

Takeley Congregational Church Handbook

Part 1: Principles for Charity Purposes

1. Introduction

- 1.1. We are Takeley Congregational Church meeting in Takeley Chapel at Brewers End.
- 1.2. Matters of membership and church governance are decided by every member voting in a Church Meeting.
- 1.3. Persons become members by profession of faith in Jesus as Lord and acceptance by the Church Meeting.
- 1.4. The Church is independent.

2. Basis of Faith

- 2.1. We acknowledge God to be our Father and Jesus Christ His Son to be our Saviour and the Holy Spirit to be our Guide, and commit ourselves to live together as a company of Christ's people.
- 2.2. We seek to fulfil the Word of God, in bearing one another's burdens and sharing one another's joys, in welcoming the stranger and befriending the poor and lonely, in caring for the young and building up our families as part of the great family of God.
- 2.3. We promise to endeavour by prayer, personal service and conscientious giving, to proclaim the Kingdom of God at home and abroad, and to fulfil His will in all human relationships in which we have a part, whether social, economic or international.
- 2.4. We intend that our church should seek by God's grace fellowship with churches of other denominations, especially those of our neighbourhood working and praying together with them for the spiritual unity of Christ's church in the world.
- 2.5. Finally: We commit ourselves to the whole Church of Christ on earth and commit ourselves to the Word of God our Father, in the knowledge that He will not leave us or forsake us, and that at the last all those who accept Christ as Saviour will be gathered together in Him our Redeemer

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3. Teachings and Practices

3.1. The emphasis in our teaching.

- a. There is one God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who alone is good and who is steadfast, gracious and compassionate.
- b. We uphold the dignity of all people, made in God's image, each created to love, be holy, be chaste and care for creation.
- c. All people sin and fall short of the glory of God.
- d. There is one Lord, Jesus Christ, who though fully God, took our human nature and was fully man, died for us on the cross and rose again. Christ will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.
- e. Through the work of the cross, we are redeemed from sin, justified by faith alone and reconciled to God.
- f. Jesus Christ exercises his authority in the church by the Holy Spirit and through the Christian Bible.
- g. There is forgiveness of sins through the work of the cross, there is resurrection of the body, and there is life everlasting.

3.2. Our practices include meeting together, baptism, table fellowship and the Church Meeting.

3.2.1. In meeting together, we aim to praise and worship God, hear God's word, receive his gifts and build the church up, encouraging the practice of regular prayer, study of the Christian Bible and cheerful giving. We think it is important to listen to one another and that the meeting is a safe place to explore our faith and be heard.

3.2.2. In the case of baptism the church respects varying viewpoints, while actively encouraging believers baptism and thanksgiving for all children.

3.2.3. When we eat together, all are welcome. In this we imitate Jesus who welcomed all to the table. In breaking bread we remember Jesus' body broken for us on the cross and in pouring out wine and sharing it, we remember Jesus' blood poured out for us so that our sins are forgiven. We approach the table in humility and thankfulness. We proclaim the mystery of the cross, that while we were still sinners Christ died for us, Christ is risen and Christ will come again.

3.2.4. Members voting means that, in a properly called and ordered Church Meeting, every member is able to contribute and vote on the matters being discussed. All matters to do with the governance and direction of the church are put before the Church Meeting.

3.3. Our being together as a church

3.3.1. We aim to meet each week on a Sunday and sometimes during the week.

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3.3.2. We reverence life, especially when babies are born and when people pass away and support all people and families at these times through events that celebrate life.

3.3.3. We believe that marriage between a man and a woman reflects the created order and is an image of the relationship between Christ and the church and to be honoured.

3.3.4. We organise ourselves to serve our communities and may do this through events that reach out to our communities with the message of Jesus.

3.4. Our congregational distinctive

3.4.1. Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church Universal, which is his Body, and of each local church.

3.4.2. Each local church is in itself a complete church, therefore autonomous, possessing all the rights and responsibilities of the Church by the Holy Spirit as set forth in the Scriptures.

3.4.3. Jesus Christ exercises his authority in each local church by the Holy Spirit and through the Scriptures.

3.4.4. Each local church, through its Church Meeting, is answerable only to Jesus Christ, and not to any association, conference, council, synod, or any other ecclesiastical body.

3.4.5. It is proper and beneficial for each local church to seek fellowship and counsel of other churches that are like-minded in the Lord.

