

Church Rules



Godmanchester Baptist Church

Introduction

This document is to be read in conjunction with the CIO Constitution of the Church (registered charity number 1188171). It is intended to add detail to the policies and procedures in the Constitution, outlining how they are implemented in current practice. The Constitution has been written with guidance from the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Anthony Collins Solicitors and is accepted by the Charity Commission. It is a generic document which can apply to many different Baptist Churches. The Church Rules allow us to tailor the Constitution to our own history and current identity as a Church. They are presented in accordance with Clause 29 of the Constitution.

The section headings refer to the equivalent section in the CIO Constitution, but entries are not required for every section. The authority of the Constitution will always supersede that of the Church Rules, and nothing herein should be in conflict with the Constitution.

Name (section 1)

There has existed since 1845 a body of Christian believers in Godmanchester under the names of Duck End Chapel, Union Chapel and Silver Street Baptist Church, now known as Godmanchester Baptist Church (hereinafter called 'the Church'). It shall consist of Christian believers who have become Church members in the manner set out in the Constitution and those who regularly attend.

Beliefs (section 4)

In addition to the Baptist Union's Declaration of Principle, the Church has adopted a Covenant which sets out both the historic beliefs of the Church and the responsibilities of membership.

Each year, at a suitable opportunity, those present will renew their commitment to the fellowship by reading the Church Covenant together. Those who are unable to attend on that occasion will be given a letter enclosing a copy of the Covenant for them to sign.

It is recognised that sometimes members may pass through a crisis of faith or for other reasons may not conscientiously feel able to commit themselves to fulfil the responsibilities of membership. Such persons will be treated with pastoral sensitivity.

However, anyone who does not return the signed Covenant within the following year will normally be considered for review by the Church Members' Meeting as per Clause 12.5.2.

In line with clauses 12.5.2 and 12.4.2 of the CIO Constitution the list of current members will be reviewed at least once every three years by the Church Members' Meeting which may resolve to make any appropriate deletions.

Admission of new members and eligibility (section 12.1)

Section 12.1.2 says

Persons seeking membership who have not been baptised in the manner described in the Baptist Union's Declaration of Principle (i.e. as believers by immersion) may at the discretion of the Church Members' Meeting be accepted for full membership based on their own public profession of faith.

The discretion of the Church Members' Meeting is to be understood as follows: -

Christians shall have been baptised before being received into membership, normally as believers, by immersion. Affusion will be considered as being equivalent to immersion in cases of medical imperative, at the discretion of the Leadership Team.

All applicants who have been baptised but not as believers by immersion, shall be clearly presented with the teaching on believers' baptism. Those accepted into membership without having been baptised as believers by immersion shall be welcomed into the Church and be allowed to serve within the fellowship. However, they must accept that believers' baptism by immersion will be freely taught and practised.

Admission procedure (section 12.2)

To become a member the applicant shall first obtain copies of the Church Constitution, Church Rules and the Covenant from the Church Secretary. The following steps will then apply in this order;

1. Acceptance of the Constitution, Church Rules and the Covenant.
2. Being interviewed by two Church members appointed by the Leadership Team.
3. A report shall then be given to the next Church Members' Meeting and the application voted upon.
4. People accepted as members shall be welcomed and prayed for at the earliest suitable opportunity.

In exceptional circumstances and with good reason, the Leadership Team shall be able to stop an application before it comes to the Church Meeting if the applicant is clearly unsuitable.

If a membership application is refused, either before coming to the Church Meeting or by not achieving a majority vote at the Church Meeting, the applicant shall be informed within 21 days and shall have the right to appeal to the Leadership Team for the application to be reconsidered. The Leadership Team may

- reverse their original decision and allow a vote at a Church Meeting, with or without a positive recommendation from visitors
- resubmit the application to the Church Meeting with new information or extenuating circumstances for a second vote
- confirm the original decision as to the unsuitability of the applicant

The result of the appeal shall be communicated to the applicant within 21 days of the decision but shall be delivered with pastoral concern and guidance on changes which the applicant could make which might result in a further application being considered.

If individuals who have moved to the Church wish to transfer their membership from their previous Church, the Church Secretary will write to the previous Church for a letter of commendation. The normal process outlined above will still take place.

