

# Church Handbook

Above Bar Church is a charitable company limited by guarantee.  
Registered in England and Wales, registration no: 6959469. Charity registration no: 1131075.  
Registered office: Above Bar Street, Southampton, SO14 7FE.  
[www.abovebarchurch.org.uk](http://www.abovebarchurch.org.uk)

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The appendices referred to above are attached to the master copy and available on request to all members.

## **Introduction**

**Above Bar Church** is a charitable company limited by guarantee and not having a share capital. We are an evangelical church community seeking to love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ together across the city of Southampton and beyond. We exist to glorify God by seeking to make and mature disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

This Church Handbook contains a number of standing orders to enable the proper conduct and management of the life of the church. Its purpose is to set out clearly our beliefs and vision and what this means in practice for the church community. It is intended to be understood in the light of the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the company (copies are available on request).

Trustees are appointed to lead and direct the church's affairs in accordance with its governing documents. They comprise paid elders; unpaid elders; the church (company) secretary, and the church (company) treasurer. These appointments are made in line with the procedures set out in Section B, paragraphs B3.1-B3.12 of this handbook and paragraph 18 of the Articles of Association.

## **Section A – An essential guide**

### **A1. Our statement of beliefs**

We believe in:-

- one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit as revealed in Scripture and in the sovereignty and grace of God in creation, providence, revelation, redemption and final judgement;
- the divine inspiration and consequent infallibility of Scripture as originally given and in its final authority in all matters of faith and conduct;
- the responsibility of every Christian believer to seek to live under the authority of Scripture and in loving relationships with fellow Christians;
- the dignity of all people, made male and female in God's image, to love, be holy and care for creation;
- the universal sinfulness and guilt of the human race in consequence of the fall and our liability to God's wrath and judgement;
- Jesus Christ, the virgin-born incarnate Son of God and his sacrificial death in our place as the sole and all-sufficient ground of redemption from the guilt and power of sin and from its eternal consequences;
- the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and his ascension into heaven;
- the justification of the sinner solely by the grace of God through faith alone;
- the illuminating, convicting, regenerating, indwelling, sanctifying and empowering work of God the Holy Spirit in every believer;
- one universal church comprising all believers as the body of which Christ is the head, expressed locally in terms of committed fellowship, worship, service, care and mission;
- the responsibility of all believers, both individually and collectively, to share their faith actively with others everywhere; and
- the personal, visible return of the Lord Jesus Christ in power and glory, in final

judgement, the eternal punishment of the unsaved and the eternal fellowship of believers with Christ in a new heaven and a new earth.

## **A2. Our vision and values**

The church exists to glorify God by seeking to make and mature disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

We seek to fulfil this aim by becoming increasingly:

- *Mission-focused* – locally, nationally and internationally
- *Bible-centred* – in our ethos and activities
- *God-dependent* – expressed in prayer and expectation of the Holy Spirit's work
- *An authentic community* of people from many backgrounds who love and nurture each other as disciples of Christ.

Our vision is not only to live out these values in our central activities, but to work together as a whole church family to see them expressed and having a godly impact across the city of Southampton and beyond.

## **A3. Distinctive practices and general practices**

### **Distinctive practices**

#### **A3.1 Baptism**

Individuals become Christians through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit when they hear the good news and truly repent of their sin, turning to Jesus Christ as the only one who can bring them to God. In line with New Testament teaching, we encourage each Christian to obey the command of Jesus to testify to God's grace in their lives by being baptised as a believer.

#### **A3.2 Marriage**

We believe that marriage is a gift of God in creation for the benefit of the married couple, any children they may have, and the wider society. We follow the clear teaching of the Bible that marriage is intended to be a lifelong union of one woman and one man, and that any sexual intercourse outside marriage (so defined) is sinful and wrong. We will therefore not condone, promote, assist or encourage the practice of sexual intercourse in any other context. Above Bar Church holds to the traditional Christian marriage ethic and adheres to the guidance set out by the FIEC to which we are affiliated. Therefore Above Bar Church is licensed only for the solemnisation of such marriages.

#### **A3.3 Dedication of infants**

We encourage believers in the church to dedicate to the Lord in public any children he may give them. We do not believe that this act of dedication makes the child a Christian. Rather it provides an opportunity for us all to give thanks for the child, for the parents to commit themselves to bringing the child up within the Christian faith and for the wider church family to recognise their share in the responsibility to care for and teach the child.

### **General practices**

#### **A3.4 Corporate worship**

We gather together as Christians to glorify God by worshipping him and responding to his word which is preached to help us grow in our faith. All, of any belief or none, are welcome to join us. Jesus commanded us to remember his death and its significance and we do this in regular communion services, within which we warmly invite all those who profess personal faith in Christ and are seeking to follow him to participate in the sharing of bread and wine.