3.4.6. Local churches have a responsibility to love and respect one another in the Lord and to show concern for one another's welfare.

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Part 2: Provisions for the Internal Governance of the Church

4. The Church Structure

4.1. Members and Membership

Persons wishing to become members of the Church by profession of faith and who have attended meetings of the Church for more than 6 months, will be seen by a Minister, or, if this is not possible, by a Church member appointed by the Church Leaders or by the Church Meeting, who, if satisfied with their reasons for desiring to join the Church, will, in conjunction with the Church Leaders, nominate them as candidates at a Church Meeting.

Members of Takeley Congregational Church are formally members of Takeley Congregational Church Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). This does not constitute any additional or legal financial risk in UK law, but is simply the technical and legal framework in which most UK churches operate in the legal jurisdiction of the UK. The sister document to this handbook is the CIO constitution and all members and potential members are given access to this electronically or on paper if they express a preference.

4.2. The Church Meeting

The Church Meeting is the Church assembled in order that the Spirit of Christ may direct its members in all things touching the Work of God, and is the representative gathering of the Church members for worship and fellowship, for matters pertaining to Church membership, for the reception of reports of Church and other organisations, and for discussion and decision concerning matters pertaining to the service of Christ. The provisions for Church Meetings are set out in the Constitution under the Clauses headed "Members' decisions" and "General meetings of members". A "general meeting of members" under the Constitution is referred to as a "Church Meeting" in this Church Handbook.

4.3. Minister (s)

A Minister is called by the Church to be a leader and guide in spiritual things and to exercise the pastoral ministry and the role of Elder as defined in the Christian Bible. A Minister is required to consider all the Church's work and to carry out its decisions and is a Charity Trustee.

4.4. Church Leaders

A Church Leader is called by the Church for a purpose and to exercise the role of Deacon as defined in the Christian Bible and, with the Minister(s), a religious leader of the Church and required to consider all the Church's work and to carry out its decisions and is a Charity Trustee.

4.5. Church Trustees

A Church Trustee is appointed by the church to be a Charity Trustee of the Church in accordance with the church constitution. Any Church member may be a Church Trustee and with the ministers and church leaders is required to consider all the Church's work and to carry out its decisions.

4.6. Men and women in leadership

It has been the practice and is the belief of the congregation that biblical leadership and biblical ministry in the church is open to both men and women.

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5. Policies and Procedures

5.1. Church Safeguarding Policy

5.1.1. The charity trustees shall operate a church safeguarding policy and shall ensure that activities involving children and vulnerable adults are carried out in accordance with that policy.

5.1.2. Each person overseeing church activities involving children or vulnerable adults and every charity trustee shall provide to the Church Secretary a current Disclosure and Barring Service certificate.

5.2. Amendment of the Church Handbook

5.2.1. Other than the section headed "Principles for Charity Purposes", any provisions of this Church Handbook can be amended by the charity trustees under the authority of a resolution of the Members of the Church approving such a change at a Church Meeting, provided that the proposed amendment shall not be such as would cause the Church to lose its charitable status or such as would cause this Church Handbook to be inconsistent with the Constitution. The section headed "Principles for Charity Purposes" can only be amended where this is required because the provisions of the Constitution have changed.

5.2.2. A majority of 60% of those Members present and voting at the Church Meeting is required to approve a proposed amendment to any clause excepting (i) any provision of this Church Handbook requiring the approval of a matter by percentage of the Members which is greater than a simple majority of the Members present and voting a Church Meeting, in which case the majority required to amend that provisions shall be the greater of (a) 75% of Members present and voting a Church Business Meeting and (b) the majority required by the provision itself as currently drafted, (ii) the provisions contained in Part 1 of this Church Handbook where a majority of 75% is required, and (iii) the provisions in the section headed "Principles for Charity Purposes" where the charity trustees shall make the amendment without the need for a vote following any change to the Constitution.

5.2.3. Notice of any proposed amendment together with the specific wording of the proposed change must be given in writing to all Church Members at least 3 weeks before the meeting at which the proposal will be put to the vote.

