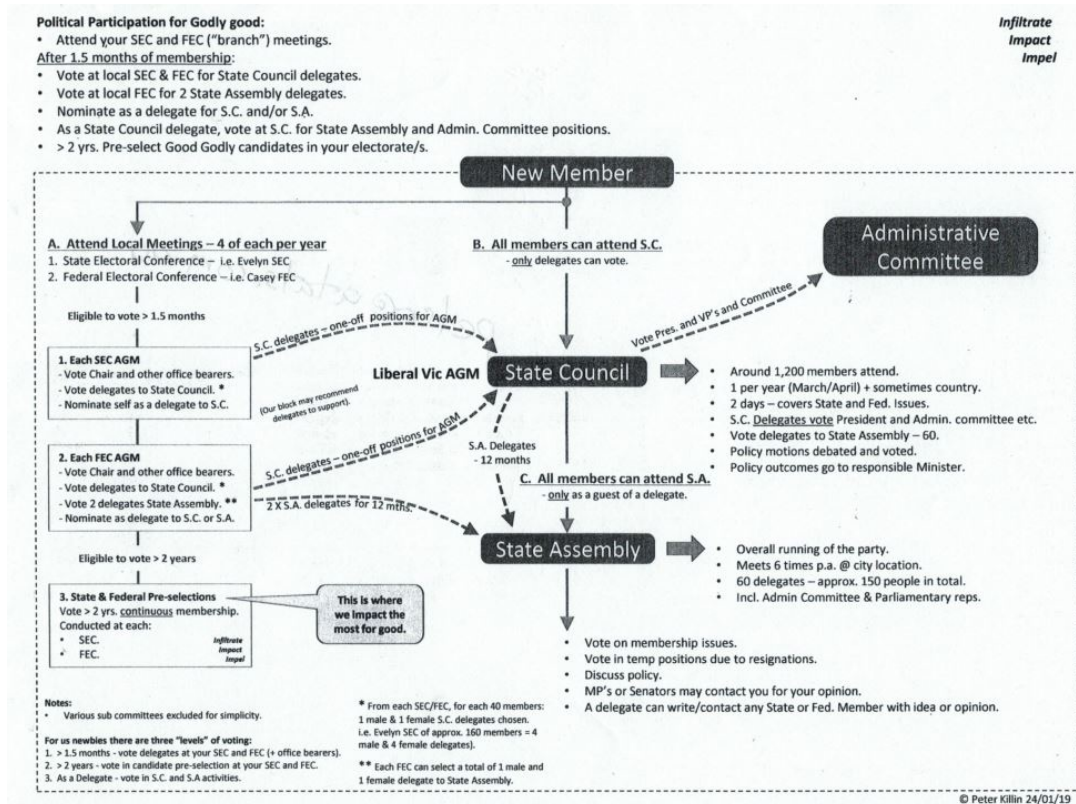
A roadmap outlining how the religious right can "infiltrate" the Liberal Party with "Good Godly" candidates has been linked to a controversial former Liberal candidate and current member of the party's state assembly in Victoria.

[Peter Killin made headlines in 2019](#) as the former Liberal candidate for the federal seat of Wills and was forced to resign over comments he made about homosexuality.

In a submission to the former federal government's 2018 inquiry into religious freedom, Mr Killin endorsed the views of Presbyterian pastor Campbell Markham, who wrote in 2011 that the "homosexual lifestyle" was "distressingly dangerous" and had "appalling health risks".

Mr Killin also decried the election of "homosexual MP" Tim Wilson.

The roadmap, a version of which has been circulating online and on Twitter without attribution, [shows a comprehensive strategy](#) to gain control of Liberal Party branches and influence the choice of candidates.



The roadmap shows a strategy to gain control of Liberal Party branches. (Supplied)

Mr Killin's name is listed on the bottom right corner of the document, with a date of January 24, 2019.