### **A3.5 Mission**

Every Christian believer plays a part in God's purpose in mission to the world. We are his witnesses wherever we are. We support mission in prayer, in giving and through seeking to fulfil our own part in God's purposes. We seek to assist and motivate one another in our responsibilities both locally and on a world-wide basis.

The elders are responsible for mission policy and strategy within Above Bar Church but delegate some of the functions to working groups made up of church members.

The church's policy on World Mission, with detailed information on our approach to the calling, sending and supporting of mission partners, is fully explained in the World Mission Policy document which may be updated from time to time, as proposed by the elders and agreed by the church members.

### **A3.6 Small groups and Christian growth**

We encourage each Christian to belong to a missional community and/or a small group of believers in which worship, prayer, Bible study, authentic community, communal evangelism and support for personal witness are encouraged in the context of meaningful relationships. We also provide programmes to aid growth, training and development across all age groups.

### **A3.7 Prayer**

We encourage all Christians to be committed to prayer as an expression of our complete dependence on God. We seek to express this both individually and in groups with other Christians.

### **A3.8 Giving**

Giving is one way in which we express our gratitude to God for His love and grace to us. We encourage regular giving of money and other resources as part of our commitment to Christ.

### **A3.9 Caring for one another**

We are committed to building meaningful and godly relationships with one another both for continuing encouragement in our Christian discipleship and for the giving and receiving of love and support during times of difficulty.

### **A3.10 Church members' meetings**

Those who are members of the church meet together regularly to consider and discuss the direction and the business of the church. The purpose of these meetings is to:

- seek God's will on a variety of issues, bearing in mind that Christ is head of the church
- enable effective communication between the leadership and the membership on matters concerning the whole church.

## **A4. Membership of Above Bar Church**

Applications for membership of Above Bar Church are welcomed from all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ who:

- subscribe to the statement of beliefs and vision (as set out in this handbook and the Memorandum and Articles of the company)
- have signed a written application
- are aged 18 or over.

Individuals must also seek to live according to God's word. Those accepted as members will normally have been baptised as believers, but applications from those who (as a matter of their conscience or conviction) have not been baptised as believers may be accepted, at the elders' discretion.

#### *Privileges and responsibilities of membership*

To be a member of Above Bar Church is to express active commitment to its beliefs, vision & values and distinctive practices. Therefore the central responsibility of church members is, with God's help, to follow and promote those beliefs and to play their part in seeing the vision fulfilled.

It is the responsibility of each individual before God to discern what should be their pattern of regular involvement in church life. In general, those involved in the church will be encouraged to:

- be regularly involved in Sunday services
- be committed to their local cluster and to one small group
- be active in serving in at least one area
- consider their responsibilities in giving and in prayer for the life and wider mission of the church
- attend church members' meetings whenever possible, in a prayerful and loving spirit and to keep confidential the business transacted.

## **A5. Leadership within Above Bar Church**

### **A5.1 Elders**

Elders are appointed to work together in taking responsibility for the oversight of the church and in equipping all involved to serve God effectively.

There shall normally be two categories of elder:

- those elected from the membership and set apart to serve in an unpaid capacity
- those appointed, set apart and paid as ministers in the church.

There shall normally be six unpaid elders and three paid elders, but if circumstances dictate, these numbers may be varied provided there is still a majority of unpaid elders. As trustees of the company they are responsible for ensuring that the affairs of the church are conducted in an orderly manner and comply with charitable company law in accordance with the Memorandum and Articles.

### **A5.2 The church secretary and church treasurer**

The secretary and treasurer shall be known as church officers and be accountable to the elders and church members. As trustees of the company they are responsible for ensuring that the affairs of the church are conducted in an orderly manner and comply with charitable company law in accordance with the Memorandum and Articles.

### **A5.3 Ministry leaders who serve in the church**

A core responsibility of the elders is to identify, equip and support church members who serve as ministry leaders in various areas of church life.

The fulfilment of some of these roles may require the appointment of paid church staff, but most will be fulfilled by church members on a voluntary basis.