All members are expected to fully participate in the life of the Church as outlined in the Constitution (section 12.3) and the Covenant.

Termination of Membership (section 12.4)

In addition to termination of membership by death, transfer, resignation in writing or decision of the Church Meeting, a member may be considered to have voluntarily resigned their membership if they do not return a signed copy of the Church Covenant and do not engage with pastoral approaches to discuss their situation. The Leadership Team will consider such removals with pastoral sensitivity prior to recommending removal to the Church Meeting according to 12.4.2.

In cases where members cannot fulfil all of the responsibilities of membership due to serving in Mission elsewhere in the world, or due to incapacity after years of active membership, such members will be moved onto a Friends of GBC list where they are still entitled to receive updates from the Church but are not entitled to vote.

Church Members' Meetings (section 13)

General provisions

All business shall be treated as private and confidential, and members are urged to use the utmost discretion when discussing church affairs with non-members. The chair's guidance shall be accepted concerning issues of particular sensitivity and his/her ruling on procedure shall be final. The Quorum for any Church Meeting will be 25% of the Membership or 10 members whichever is the greater.

Any Church member who wishes to raise an agenda item at a Church Members' Meeting shall give notice of the nature of the item to the Chair, in writing, at least 2 weeks before the date of the Meeting.

Any proposition which arises without prior notice during a meeting may be postponed until a subsequent meeting if such a wish is expressed by the Chair or by a majority of members present.

Draft minutes from any constituted Church Members' Meeting will be produced and circulated within 7 days of the meeting and agreed at the following meeting.

Each member agrees to conduct themselves with integrity and honesty, they agree to listen to each other and respect other members at all times.

Annual General Meeting

An Annual Church Members' Meeting (Clause 13.1.2) shall normally be held in March or as soon as practical thereafter. Written reports of ministry activities for the previous year shall be received, the goals and aims of the whole Church reviewed and its ministry activities for the future outlined. The Meeting will receive and consider the accounts for the financial year and reports of the charity trustees and independent examiners. Looking forward the independent examiner for the coming year will be appointed and any remuneration agreed.

Single-Purpose Ordinary Church Members' Meetings

At the discretion of the Leadership Team, and with the appropriate notice, an Ordinary Members' Meeting may be convened at the end of a Service of Worship for the purpose of a discussion pertinent to members and non-members alike. If a decision is necessary, then the normal quorum guidelines apply.

Charity Trustees (section 14)

The Leadership Team shall function as the Trustees of the Church and individually and corporately shall fulfil the requirements relating to Trustees of the Charities Act 2011 (or any statutory re-enactment or modification of that provision). (Clause 14.1.3)

The Leadership Team shall consist of those whose leadership abilities have been recognized by the Church members and who have been appointed by the Church Members' Meeting. The Team will include those appointed as Ministers as well as those appointed from within the Membership.

Qualifications

In addition to the legal requirements of qualifying to be a trustee, Leadership Team members (equivalent to New Testament 'Elders') shall be appointed primarily on the basis of Christian character and lifestyle (1 Timothy 3:2-7). In terms of gifts, they shall have varied contributions, but all shall be able to teach (1 Timothy 3:2), although not necessarily in the context of the whole congregation. They shall be Church members who are not recent converts (1 Timothy 3:6). They shall have:

- a) been baptised by immersion as believers, or
- b) been baptised by affusion as a believer where there was a medical imperative, and at the discretion of the Leadership Team, or
- c) made a formal public confession of faith as a believer in a different Christian tradition.

As described in Clause 14.3.8, a majority of the Leadership Team (and all Ministers) will have been baptised according to a) or b) above.

Roles

In addition to the provisions of Clause 14.2, Leadership Team members are to be examples of Christian living and ministry to the whole church. Together they will be responsible for:

- a) The spiritual direction of the Church.
- b) Worship and prayer.
- c) Discipleship (doctrinal teaching and pastoral care).
- d) Outreach.
- e) Overseeing the administration of the church, which provides the resources for the functions listed above.

Within this corporate sense of ministry and responsibility, Leadership Team members may have a particular brief for a specific area of church life.

Appointment

The number of Leadership Team members shall be determined with reference to the character, gifts and availability of individuals, together with the ministry needs of the fellowship.

