

PARTNERS' HANDBOOK



A Bible centred church who love and serve Jesus

Welcome to The Mission

This handbook has been produced to give partners (i.e. church members), particularly new partners, some idea of the church's history, governance, beliefs and practices.

1. What is the background and character of the church?

When the Mission was established by William Baker over 100 years ago, its roots lay within the Brethren movement. Over the past couple of decades, however, the church has adopted the description of an "***Independent Evangelical Fellowship***". Indeed, our congregation now comes from a wide variety of denominational backgrounds united in Christ. Although we are basically independent, belonging to no national denomination, we are members of the Evangelical Alliance.

2. How do I become a member of the Mission?

We have adopted the term "**Church Partners**" to reflect our biblical position as "partners in the gospel".

Partners are those who have agreed the Statement of Faith (see paragraph 10) and who have expressed their willingness to accept the practices of this church as laid out in this handbook, especially the "Partners Covenant" (paragraph 12).

Anyone seeking to become a partner will be seen by a pastor or one of the elders who, if satisfied with the responses given, will recommend to the body of elders that the person be welcomed into fellowship at the earliest opportunity. This is usually done publicly during a Sunday service.

3. So how is the church governed?

Being independent of any denomination, the church has a Constitution registered with the Charities Commission. This Constitution specifies that the church is to be governed (or overseen) by the elders.

In 1953 the church was formally established through the creation of a Church Property Trust which, over the years, has provided two properties for worship and evangelical activity. The original meeting room was the Old Mission Hall on Danbury Common and subsequently the present church building was established on the Maldon Road. The church elders are the trustees of this Property Trust.

4. What are the responsibilities of church elders?

In line with biblical tradition, we regard the role of elders as that of overseeing the activities of the local church. They are to provide spiritual, scriptural teaching and leadership to all in fellowship. In 1 Peter they are likened to “shepherds of the flock”.

Since elders clearly cannot have direct involvement with every church activity, they delegate many leadership roles to others in the church. (paragraphs 6 and 7)

Elders are also responsible for ensuring that all teaching is faithful to Scripture and for encouraging corporate obedience to the Word of God.

They should support and pastor all in the church and handle disciplinary problems should they arise. (paragraph 9)

To help facilitate good communication with church partners and to foster consensus on key issues, elders will call at least three church meetings each year. (paragraph 8)

5. How are elders appointed?

Every five years the church undertakes the task of recognising a new eldership. An elder can continue to serve beyond the five-year term with the approval of the church.

On these occasions the church partners are requested to nominate potential elders but it is the responsibility of the current eldership to make a selection of those they feel have the spiritual and leadership qualities to undertake the task. In doing this they seek to follow the guidance given in the Bible.

Candidates for eldership thus identified are approached to see if they are willing to stand. If so, then their names are sent to all partners who are asked to respond (anonymously if they choose) indicating whether they recognise each name submitted as having eldership qualities. Completed forms are then returned for independent scrutiny.

Should a potential elder be recognised by less than two-thirds of those responding, the elders would withdraw their recommendation.

An elder can step down from the eldership at any time during the five-year period. The remaining elders may decide to effect an immediate replacement or wait for the five-year term to be completed.

6. The church pastor

The identification and appointment of the pastor is the responsibility of the elders. They will make every endeavour to invite potential candidates to the church to speak and meet the fellowship. The elders will bring the name of their preferred candidate to a church meeting. Should any partner have good reason to question the recommendation, their objection would be treated seriously by the elders who may then reconsider their decision. The pastor will be subject to a standard employment contract. His terms and conditions of service are determined by the elders.

The pastor will be a church elder throughout the period of his appointment.

Termination of the pastor's contract will be at the discretion of the elders, should they have good reason, with church partners being advised at a church meeting. The pastor could resign if he so wishes in line with his employment contract. We are quite flexible as to the period of time the pastor is employed by the church.

Assistant pastors are appointed in a similar way although they may not necessarily be asked to speak at the church as part of the selection process.

7. Other church appointments

Since the elders cannot lead every church activity, they identify and appoint leaders (or deacons) from within the church partnership to undertake a variety of ministries. These include: home groups, pastoral, children and youth work, treasurership, some preaching and teaching, worship and music, prayer, evangelism, community activities, missionary, administration etc. Leaders of these ministries are individually accountable to the elders.