## **Section B – Our procedures**

### **B1. Becoming a member of Above Bar Church**

- B1.1 Anyone wishing to become a member should apply to the elders, who will discuss with the applicant the privileges and responsibilities of membership. Applicants must satisfy the requirements given in paragraph A4 and accept the responsibilities of membership. Following receipt of the signed application form (which includes agreeing to pay the maximum of £1 in the event of the church needing to be wound up) and approval by the elders arrangements will be made for approved applicants to be welcomed into membership during a Sunday service. An approved applicant has full rights and responsibilities as a member of Above Bar Church.
- B1.2 Members of another church who are temporarily in the Southampton area or individuals who do not wish to become full members of Above Bar Church may apply to the elders for Associate membership. Associate members must meet the criteria set out in paragraph A4. They do not have the same privileges and responsibilities as members. They are not entitled to vote at a church meeting. However, they are entitled to attend as an observer on such terms as the trustees decide and with prior consent of the chair may take part in discussions.
- B1.3 If in the opinion of the elders a member or associate member brings dishonour on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the matter shall be investigated with the member concerned. If necessary, appropriate disciplinary measures shall be taken in a spirit of love with a view to restoration.
- B1.4 Membership will cease on death, written resignation or when a member moves away from the Southampton area permanently.
- B1.5 The elders may terminate membership in the following circumstances:
- if a member is out of contact with the church for at least six months without good cause
  - if, in the opinion of the elders, a member brings dishonour on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ
  - if, in the opinion of the elders, there are other reasonable grounds for terminating membership.

### **B2. Church members' meetings**

- B2.1 Entitlement to attend and to vote:
- only members and subject to paragraph B1.2 above, associate members are entitled to attend members' meetings
  - members (but not associate members) are entitled to vote.
- B2.2 There shall normally be three church members' meetings a year, one of which shall be the Annual General Meeting (AGM).
- B2.3 The AGM shall normally be held in the autumn of each year. The business at the AGM is:
- to receive the annual trustees' report
  - to appoint trustees (elders and church officers)
  - to consider the accounts and the auditors' report (if necessary)
  - to appoint the auditors (if necessary)
  - any other business specified in the notice convening the meeting.
- B2.4 Notice of church members' meetings must be given at least 14 clear days prior to the meeting. Such notices will be in writing (whenever possible via e-mail transmission) but may also be highlighted orally, during the Sunday services at least 21 days prior

to the meeting and in any case will be in accordance with paragraphs 9 and 35 of the Articles.

- B2.5 In addition to paragraph B2.2 above additional church members' meeting may be held whenever considered necessary by the elders, or at the request of at least one tenth of the membership the trustees must promptly convene a church meeting. Notice of such a meeting must be given in accordance with B2.4 above.
- B2.6 Proposals to be introduced at any church members' meeting should be submitted in the names of two church members. These proposals must be given to the church secretary by a date specified in the notice of the meeting. Any other proposals or amendments to proposals, arising from discussion in the meeting, may be put to the meeting only at the discretion of the chair of the meeting. Copies of the agenda for the meeting shall be available to church members on the Sunday before the meeting at the latest.
- B2.7 A resolution shall be carried when a simple majority of the members who are entitled to vote, vote in favour, except where indicated otherwise in this document. Anyone abstaining from any vote shall be deemed not to have voted. Voting is by show of hands, except where indicated otherwise in this document or so resolved by the meeting.
- B2.8 The quorum for all church members' meetings shall be one sixth of the membership.
- B2.9 Members have a responsibility to attend church members' meetings whenever possible, to do so in a prayerful and loving spirit and to keep confidential the business transacted.

As a company we are required to make provision for 'proxy voting' at members' meetings. This option should not be undertaken without careful consideration and whenever possible any proxy appointed should be the Chair of the meeting or another church member.

If a member wishes to exercise this right the relevant form can be obtained from the church/company secretary via the registered office (69 Above Bar Street, Southampton, SO14 7FE). Completed proxy forms must be delivered to the church/company secretary via the registered office at least 24 hours before the start time for the meeting.

### **B3. Appointment of trustees (unpaid elders; paid elders; church/company secretary and church/company treasurer**

#### Unpaid elders:

- B3.1 The unpaid elders shall be elected for a four year period and should normally step down after two periods of office. They can be nominated to serve for further periods after a gap of at least one year.
- B3.2 Unpaid elders shall be men who have been identified as having gifts of oversight, have been baptised as believers, and fully accept the beliefs, vision and practices as set out in this document. They should normally have been in membership of the church for at least three years.
- B3.3 Nominations shall be as follows:
- An elder may be nominated by any two church members, who must first discuss the nomination with the church secretary. The nominee's consent must then be obtained before the nomination is submitted to the church members' meeting.

- Voting by ballot will normally be at the AGM in accordance with the practices set out in this handbook. The election of an elder requires a 75% majority in favour.
- When there are more nominations than vacancies, the elders may bring a voting procedure that will allow the vacancies to be filled such that all successful candidates obtain the 75% majority in favour.

