



Sidcup Baptist Church

A church that loves and serves God, His people and His world

SUMMARY CONSTITUTION

for members and enquirers

CONSTITUTION OF SIDCUP BAPTIST CHURCH: A SUMMARY

Note: In the narrative that follows, section numbers match those in the formal full constitution that was adopted by the Church Members' Meeting on 18th March 2009 and approved by the Charity Commission on 14th July 2009. There is no intention in this summary to alter the meaning of any aspect of the full constitution, only to make it more digestible for members and potential members. Throughout this document, "the church" means Sidcup Baptist Church.

1–3 THE FUNDAMENTAL BASIS OF THE CHURCH

The principal purpose of the church is the advancement of the Christian faith according to the principles of the Baptist denomination. The church may also carry out other charitable purposes in the United Kingdom and/or other parts of the world.

The church is a member of the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BU) and the London Baptist Association (LBA). As a member of the Baptist Union, the church subscribes to the Baptist Union's Declaration of Principle:

- *That our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and that each church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer His laws.*
- *That Christian Baptism is the immersion in water into the name of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit, of those who have professed repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ who "died for our sins according to the Scriptures; was buried, and rose again on the third day".*
- *That it is the duty of every disciple to bear personal witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to take part in the evangelisation of the world.*

4–5 ACTIVITIES

In fulfilling its purpose, the church will engage in a range of activities – either on its own or in collaboration with others. The activities may include, but are not restricted to:

- regular public worship, prayer, Bible study, preaching and teaching;
- baptism, as defined in the BU Declaration of Principle (above);
- the Communion of the Lord's Supper;
- the giving and encouraging of pastoral care;
- the nurture and growth of Christian disciples;
- the teaching, encouragement, welcome and inclusion of young people;
- evangelism and mission – locally, regionally, nationally and internationally;
- supporting and encouraging charitable social action in the United Kingdom and abroad;
- education and training for Christian and community service;
- encouraging relationships with and supporting Baptists and other Christians.

In relation to activities undertaken by the church, all organisations, groups and committees, and their leaders, are accountable to the trustees (see section 15–16 below) and also through any specific direction of a Church Members' Meeting (see section 9–11 below).

6 BELONGING TO THE CHURCH

As Christians we want to see the Lord Jesus Christ glorified through His Church. As members, therefore, we undertake to carry out – relying on God’s help and in the power of the Holy Spirit – the following responsibilities. Accordingly, as a member you should aim to:

- live a life consistent with the Gospel and worthy of your calling in Christ;
- spend some time each day in prayer and scripture reading;
- share in the corporate worship of the church each Sunday, whenever possible, and be regular and faithful in celebrating the Lord’s Supper.
- take part in appointing, as the Holy Spirit guides, leaders in the church, as well as encouraging them, praying for them, and following their collective leadership, under God;
- take some part in the work of the church according to your calling, gifts and opportunities;
- live in love and friendship with all the other members of the church (see below);
- become a regular member of one of the church’s housegroups, praying for the other members of that housegroup and exercising pastoral care and concern for them;
- accept personal responsibility for the good government of the church by being present, whenever possible, at Church Members’ Meetings;
- support the work of Christ’s kingdom through the church by regularly setting aside a sum of money (proportionate to income) and giving it to the funds of the church;
- witness to the Lord Jesus Christ by word and deed, and introduce others to the church.

If there are differences that lead to difficulties between you and other members of the church (and it is recognised that these will sometimes arise), you should try to resolve the situation with gentleness and humility following Christian and Biblical principles. It might be necessary for another wise and experienced member of the church (or someone from another organisation) to help you by acting as a mediator or friend.

7–8 THE FORMALITIES OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Church membership is open to those who:

- accept the beliefs of the church, as stated in section 1–3 above;
- commit themselves to serving Christ within the church and beyond;
- abide by the decisions of the Church Members’ Meeting;
- acknowledge their responsibilities as church members (see section 6 above);
- have their membership application accepted by the Church Members’ Meeting.