The elders will recommend to the church from time to time the appointment of staff members whether they be employed full or part time or voluntary – e.g. church administrator, community worker, housekeeper etc.

8. Church meetings

The elders will call a minimum of three church meetings each year. The second meeting in the year (usually in late June or early July) will be the Annual General Meeting when the previous year's report and accounts will be formally submitted to the church.

These meetings provide the whole church with an opportunity for reflecting on past achievements and activities and for discussing future plans, appointments, etc.

An agenda will be compiled by the eldership but partners are free to raise issues for inclusion. The agenda will be distributed two weeks beforehand.

At the discretion of the elders, the church partners may be required to vote on a particular issue. In general, a simple majority of church partners present at a church meeting would suffice to agree a motion - only those partners 16 and over will be eligible to vote. If a matter is of such importance that a fuller representation of the church partnership should have their say, then the elders may decide that a postal ballot should be held.

9. Discipline in the church

If a partner is accused of behaviour unbecoming a disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ, the matter will be referred to and considered carefully and prayerfully by the eldership. The individual concerned will be seen by two of the elders so that the eldership can decide on the appropriate course of action.

In the first instance a partner may be requested not to participate in the Lord's Supper, nor to teach for a period deemed appropriate by the elders. The next stage would be to suspend the person's partnership thus preventing him/her from not only teaching or participating in the Lord's Supper but also from voting at church meetings. In these circumstances it may be necessary for the full partnership to be advised.

Regular reviews of the situation will take place – our aim will always be to achieve restoration back to full fellowship.

10. Statement of faith

God

There is one God, who exists eternally in three distinct but equal persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. God is unchangeable in his holiness, justice, wisdom and love. He is the almighty creator; saviour and judge who sustains and governs all things according to his sovereign will for his own glory.

The Bible

God has revealed Himself in the Bible, which consists of the Old and New Testaments alone. Every word was inspired by God through human authors, so that the Bible as originally given is in its entirety the Word of God without error and fully reliable in fact and doctrine. The Bible alone speaks with the final authority and is always sufficient for all matters of belief and practice.

The human race

All men and women, being created in the image of God, have inherent and equal dignity and worth. Their greatest purpose is to obey, worship and love God. As a result of the fall of our first parents, every aspect of human nature has been corrupted and all men and women are without spiritual life, guilty sinners and hostile to God. Every person is therefore under the just condemnation of God and needs to be born again, forgiven and reconciled to God in order to know and please him.

The Lord Jesus Christ

The Lord Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin, and lived a sinless life in obedience to the Father. He taught with authority and his words are true. On the cross he died in the place of sinners, bearing God's punishment for sin and redeeming them by his blood. He rose from the dead and in his resurrection body ascended into heaven where he is exalted as Lord of all. He intercedes for his people in the presence of his Father.

Salvation

Salvation is entirely a work of God's grace and cannot be earned or deserved. It has been accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ and is offered to all in the gospel. God in his love forgives sinners whom he calls, granting them repentance and faith. All who believe in Christ are justified by faith alone, adopted into the family of God and receive eternal life.

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit has been sent from heaven to glorify Christ and apply His work of salvation. He convicts sinners, imparts spiritual life and gives true understanding of the Scriptures. He indwells all believers, brings assurance of salvation and produces increasing likeness to Christ. He gifts and builds up the church, empowering its members for worship, service and mission.

The Church

The universal Church is the body of which Christ is the head and to which all who are saved belong. It is made visible in local churches, which are congregations of believers who are committed to each other for the worship of God, the preaching of the Word, the administering of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; for pastoral care and discipline and for evangelism. The unity of the body of Christ is expressed within and between churches by mutual love, care and encouragement. True fellowship between churches exists only where they are faithful to the gospel.

The future

The Lord Jesus Christ will return in glory. He will raise the dead and judge the world in righteousness. The wicked will be sent to eternal punishment and the righteous will be welcomed into a life of eternal joy in fellowship with God. God will make all things new and will be glorified for ever.

11. Does the church have any key practices which partners need to observe?

Our Lord introduced two sacraments or practices as visible signs of the gospel. He wishes his disciples to observe - baptism (Matthew 28.19 & 1 Peter 3.21) and communion (1 Corinthians 10 & 11). Partners should observe both.