A handwritten private email address linked to Mr Killin's business is also inscribed on the back of it.

The ABC has contacted Mr Killin multiple times but he has not responded to written questions about the leaflet or denied authoring it or being involved with it.

Despite his ousting as a candidate in 2019, in August Mr Killin was elected to the party's internal state assembly, which influences the overall running of the party.

Liberal Party state director Sam McQuestin said the document was not a Liberal Party document.

## Number of religious conservative candidates grows

In other cases there has been growing unrest inside Victorian Liberal Party ranks over the party's connection to some church groups from the religious right.

In September, an [ABC Regional Investigation revealed concerns](#) from members in Gippsland that local branches were being stacked with members from Pentecostal groups, including the Sale-based City Builders church, to influence preselections.

The party's Upper House candidate for Eastern Victoria, Renee Heath, is an active member of the church where her father, pastor Brian Heath, has preached against abortion and same-sex marriage.

She is also a shareholder in a church enterprise.

Pastor Heath, a former Family First candidate, has called on his congregation to "produce the next generation of godly leadership" and is currently vice-president of the Liberal Party's Morwell state electorate conference branch.



Renee Heath with her father, Sale-based pastor and church head Brian Heath. *(Supplied)*

Ms Heath has not answered questions from the ABC about her stance on abortion, same-sex marriage or assisted dying laws, but has publicly affirmed her belief in the separation of church and state.

She has declined repeated requests for an interview but said in a previous statement, "I am not my father. To suggest that I am is offensive, as it belittles me."

## **'Nation builders alliance'**

Internal concerns have been raised by other Liberal Party members that some church groups are using the party as a vehicle for their own ideology elsewhere in the state and consolidating their power through affiliations.

Pastor Seyi Oluwasola, from the Pentecostal City of Refuge church in Keilor Lodge, in north-western Melbourne, has given guest sermons at the City Builders church.



Pastor Seyi Oluwasola campaigning against same sex marriage in 2017. (Supplied: Facebook)

Facebook videos show him joining Liberal Party members during campaign efforts in the seat of Fraser — based around Melbourne's inner west — in the lead-up to the federal election.

In a YouTube sermon from March, Mr Oluwasola boasted that within a few years of joining he had become the chairman of the Fraser federal electorate conference branch.

"God has brought us to the table," he told his congregation.

"And what we have done is that we've encouraged members of our church to also be part of what we are doing there."

In his sermon, Mr Oluwasola described Mr Heath as "a very good friend" and "covenant partner".

"The reason why God connected us," he said, was to connect him to the "ruling party".

"And I joined the Liberal Party."

Mr Oluwasola and Mr Heath are both directors in a company called Nation Builders Alliance, along with Heidi McIvor, a City Builders pastor who was a face of the "no" to same-sex marriage campaign.

The ABC understands it was set up as a political lobby group akin to Advance Australia to advocate a conservative agenda in politics.



Seyi and Mope Oluwasola are pastors at the Pentecostal City of Refuge Church in Melbourne. *(Supplied)*

Mr Heath and Mr Oluwasola have both been linked to the ISAAC network (International Strategic Alliance of Apostolic Churches), which follows the doctrine of Malaysian pastor Jonathan David.

The doctrine appears to be consistent with the 'seven mountains dominionism' belief that church members should be advancing their religion through business and politics.

Mr David's website states, "We will use churches with an apostolic mentality to co-ordinate the region for a divine attack on the nation.

"We are currently building apostolic bases in many nations for an end-time launching into the harvest."

Mr Oluwasola, his wife and daughter now make up three of the four delegate positions representing the Fraser federal electorate conference at the Liberal Party's internal state council.

A party member told the ABC that existing party members from the Fraser electorate had opted to join neighbouring electorate branches instead, and that half the attendees at the 2022 Fraser conference annual general meeting were from the pastor's family.

Mr Oluwasola was contacted for comment but declined an interview.