In the case of Church Leaders (other than Ministers) being appointed from within the Membership, the process shall be one of recognition of gifts already being used.

From time to time the Leadership Team will announce that there will be an opportunity to elect or re-elect Leaders. Church members will be informed not less than 5 Sundays before an election of the number of vacancies. The Leadership Team will be looking out for suitable potential members, but any Church member may suggest someone, in writing supported by two other members and with the knowledge of the individual being nominated, to the Leadership Team.

Nominations will close 3 Sundays prior to the meeting and be announced 2 Sundays before the elections by suitable means of communication and will include any existing Leaders who are standing for re-election who will have been subject to the nomination process in Clause 14.7.

It will be normal practice for profiles of the nominated people to be distributed to members during this period, and for the names of the nominees to be announced each week.

During the meeting that the election will take place members will be given a voting slip to choose Yes or No for each nominee. A member may only vote once. To be a valid election, at least 25% of the Membership shall have returned a voting slip. For the appointment to be made, at least 75% of those votes must be in favour.

There will be no provision for postal voting as it is our desire that the Membership meet and discern the mind of Christ together.

The calling of a Trustee is contingent upon their acceptance of the Constitution, Church Rules and Covenant. No person shall be entitled to act as a Church Leader whether on a first or subsequent entry into office until after signing a declaration of eligibility, acceptance and of willingness to act in the trusts of the Church (based on the Charity Commission's Declaration of Eligibility and the HMRC Fit and Proper Persons Declaration).

Ministers (section 16)

When a Minister / Pastor is to be appointed, usually from outside the Fellowship, there will be opportunities for the whole Fellowship to meet the candidate and observe them leading a service or meeting appropriate to the post. Then a formal nomination will be brought by the Leadership Team to a Special Church Members' Meeting at which the nominee will be discussed.

Clause 16.9 states an invitation to take up the post may be issued as long as at least 25% of the membership shall have returned a voting slip and at least 75% of votes are in favour. However, the Leadership Team and a prospective minister would be looking for a high percentage of positives from a large majority of the members to respectively issue and accept a call and presence at that meeting is essential wherever possible.

Such a Minister shall automatically become a Church member on appointment. (Clause 16.1). Any other members of the Minister's immediate family would be asked to apply for membership through the normal route.

Ministers will be members of the Leadership Team for as long as they hold that post, (Clause 14.3.6) except whilst suspended from duty as a result of disciplinary procedures.

The calling of a Minister is contingent upon their acceptance of the Constitution, Church Rules and Covenant. No person shall be entitled to act as a Minister until after signing a declaration of eligibility, acceptance and of willingness to act in the trusts of the Church (based on the Charity Commission's Declaration of Eligibility and the HMRC Fit and Proper Persons Declaration).

Removal of Ministers

Any Minister shall be considered for removal from office if he or she:

- a) Is disqualified from acting as a member of the Executive Committee of a Charity by virtue of sections 178-184 of the Charities Act 2011 (or any statutory re-enactment or modification of that provision); (Clause 18.2.6)
- b) Becomes incapable by reason of mental disorder, illness or injury of managing and administering their own affairs; (Clause 18.2.4)
- c) Is absent without the permission of the Leadership Team from all their meetings held within a period of six months and the Leadership Team resolve that his or her office be vacated; (Clause 18.2.2)
- d) Ceases to believe in or adhere to the Statement of Beliefs set out in the Church Covenant; (Clause 18.3)

In cases where any of a) to d) applies to a Minister, the process will follow the Grievance Procedures for Baptist Ministers and the Ministerial Recognition Rules of the Baptist Union, mediated by a Regional Minister and subject to relevant employment legislation. If this process fails to resolve the issues, the Minister may be removed from office by a vote at a Special Church Members' Meeting, chaired by a Regional Minister, at which there is a quorum of 25% of the Membership and 75% of those present vote in favour of removal. The Minister will have the right to address the meeting before a vote is taken. (Clause 16.12)

Removal of Charity Trustees (except Ministers)

In cases where any of a) to d) above applies to a Charity Trustee who is not a Minister, the Trustee may be recommended for removal if the Leadership Team, at a meeting at which the majority of members are present, decides by clear majority for a good and sufficient reason that the trustee should not continue to hold office, provided that he or she shall be given 21 days' notice of the proposal to remove him or her and shall have the right to be heard by the rest of the Leadership Team before any vote is taken.