Sidcup Baptist Church operates an ‘open’ membership, where those seeking membership who have not been baptised in the manner described in the BU Declaration of Principle may (at the discretion of the Church Members’ Meeting) be accepted for membership based on their own public profession of faith. A person wishing to become a church member needs to apply formally in accordance with the procedure set out in Appendix A.

We maintain a database of those who are our members and regular attenders, and once you are accepted into formal membership of Sidcup Baptist Church you will be recorded on this database as a member. The database is reviewed and updated periodically with routine changes related to the data held (name, contact information, etc) or because of changes arising through transfer to another church, resignation, death, or resolution at a Church Members’ Meeting.

All members are expected to attend Sunday worship and the Lord's Supper at the church on a frequent basis. For some members this may not at times be possible – for instance, those who are housebound or in hospital, those away at university, those working out of the district for a prolonged period or those involved with Christian ministry elsewhere. If this applies to you, action to remove you from the membership list for non-attendance will generally not be contemplated.

If, however, you are able to attend Sunday services on a normal basis but you do not do so, you will be followed up pastorally in order to discover the reasons and to encourage you to engage more fully in the church's life and witness. If, thereafter, there remains no change in your outlook or practice, your name could be brought to a Church Members' Meeting with a recommendation for removal from the membership list. If this happens, you have a right to speak in your own defence.

If at any stage you wish to transfer your membership to another Christian church or fellowship, whether in Sidcup or further afield, the trustees would be happy to provide a letter of transfer. If you move out of the Sidcup area, we will do all we can to encourage you to link up with another local church. Where a year has passed and you have not yet decided to join another church, you may remain on the membership list of Sidcup Baptist Church for the time being if you are still in contact with the church and ask in writing to do so (renewed annually). Otherwise, after one year away your membership at Sidcup Baptist Church will be deemed to have lapsed, and we will attempt to write to inform you when this has occurred.

If your conduct is known to be, or reliably reported to be, such as might tend to bring reproach upon the church, the trustees will look fully into the matter and take what action they consider suitable (eg counselling or prayer support). If they consider it serious enough, however, they could bring the matter before a Church Members' Meeting. Throughout this procedure, you have a right to speak in your own defence.

9–11 CHURCH MEMBERS' MEETINGS

Church members aim to meet together in a Church Members' Meeting under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the Lordship of Christ to discern the mind of God in the affairs of the church. Discussion at the meeting should be set in this context, with the intention that practical issues are not perceived as being separate from the spiritual aspects of church life. For this reason, worship and prayer should form part of each meeting.

There are two types of formal Church Members' Meetings, namely Ordinary Church Members' Meetings and Special Church Members' Meetings:

- Ordinary Church Members' Meetings are an opportunity to consider and review routine matters associated with the life of the church, such as the progress of various developments in church activities, church membership applications, the appointment of trustees, and the approval of an annual budget. Such meetings are held at roughly two-monthly intervals and there must be no fewer than four in any calendar year. One of these must be the Annual Church Members' Meeting, where the church's annual accounts and other reports are received – currently this is held in November.
- Special Church Members' Meetings are convened when it is necessary to consider the appointment or dismissal of a minister, matters relating to the redevelopment of church property, or matters considered by the trustees to be of sufficient importance to require the calling of such a meeting.

Church Members' Meetings are convened by the trustees and scheduled so as to be convenient for as many church members as is reasonable – meetings are normally held on a Wednesday evening. For an Ordinary Church Members' Meeting, the date, time and place for the meeting must be publicised at the worship services on the previous Sunday, preferably with an indication of the agenda items. For a Special Church Members' Meeting, the same applies but with publicising on two previous Sundays.

As well as the standard scheduled meetings described above, the trustees are obliged to call an additional Church Members' Meeting (whether Special or Ordinary) upon receipt of a written request that has been signed by at least one-tenth of the local church membership, or 12 church members, whichever is the fewer. "Local" church membership is defined as membership of those living within the BR, DA and SE postcode areas.

Guests can be invited by the trustees to attend Church Members' Meetings for a specific purpose – for example, someone to take the minutes, an architect to advise on a building development, or an external overseer when the church does not have a minister (none of whom can vote on any matter). Apart from that, only church members are permitted to attend Church Members' Meetings.