Baptism: As a church we practise and encourage baptism of believers by immersion as a symbol of union with Christ and entry into his church while making clear that baptism does not, in itself, impart spiritual life.

We also recognise, however, that many evangelical Christians regard their own infant baptism as valid and if this view is held in good conscience, we would be happy to welcome them into partnership.

Communion or the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is a commemoration of Christ's sacrifice and an opportunity to remember our Lord in fellowship with one another. We invite all believers to participate in this memorial meal provided they are actively seeking to live in right relationship with Jesus and their Christian brothers and sisters. As such the communion table is open to both partners and non-partners.

12. The partnership covenant

When an individual becomes a Christian they automatically become members of God's universal Church. Belonging to a 'local expression' of this Church is, however, vital to the spiritual life and well-being of each individual Christian. For this reason, we encourage believers in our Lord Jesus Christ to become partners with us at Danbury Mission. Membership of any church family undoubtedly brings many blessings and inevitably involves accepting the responsibilities of those who are committed to the Lord and to one another. We therefore ask church partners to promise prayerfully, faithfully and with God's help:

- a) to live a life consistent with the gospel and worthy of those who are members of God's family, in order to glorify God and uphold the reputation of the church.
- b) to worship together regularly at the services and meetings of the church, including church business and prayer meetings and communion.
- c) to pray regularly for fellow partners and those associated with the church, also to pray for the activities of the church.
- d) to encourage and help one another by loving counsel, support, example and practical assistance in order to increase in faith, love, knowledge and holiness.
- e) to warn and correct one another when necessary, in a spirit of humility, always recognising our own sinfulness and need to accept such help when offered to us.
- f) to respect and support the elders as they lead the work in accordance with God's Word and to submit to the discipline of the church.
- g) to discover the gifts that God has entrusted to each one of us and to use them, as he intends, for the benefit of the church.
- h) to witness to the Lord Jesus Christ by our words and way of life, seeking also to bring others to hear the gospel and encourage the church's evangelism both at home and abroad.
- i) to give financially and regularly to the church as circumstances allow in order to support the work of the church both at home and abroad.

In these ways we will promote the unity and health of the church.

13. Church giving and funding

God has been very good to us at the Mission. We encourage all partners to adopt a biblical approach to their giving. The Bible calls us to give generously and joyfully as an expression of the fruit of the Spirit's life within us.

We do not take up a regular offering in our services, although an offertory box is placed by the door. We encourage all partners to consider prayerfully what they can afford to give to the Lord's work at the Mission and to complete a Gift Aid declaration form (see back of Handbook). Refunded tax on a gift made in this way to a church or charity means that donations are significantly enhanced.

We aim to give around 20% to 25% of our income to missions at home and abroad. Quarterly statements of our income and expenditure are placed in the weekly diary sheet. The previous year's audited accounts are displayed in the church and, for more details, please ask the treasurer.

14. Giving of our time and energies

Giving to our Lord's work is not simply a matter of money – it is very much to do with giving of our time and energies as well. We therefore encourage partners to consider what their gifting might be. Is there a church activity in which you feel you would like to participate? Here are some examples:

- **Music** - instruments and voices – please do enquire – we do undertake auditions but these are not too demanding!
- **Stewarding** - welcoming on the door, serving communion, preparing and serving coffee, putting out chairs etc.
- **Children's and Youth work** – from ages 3 to 18 - Sundays and weekdays – with around 200 in this age group we need lots of help – please see one of the assistant pastors.
- **Missionary interests** - at home and abroad
- **Home groups** - plus day time ladies' and men's
- **Fellowship groups** – some 12 in all – these are seen as central to the life of the church.
- **Pastoral and caring** – helping those in need, visiting, assisting with the luncheon club, etc.
- **Audio and visuals** - good technicians are always in demand.
- **Social and sporting activity** - football, golf, hog roasts, quiz nights, etc. - have proved invaluable avenues of outreach
- **Mums & Toddlers** and the Sunday **crèche** – always a demand for helpers
- **Prayer & encouragement** – most vital of all and something we can all do – join one of the prayer chains, or join the Sunday morning prayer support group, attend our prayer meetings.

If you require more information, speak to a pastor, an elder or someone at the welcome desk.

We hope that you will feel at home amongst us – may this be your spiritual home where you can serve the Lord, grow in love and knowledge of him and share in the work of extending his kingdom here in Danbury.

Prepared by the Church Elders

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