Pastor Jonathan David formulated the doctrine followed by an international network of churches. (Supplied: Facebook)

## Lifelong member ousted

Fred Ackerman has been a lifelong member of the Liberal Party and has traditionally aligned himself with conservative centre-right politics.

Before his resignation from the party earlier this year, he helped with the Liberal campaign for the seat of Fraser, alongside Mr Oluwasola.

He said it was not healthy for members of one family to "dominate" a local party branch, but declining membership in the party had made it possible for the influence of church groups to grow.

He thinks there should be a range of views in the party.

"They've put their hands up and they've been elected, and that's democratic," he said.

"However, [federal electorate conferences] for seats like Fraser are very small, probably around 50 members — there's probably only 10 or a dozen who are active.

"And the size allows domination, I suppose.

"Because it is on such a small scale, the party does leave itself open to dominance by a particular person, group, family in this instance."

Mr Ackerman lost Liberal Party preselection to [controversial candidate Moira Deeming](#) for the Victorian Upper House ticket for the Western Metro region this year, and said her views on abortion and gender were "so extreme that they are not palatable".

He is now running as an independent for the Upper House.

## Strategy 'quite successful'

Mr Ackerman said he had observed the membership of the Liberal party change over time.

"If you can recruit people of like mind into your conservative group within the Liberal Party, you can then become quite strong and very influential, obviously, through preselections," he said.

"In terms of results, if you look across the recent preselections, that has been quite successful."

Mr Ackerman said it was being done with full knowledge of party authorities.

"Certainly there are people in executive positions and so on, within the party, who have supported that, no doubt about that," Mr Ackerman said.

Ms Deeming, who replaced Mr Ackerman on the ticket, said in an email:

"If you can give me a good explanation about why the so-called 'religious right' is out of line with the Liberal Party constitution, I'd definitely consider talking to you.

"I have been slandered relentlessly by people claiming to be journalists and am in the process of putting together legal proceedings against them.

"I hope that your article doesn't end up being of the same calibre.

"I find the term 'religious right' offensive; it does not apply to me. I am a proud First Nations Māori woman."

Liberal Party headquarters did not respond to questions about Mr Ackerman's allegations.



Ann-Marie Hermans, Renee Heath, federal Liberal MP Zoe McKenzie and Briony Hutton.  
(Supplied: Facebook)

## 'Progressive' legislation under threat

Liberal Party sources claim there is a growing number of religious right candidates and MPs including Ms Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Cynthia Watson, Nicole Werner and Briony Hutton.

All were contacted for comment but declined to or did not respond. The ABC does not know their stance on abortion or euthanasia laws in Victoria.

Reason party MP Fiona Patten said there was a real chance these candidates could influence settled legislation on key issues.

"We are expecting to see Labor numbers diminish in the Upper House, where we know that a number of the safe Liberal seats in the Upper House will be now held by very religious conservative MPs," she said.

"And the crossbench could actually be largely conservative as well.

"So this will mean that progressive legislation that we need in this state, that is reflective of the community in this state, will not get through the Upper House, it will be blocked.

"I can't imagine how we would have dealt with that if we were debating assisted dying next term, or if we were debating something like abortion rights next term.



"I suspect we will be debating them, but in fact to look at winding them back.

"And this is a huge concern to me. And I think it should be of huge concern to the community."



Churchgoers pray with Pastor Brian Heath at the City Builders church in Sale. (Supplied)

Ms Patten took issue with what she saw as an over-representation of religious conservatism in the Liberal Party more broadly.

"We are seeing an inordinate number of elected MPs, particularly in the Liberal Party, who come from Pentecostal backgrounds, who come from Mormon backgrounds, who come from very conservative religious backgrounds," she said.

"And that is not reflective of where the community stands.

"Those organisations represent a very small percentage of Victorians and Australians, yet they are remarkably, I would say, over represented in Liberal Party preselection."