12–14 THE CONDUCT OF CHURCH MEMBERS' MEETINGS

A quorum of 25% of the local church membership (as defined above) applies for Church Members' Meetings; if fewer are in attendance, no business can be conducted. Someone must be appointed to chair each meeting – this is usually the minister.

Members should, as far as possible, seek consensus in all matters; but for those issues requiring a specific decision, a vote should be taken. In general (there are some exceptions), a simple majority of those voting is all that is needed to carry a resolution at an Ordinary Church Members' Meeting (ie abstentions are not taken into account) and a two-thirds majority at a Special Church Members' Meeting.

Voting will generally be by a show of hands after discussion and debate amongst those present. In some circumstances where an important issue is being voted on, a secret ballot will be more appropriate, in which case two members present at the meeting will be appointed as scrutineers to administer and count the votes. In all cases the person chairing the meeting will announce the outcome of the vote.

No minimum age amongst members applies for being entitled to vote. No proxy or postal voting is permitted. A resolution passed at either an Ordinary Church Members' Meeting or a Special Church Members' Meeting cannot be rescinded within one year unless special notice of reconsidering the matter is given.

The business conducted at Church Members' Meetings – and, in particular, any decisions made by the members – must be recorded in the minutes for future reference. Each set of minutes should be approved (after any necessary corrections) by the church members attending the next Church Members' Meeting, and the person chairing that meeting should sign and date them as a correct record. Signed minutes act as conclusive evidence of the decisions taken at a Church Members' Meeting.

15–16 THE APPOINTMENT AND REMOVAL OF TRUSTEES

Trustees are responsible for the governance of the church and the fulfilment of the church's purpose through its activities (see sections 1–3 and 4–5 above), always aiming to act

according to the discerned will of God. They are responsible for the control, management and administration of the church, including the upkeep of all property. Trustees comprise the minister and the deacons, and there is scope to elect elders as trustees if that role within the church is accepted at some time in the future. As Sidcup Baptist Church is a registered charity, the trustees must act at all times in accordance with UK charity law.

Trustees are appointed from amongst the church members by a vote at a Church Members' Meeting (apart from a newly appointed minister, who automatically becomes a trustee by virtue of his/her position even if not yet formally accepted into membership). Both a Church Secretary and a Church Treasurer must be appointed from amongst the trustees. There is no minimum or maximum number of trustees.

Trustees (except for the minister) are appointed for one term of three years, with the opportunity to be nominated for one further three-year term – which must then be followed by at least one year when they are not eligible for reappointment. Despite the church's "open" approach to membership (see section 7–8 above), each trustee must have been baptised as a Christian believer in a manner constituting his/her own public profession of faith – preferably (but not necessarily) by full immersion.

The appointment of trustees is conducted in a way that aims to be transparent, clear and open, so that all church members can consider prayerfully who should be appointed to oversee the church's activities. In this church:*

- Nominations for the role of trustee (other than the minister) must be submitted in writing to the Church Secretary (or other appointed electoral officer) not later than three Sundays before the scheduled Ordinary Church Members' Meeting at which an election is to be held. Requests for nominations will be made at all services on the two Sundays immediately before that Sunday when nominations must cease.
- Only church members with at least five nominations will be considered as having sufficient initial support for further consideration. Candidates with at least five nominations will be contacted by the Church Secretary (or other appointed electoral officer) immediately after the nomination period closes and given time to decide whether they wish to stand for election. Anyone seeking to be a trustee of the church should first read relevant explanatory information, from both the Charity Commission and the Church Secretary, in relation to the significant responsibilities of the role, as well as the full version of sections 16 to 20 of the church Constitution.
- The names of those agreeing to stand will be published at the services on at least the two Sundays before the scheduled Ordinary Church Members' Meeting.
- Voting will be by secret ballot at the scheduled Ordinary Church Members' Meeting. Church members should vote for those candidates who they believe would serve the church well as trustees. Candidates receiving votes from at least two-thirds of those members voting shall be elected as trustees.