B3.4 In the event of an unpaid elder being unable to fulfil their term of office, the elders may co-opt an eligible member to fill the vacancy. This shall be reported to the next church members' meeting and the vacancy filled at the next AGM in the usual way.

B3.5 If there is an accusation by at least two church members that an unpaid elder has brought the name of the Lord Jesus Christ into disrepute the remaining elders shall investigate the matter with the elder concerned. If the accusation is upheld the elders may terminate their term of office. The matter shall be reported to the church members as soon as possible.

#### Paid elders:

B3.6 The number and title of paid elders shall be determined by the trustees in accordance with paragraph A5.1 of this handbook and the Memorandum and Articles.

B3.7 A paid elder shall be a man who has been baptised as a believer, and who has indicated in writing that he fully accepts the statement of beliefs, vision and practices as set out in this document. He shall be responsible, with all other elders, for the general oversight of the church.

B3.8 A recommendation to appoint a paid elder shall be made by the elders to a church members' meeting. The appointment of a paid elder requires a 75% majority vote in favour, by ballot.

B3.9 In the event of difficulties in the employment of a paid elder, the other elders and officers should take account of the procedures in the Staff Handbook and the advice in the document entitled 'Above Bar Church - Guidelines for Good Practice'. However, as a final resort, termination of a paid elder's appointment shall be in accordance with the terms and conditions set out in their contract of employment.

#### Appointment of the church/company secretary and church/company treasurer (church officers)

B3.10 The church officers shall be men or women who have been baptised as believers and who fully accept the statement of beliefs, vision and practices as set out in this document. They shall normally have been in membership of the church for at least three years.

B3.11 The church officers are unpaid and shall normally be elected at an AGM for a four year period and should normally step down after two periods of office. They can be nominated to serve for further periods after a gap of at least one year. Their election requires a 75% majority vote in favour by ballot.

#### Retirement and removal of a trustee

B3.12 A trustee will cease to hold office if he/she:

- dies;
- ceases to be a paid elder, an unpaid elder, the church secretary or the church treasurer, as the case may be;
- ceases to be a trustee (director) under the Act or is prohibited by law from being a director or is disqualified from acting as a charity trustee under the Charities Act

- 1993;
- becomes incapable of managing and administering their own affairs because of mental disorder illness or injury;
- is declared bankrupt or makes any arrangement or composition with their creditors;
- resigns by written notice to the other trustees;
- fails to sign a statement of their obligations as required in Article 19 of governing documents within one month of his appointment and the trustees resolve that they be removed;
- is absent without good reason from three consecutive meetings of the trustees and at least a two-thirds majority of all the trustees able to vote resolve that he/she be removed;
- ceases to be a church member; or
- is removed in accordance with paragraph B3.4 or B3.5 above.

#### **B4. Appointment of ministry leaders to serve in the church**

B4.1 A core responsibility of the elders is to identify, equip and support church members who serve as ministry leaders in various areas of church life. Ministry leaders are those who are seeking to develop a particular ministry area and lead those who serve within it. The relevant areas of church life are numerous and include both *enabling ministries* of various kinds and *direct ministries* which involve (for example but not exclusively) pastoral care and the handling of scripture.

The fulfilment of some of these roles may require the appointment of paid church staff, but most will be fulfilled by church members on a voluntary basis.

B4.2 Ministry leaders shall be men or women who fully accept the statement of beliefs, vision and practices of the church and should normally have been baptised as believers. These requirements apply whether the role is filled by a paid staff member or on a voluntary basis.

B4.3 Ministry leaders appointed on a voluntary basis should normally have been in membership of the church for at least one year. The elders are responsible for making these appointments in consultation with other members involved in the particular ministry area and to report such appointments (or any resignations / terminations) at the next church meeting. The appointments will be reviewed every four years as appropriate and people will normally serve for two periods, after which there will be discussion with the individual(s) on whether it is appropriate to continue.

B4.4 Appointments to paid-staff ministry leader posts, both new and replacement, shall be made by the elders in accordance with normal employment terms and conditions and good recruitment practice.

Other than in exceptional circumstances (which must be reported specifically to the membership) a recommendation to appoint someone to the church staff as a ministry leader shall be made by the elders to a church members' meeting. Such an appointment requires a 75% majority vote in favour by ballot.

B4.5 Ministry leaders in the church whether paid or voluntary shall be accountable to the elders, either directly or through the church secretary, manager or treasurer, whichever is most appropriate.

B4.6 If there is an accusation by at least two members that an unpaid ministry leader in the church has brought the name of the Lord Jesus Christ into disrepute, the elders shall investigate the matter with the person concerned. If the accusation is upheld, the elders may terminate their term of office.