5.2.4. No amendment may be made under this Clause to any provision of the Constitution, including the Basis of Faith.

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6. Standing Orders

6.1. Leaving Church Membership

- 6.1.1. Members removing to another neighbourhood, at such distance that they cannot conveniently attend are urged to join a Church nearer their own home.
- 6.1.2. If the leaders of the church or the Church Meeting decide that a person should be removed from the list of members for whatever reason, there is a process detailed in the constitution that includes for those being removed because of misconduct informing the person of the reasons why their membership is being terminated and giving them an opportunity to state their case to the Church Meeting.

6.2. Exclusion of non-members from public meetings of the Church

- 6.2.1. The charity trustees may propose that the open invitation to attend public meetings of the Church customarily extended to non-members may be withdrawn from any individual who seeks to obstruct the carrying out of the work and ministry of the Church, or to undermine the leadership of the Church.
- 6.2.2. Charity trustees may only withdraw such open invitation to an individual if this is supported by a vote of 75% of Members present and voting at a Church Meeting.
- 6.2.3. An invitation that has been withdrawn may be reinstated by a resolution of Members at a Church Meeting.

6.3. The Church Meeting

- 6.3.1. The Church Meeting shall normally be held quarterly, the Annual Meeting to be held in April. Church Meetings for special business shall be held when necessary (in accordance with the Constitution).
- 6.3.2. A Minister of the Church will preside over all Church Meetings. Failing this, one of the Church Leaders shall occupy the position or, failing such an arrangement, the meeting may appoint its own chairman.

6.4. Election of Minister(s) and Church Leaders.

- 6.4.1. The election of a Church Minister or Church Leader shall take place at a Church Meeting specially convened for that purpose, notice of such meeting having been given in accordance with the constitution.
- 6.4.2. In order that such elections may truly express the will and feeling of the Church it is essential that members should by their presence make the meeting representative, and a vote of at least three-quarters of the total votes cast shall be required in favour of the Minister or Church Leader nominated in order to make the election valid. Members who cannot be present must return their ballot papers by hand, post or electronically in such a way as their identity can be verified. There are provisions in the constitution for proxy voting.
- 6.4.3. In no case shall the name of more than one Minister be placed before a meeting.
- 6.4.4. The Initial period for a Minister and a Church Leader shall normally be not less than 3 years or more than 5 years. Re-election shall be by the same procedure as for election. The frequency of re-election to be for not less than 1 year and not more than 3 years.

6.5. Election of Trustees who are not church leaders.

- 6.5.1. Nominations shall be made in writing by any two Church members and shall be placed in the hands of the Church Administrator by the Saturday previous to the Church Meeting at which the election is to take place.
- 6.5.2. Voting papers containing the names of the members thus nominated shall be distributed at the Meeting at which the election is to take place, and the vote shall be taken by ballot for the number of Trustees to be elected.
- 6.5.3. Church Members who are unable to attend the Church Meeting may apply to the Church Administrator for a voting paper or proxy vote.
- 6.5.4. The number of Trustees shall be decided from time to time by the Church Meeting
- 6.5.5. One-third of Trustees who are not church leaders are to resign by rotation each year.

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6.6. Administrative appointments

The Trustees shall nominate Church Administrators and shall submit their names to the Church Meeting for selection, and such appointments shall be confirmed annually at the Annual General Meeting of the Trust.

6.7. Communication

6.7.1. A Church Administrator is appointed as a clerk to the Trust and all communication is to be directed through the Church Administrator: office@takeleychapel.org.uk.

6.7.2. All Church Meetings will be announced at the Sunday meeting

6.7.3. All meetings will be published on the Church website (www.takeleychapel.org.uk) which also has a password controlled members only area where minutes of previous meetings are available.

6.7.4. Any member can request a paper copy of any Church document from info@takeleychapel.org.uk

6.8. Auxiliary organisations

Leaders of auxiliary organisations should be Church Members, and appointments are to be confirmed annually at the Annual General Meeting.

6.9. Buildings and land

6.9.1. The buildings and land owned by the church can only be used to further its purposes and may not be hired out. This is a stipulation of any lease granted to organisations.

6.9.2. Where the buildings and land are leased to organisations, no public event or ceremony is to be organised without the approval of the Trustees and this is to be part of the lease conditions.

6.10. Policies

The Church has in place policies on Safeguarding, Health and Safety and Conflicts of Interest. Policies are updated to comply with changes in legislation by the Trustees and the Church is made aware of additions and amendments at the Church Meeting.

6.11. Amendments to the Standing Orders are made as specified in section 26 of the Constitution.