An Ordinary Church Members' Meeting may rescind the appointment of any trustee, excluding the minister, at any time. Where church members at such a meeting are considering the dismissal of a trustee, that trustee will have the opportunity to speak in his/her defence before any discussion or vote as to whether the appointment should be terminated.

* Please note that some aspects of what is contained in the bullet lists shown here are not explicitly stated in either the full Constitution or the associated Addendums (bylaws). Nevertheless, they were present in SBC's previous rules and have been the procedural custom and practice at SBC for **at least 30 years**.

17–20 BEING A TRUSTEE

The trustees' leadership and administration of the church should be characterised as much by mutual accountability, service and pastoral care as by strategic thinking and effective management. Thus worship and prayer should be a key feature of how the trustees go about their task.

The trustees will decide amongst themselves how frequently they will meet, but this must not be less than once every two months. Currently, the church's trustees meet monthly. The quorum for business meetings is half their elected number (rounded up as necessary).

For matters requiring a decision, the trustees will seek consensus; but where this is not possible, a vote will be taken. Resolutions will be carried if a simple majority is obtained. All actions taken must be in accordance with the full constitution, any decisions made at Church Members' Meetings, and UK law.

Minutes must be kept of the proceedings of the trustees' meetings, including the names of those present, the matters discussed, any decisions taken and, where appropriate, the reasons for those decisions. The trustees will have the power to decide whether all or part of such minutes are treated as confidential.

The trustees have the power to make donations from the church's funds to other charities working elsewhere in the United Kingdom and/or other parts of the world. They should nevertheless always work within the principles of financial prudence and the limits of the church's Reserves Policy in all their dealings.

No trustee (or any person or firm connected with the trustee) is permitted to be paid or to receive any direct or indirect benefit for being a trustee of the church. There are very limited exceptions to this rule:

- remuneration to the minister for fulfilling his/her duties;
- the reimbursement of trustees for reasonable and proper expenses incurred in carrying out their duties;
- payments authorised by a Church Members' Meeting relating to non-trustee services rendered to the church by a trustee (or a person or firm connected with that trustee) – for example, payments resulting from a contract with the son of a trustee where the son runs a decorating firm that is engaged to redecorate the manse; and
- any other payments permitted by statute or specifically authorised by the Charity Commission.

With regard to the third exception listed above, the trustee involved should not participate in (or even be present at) the decision to award a relevant contract; and the other trustees should satisfy themselves that it is in the interests of the church to contract with or employ that trustee (or a connected person) rather than another independent person.

21–24 MINISTERS

Any appointed minister of the church must accept the beliefs laid down in the BU Declaration of Principle (see sections 1–3 above). He/she should also be in a suitable relationship with the BU and the LBA, normally expressed by being on the BU Register of Covenanted Persons Accredited for Ministry. When a minister is appointed, it is expected that he/she will become a member of the church.

The minister and the church are in a covenant relationship based on Christian love and trust and mutual accountability. A minister is also in a relationship of mutual accountability with the other trustees and also with the church members.

The tasks fulfilled by a minister will vary depending on individual ability and gifting. Nonetheless, a minister is normally expected to be significantly involved in the activities of the church, with an emphasis on the leading of worship and prayer, the teaching of the Christian faith, and the pastoral care of individuals. The minister is expected to work with church members towards achieving the church's purpose through its activities.

Notwithstanding the fact that any minister appointed by the church is a trustee, he/she is entitled to be paid an agreed and reasonable remuneration or stipend out of the funds of the church – see section 17–20 above (first exception).

When there is no appointed minister serving the church, a Church Members' Meeting may appoint a person who is a church member, or a member of another Baptist church, to act as moderator (ie someone standing in to work with the trustees to oversee the church's activities and to give advice during the process of finding a new minister). The moderator will hold this office until a new minister is appointed or until there is an agreement, mutually accepted, for the person not to continue in the role. A moderator who is not a member of the church shall have a voice but no vote at a Church Members' Meeting

When it is necessary to find a person to fill a ministerial vacancy, the trustees (or a special committee appointed by the church) will be responsible for undertaking that task, generally in collaboration with the BU/LBA, and for nominating a suitable person to a Special Church Members' Meeting. For a minister to be called by the church, the approval, by ballot, of not less than three-quarters of the church members present, entitled to vote and voting is required.