- B4.7 In the event of difficulties in the employment of a paid ministry leader, the elders and officers should take account of the advice in the document 'Above Bar Church - Guidelines for Good Practice'. However, as a final resort termination of a staff member's appointment shall be in accordance with the terms and conditions set out in their contract of employment.
- B4.8 The elders will meet regularly with ministry leaders in the church for the sharing of vision and direction and to give opportunity for discussion and feedback.
- B4.9 The purpose and intention for the various ministries within the church, including any sub-groups, will be agreed by the elders and are for appendices to the Church Handbook. (Appendix A).

## **B5. Other paid staff**

Staff for administrative, clerical, secretarial and maintenance duties, or for ancillary duties shall be appointed by the elders and their appointment reported to the next church members' meeting following the appointment. They should be supportive of our beliefs and vision. Appointments and terminations shall be in accordance with the terms and conditions set out in the contract of employment.

### **B5.1 Appointment of mission partners**

Mission partners shall be mature Christians who have been identified as having gifts appropriate to the work of mission. They must fully accept the beliefs, vision and practices as set out in this document. They should normally have been baptised as believers and have been in membership of the church for at least three years. The elders will recommend to the church from time to time individuals or couples to become mission partners. Appointment of mission partners requires a 75% majority vote in favour, by ballot.

The Mission Policy document is at appendix B

## **B6. Contractual arrangements**

Contracts of employment and terms and conditions shall be negotiated by the unpaid trustees or their representatives in accordance with employment law for all paid appointments.

## **B7. Financial accountability**

- B7.1 The trustees are responsible for the management of all the church's finances in accordance with the Companies Acts 1985, 1989 and 2006 and the Charities Act 1993 (as amended by the Charities Act 2006), including all amendments, replacements or re-enactments and/or regulations, determinations and directions made or given under such Acts.
- B7.2 The church treasurer shall be responsible for keeping the church accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Acts 1985, 1989 and 2006 and the Charities Act 1993 (as amended by the Charities Act 2006), including all amendments, replacements or re-enactments and/or regulations, determinations and directions made or given under such Acts.
- B7.3 The church treasurer may co-opt a team from members of the church to assist in the task as defined in paragraph B7.2 above.
- B7.4 The annual statement of accounts shall be audited in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Acts 1985, 1989 and 2006 and the Charities Act 1993 (as amended by the Charities Act 2006) including all amendments, replacements or

re-enactments and/or regulations, determinations and directions made or given under such Acts.

This statement of accounts shall be approved by the trustees and then presented to the church members at the AGM for approval prior to filing the annual report and accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Acts.

B7.5 The treasurer of any sub-group, committee or working party within the church must submit their accounts to the church treasurer for inclusion in the church accounts.

B7.6 The church treasurer shall present an annual budget to a church members' meeting for approval.

## **B8. Church premises**

The use of the church premises by outside bodies may be allowed with the approval of the elders and church officers, subject to the terms of any governing documents eg. the Memorandum and Articles, legal documents, conveying church property and any similar documents.

## **B9. Organisation within the church**

The appointment of leaders and, if applicable, treasurers, of all sub-groups, committees or working parties of the church shall be subject to the approval of the elders in accordance with the regulations set out in the Memorandum and Articles of Association.

## **B10. Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults**

The church leadership recognises the importance of its ministry to children and young people, and vulnerable adults, and the responsibility it has to protect and safeguard their welfare. In meeting this responsibility the church appoints a co-ordinator who is responsible for the implementation of our Safeguarding Policy. The policy forms appendix C to this handbook.

## **B11. Health and Safety (including Food Safety Hygiene)**

A number of activities undertaken by ABC fall within safety regulations. The church has both a health and safety and food safety policy that comply with the law. These are reviewed and updated annually to ensure they meet the requirements and needs in delivering our various activities and are attached as appendix D and E.

## **B12. Data Protection Regulations**

Data protection is something that affects every organisation, as well as everyone who comes in contact with it. ABC is registered under the Data Protection Act 1998 and has a data protection policy. Staff and volunteers are given training related to data protection as appropriate to their role. The policy is attached at appendix F.

## **B13. Amendments to the Church Handbook**

This Church Handbook contains the standing orders for the proper conduct and management of the church. They must be consistent with the Memorandum and Articles. No standing order may be inconsistent with or may affect or repeal anything contained in the Memorandum and Articles. The Church Handbook may only be amended by the church at a church meeting called on 28 clear days' notice for the purpose of passing a resolution to amend the Church Handbook. Such resolution will only be passed if 75% or more of the church members present in person or by proxy vote in favour.

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