If the proposal to remove the trustee is carried, the matter will be put to a Special Church Members' Meeting, the trustee will have the right to address the meeting as outlined in Clause 18.3.2 before a vote is taken. The final decision rests with the Church Members' Meeting. (Clause 18.3)

Meetings and Proceedings of Charity Trustees (section 22)

The Leadership Team will normally meet together at least eleven times per year, notwithstanding the provision of Clause 22.1 of meeting not less than once every 2 months. A Special Meeting may be called at any time by the Chair or by any trustee upon not less than 4 days' notice being given to other trustees of the matters to be discussed. (Clause 22.2.1)

The Senior Minister shall have the right to act as chair of the Leadership Team meetings but may choose to delegate that role to another trustee. If so delegated, the Senior Minister may, at their own discretion, resume the chair at any point during the meeting. In the absence of the Senior Minister, the trustees present will choose one of their number or an external moderator to be chair before any business is transacted. (Clause 22.5)

Accounts (section 28)

The funds of the Church, including all donations, contributions and bequests, shall be paid into accounts operated by the Leadership Team in the name of the Church at such institutions as the Leadership Team shall from time to time decide. All cheques and electronic transactions drawn on the accounts must be signed /authorised by two of the signatories chosen from the Leadership Team or individuals appointed for that specific purpose and in accordance with the Church's Financial Rules document.

The funds belonging to the Church shall be applied only in furthering the charitable purposes and in accordance with the powers set out in this Constitution.

Sacraments

The **baptism** of Christian believers by immersion (or affusion in cases of medical imperative at the discretion of the Leadership Team) shall be administered as required. Believers may be accepted for baptism, whether or not they also seek Church membership.

The **Lord's Supper** will be observed regularly and at least monthly. All who know and love the Lord Jesus will be invited to participate.

A **Marriage service** is normally conducted by a Minister of Godmanchester Baptist Church, having consideration for legal requirements, the status of the individuals and advice from the Baptist Union. It is expected that the Minister will discuss the request with the Leadership Team before agreeing to conduct the ceremony, whether in the Church building or elsewhere. Where there is a desire to have another individual conduct the marriage service (or part of) this will be in consultation with the Minister and the Leadership Team.

Prayer for healing and anointing of the sick will be regularly offered at services but may be requested of the trustees (James 5:14) by any member of the congregation or wider community.

Church Activities

All activities or events taking place on the premises do so at the discretion of the Leadership Team and subject to any conditions they may impose, in accordance with the Lettings Policy. Requests for the use of the premises shall be made to the individual responsible for bookings, who will refer to the Leadership Team where necessary. Charges may be made.

Leaders of certain Church-wide ministries, activities and Small Groups are to be Church members gifted to fulfil the specific role to which they are appointed. They shall be people who display a consistent Christian walk (1 Timothy 3:8-13).

The number and specific roles of these leaders will vary, depending on the needs of the fellowship and the availability of individuals with suitable gifting. They shall normally seek to include and draw on the gifts of others in furtherance of the role allocated by the Leadership Team.

Such activity leaders will be appointed by the Leadership Team to fulfil a particular leadership role. The appointment is without a time limit. They may cease to hold office by resignation or by resolution of the Leadership Team. Details of new appointments will be conveyed to the Church fellowship by a suitable means of communication. A list of all activity leaders will be made available.

Additional core staff members

In addition to Ministers (see 16 above), further salaried staff may be appointed as appropriate. Core staff may be appointed by an 75% vote at an ordinary Church Members' Meeting.

At the discretion of the Leadership Team, ancillary staff may be appointed directly by the Leadership Team.

Staff working specifically for a self-financing community project, may be appointed by the committee responsible for that project, subject to ratification by the Leadership Team.

Amendment of the Church Rules (section 31)

Amendment to these rules may be made at any Church Members' Meeting by simple majority. Proposed amendments will normally be recommended by the Leadership Team, but suggestions from members will be discussed by Leadership Team in the first instance and may be brought to the Church Members' Meeting with or without recommendation of acceptance.

Approved by Leadership Team 22 July 2019

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