A minister leaving the pastorate of the church is normally expected give three months' notice of termination of service. A Special Church Members' Meeting may rescind the appointment of the minister at any time. Where church members at such a meeting are considering the dismissal of the minister, that person will have the opportunity to speak in his/her defence before any discussion or vote. The vote must be by secret ballot and will only be carried if at least half of those present, entitled to vote and voting indicate their wish to terminate the appointment. In this event, notice (or basic stipend in lieu of notice) of not less than nine months shall be given to the minister.

25–26 FINANCE

The trustees are jointly and severally responsible for the financial administration of the church. Proper accounts shall be kept of all monies received and expended by the church and by all subsidiary organisations. And once in each year the trustees are required to present at a convenient Church Members' Meeting a budget of the next financial year's projected income and expenditure.

The church's annual financial year runs from 1st August to 31st July, and the financial year of subsidiary organisations should, as far as practicable, be the same. The financial statements of all those organisations must be presented to the trustees annually and incorporated into the church's financial statements. All accounts must be audited and, in the case of the main church accounts, this will be by at least two auditors. Auditors are appointed at a Church Members' Meeting.

Audited accounts of the church and its subsidiary organisations must be presented to the trustees within 10 weeks of the end of the church's financial year. The main church accounts, suitably summarised, will be presented to the church members at the Annual Church Members' Meeting (generally in November).

Financial records, annual reports and statements of account relating to the church for the previous six years must be available for inspection by any trustee. In addition, the law requires the church's trustees to make the annual report and accounts available to any person who requests them.

27 THE FULL CONSTITUTION

A copy of this summary of the church's constitution will be provided to all church members and to every applicant for membership, with the intention that every member or potential member is informed about the beliefs and organisational structure of the church. A copy of the full constitution is available on request.

The full constitution may be altered only by a resolution of a Special Church Members' Meeting, and even then (as a safeguard) certain clauses can only be altered with the approval of the BU, the LBA and/or the Charity Commission. Furthermore, no amendment may be made to the full constitution that would have the effect of making the church cease to be a charity at law.

28 CLOSURE OF THE CHURCH

There may come a time when Sidcup Baptist Church has to close down. If that time comes, or if the church fails to meet for worship continuously for six months (after which it will be deemed to have closed), the trustees must notify the BU, the LBA and the Charity Commission.

In such circumstances any remaining non-property assets of the church, after the satisfaction of debts and liabilities, will be applied for Christian charitable purposes as decided by a Special Church Members' Meeting or, failing a decision in that way, as decided by the LBA and notified to the BU. Property assets will be dealt with by the holding trustees – in our case the London Baptist Property Board.

Appendix A: Applying for membership

Every application for membership must be made through the trustees, and only if they are satisfied will the application be considered further. Each application will then be passed to two members of the church, who will together interview the applicant. A report (describing what the members have found out about the applicant's background, faith and circumstances, and the applicant's response to this summary of the church's constitution) will be submitted by them, with their proposal, to the trustees for further consideration. Thereafter a recommendation for or against membership should be brought to a Church Members' Meeting by the interviewing church members.

In the case of a recommendation against membership, this will only be brought to the Church Members' Meeting in the exceptional circumstances where it has not been possible to resolve the concerns and the applicant still wishes the recommendation to be considered by the Church Members' Meeting. An applicant may withdraw his/her application at any time prior to the Church Members' Meeting. Confidentiality of any withdrawal will be kept by those involved in the process.

Upon a satisfactory recommendation and a majority vote of the membership present, an applicant will be accepted as a member and welcomed by the church as soon as possible after that at a Sunday service.

Members may be received by transfer from other churches and fellowships upon their understanding and acceptance of the contents of this summary document (including particularly the church's beliefs); a satisfactory letter of commendation or transfer from their previous church or fellowship should also be received. Such applications for membership should still, however, follow the procedure given above.

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