

# **THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH**

## **Constitution of Fleet United Reformed Church**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The United Reformed Church was formed in 1972 by the union of the Congregational Church in England and Wales and the Presbyterian Church of England. Since then the United Reformed Church has continued to express its deep commitment to the visible unity of the whole Church. In 1981 it entered into union with the Re-formed Churches of Christ and in the year 2000 with the Congregational Union of Scotland. The United Reformed Church is in frequent dialogue on unity with other traditions and has more than 400 Local Churches united with other denominations.

Though one of the smaller of Britain's 'mainstream' denominations, the United Reformed Church stands in the historic Reformed tradition, whose member denominations make up the largest single strand of Protestantism with more than 70 million members world-wide.

Along with other Reformed churches the United Reformed Church holds to the Trinitarian faith expressed in the historic Christian creeds and finds its supreme authority for faith and conduct in the Word of God in the Bible, discerned under guidance of the Holy Spirit. The United Reformed Church's structure also expresses its faith in the ministry of all God's people through the structure of Councils by which the Church is governed.

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**The members of Fleet United Reformed Church assembled in Church Meeting on (date) have adopted the following Constitution:**

## **1 THE LOCAL AND THE WIDER CHURCH**

Fleet United Reformed Church ('the Church') is a local association for the public worship of God, Christian witness and service in accordance with the principles and usages of the United Reformed Church ('the URC'). Admission to the full responsibilities and privileges of membership confers membership simultaneously in the Church and in the URC. The Church supports the wider councils of the URC through giving and participation, and may share in activity with other faith communities on an ecumenical basis.

The Church Members, who comprise the Church, shall aim to discover in fellowship the will of God, and to advance the Christian faith for the benefit of the public in accordance with the Scheme of Union of the United Reformed Church. As a Church they shall: provide regular public worship for all; promote the Christian faith; teach the faith to all ages; provide training, nurture and activities for children and young people; serve the community; give pastoral care and support to members and others in need, particularly those in sickness, distress or poverty; provide premises and resources for community groups and activities.

## **2 BASIC CONSTITUTIONAL DOCUMENTS**

2.1 As a local church of the URC, the Church is governed by the Scheme of Union of the URC ('the Scheme of Union') and those constitutional decisions of General Assembly binding on Local Churches. This constitution supplements the provisions of these as they affect the Church. In the event of any conflict between those provisions and this constitution, those provisions prevail.

2.2 The Scheme of Union:

	Principal provisions of the Basis of Union (B) or Structure (S)	Related clauses of this constitution
a) assigns the immediate oversight of the Church to the Church Meeting and the Elders' Meeting	S1(3), 2(1), 2(2)	6

b) provides for the membership and functions of the Church Meeting (in particular, in the Call of a Minister) and for non-voting attendance	S2(1)	5
c) provides for the membership and functions of the Elders' Meeting	S2(1)(viii), 2(2)	5 and 6
d) provides for councils of the wider church, for the Church's direct or indirect representation upon them and for appeals from more local councils to a council having wider responsibility	S1(2)(a), 1(3), 2(1)(vi), 2(3), 2(4), 2(6) and 5	
e) provides for consultation in decision-making	S4	--
f) contains (in the Basis of Union) a statement concerning the Faith of the United Reformed Church	B10, 12-18	--
g) provides for the celebration of the Gospel sacraments	B14, 15; S2(2)(ii), 2(4)(A)(xx)	--
h) provides for the ministry of Word and Sacrament, for the ministry of other Elders, and for Ministers' and Elders' ordination and induction	B19, 20, 21, 23, 25; S2(1)(vii), 2(2), 2(4)(A)(vii)	5
i) provides for the ministry of Church-related Community Workers and for their commissioning and induction	B19, 22; S2(1)(vii), 2(2), 2(4)(A)(vii)	--
j) provides for the admission of baptised persons to the full privileges and responsibilities of church membership	B14; S2(1)(ix), 2(2)(vi)	4

This constitution makes further provision for these matters in the clauses indicated.

### **3. PROPERTY TRUSTS AND ADMINISTRATION**

- 3.1 Property is held upon trust for purposes which include the charitable purposes of the Church. This includes:
- a) land and buildings governed by trusts set out in Schedule 2 to the United Reformed Church Acts 1972 and 1981 ('the URC Acts'), which provide that the statutory power of appointing new trustees and certain powers of direction are vested in the Church Meeting .
  - b) The general funds of the Church, comprising all assets and funds held by and on behalf of the Church (other than land and buildings held under the trusts declared in Schedule 2 of the URC Acts and those held on other specifically declared trusts), which are held upon trust for the advancement of the Christian faith for the benefit of the public in accordance with the Scheme of Union and whose charity trustees are the members of the Elders' Meeting qualified to serve as such, acting in accordance with procedures laid down by the Church Meeting.
- 3.2 The Church Meeting, after considering the recommendations of the Elders' Meeting and any guidance issued under the authority of councils of the wider URC, will review
- a) the uses to be made of the property in 3.1.a, and
  - b) procedures for proper administration of the general funds of the Church
- 3.3 The charity trustees of the general funds of the Church are responsible for presentation of an annual set of accounts to the Church Meeting and, where Charity registration has been completed, for preparation and submission of the annual Trustees report.

### **4. MEMBERSHIP**

- 4.1 Admission to membership of the Church on profession of faith takes place when a person
- a) is considered by the Elders' Meeting able to make a meaningful profession of faith;
  - b) has received preparation that the Elders' Meeting considers adequate;
  - c) is accepted by the Church Meeting on the advice of the Elders' Meeting;
  - d) makes during public worship the profession of faith prescribed in the Basis of Union; and
  - e) if not previously baptized, is baptized;
  - f) is not eligible for admission by transfer.
- 4.2 Admission to membership of the Church by transfer takes place when a person

- a) is a member of another local church of the URC, or of a Church with which the URC General Assembly has declared pulpit and table fellowship and
- b) is accepted by the Church Meeting or (by delegation) by the Elders' Meeting.

4.3 There shall be a Roll of Members on which persons admitted to the full privileges and responsibilities of membership in the Church, whether on profession of faith or by transfer, are to be entered. Names are to be removed from this roll

- a) on transfer to another church of the URC;
- b) at the written request of a member wishing to relinquish membership;
- c) by resolution of the Church Meeting on advice from the Elders' Meeting
- d) on death.

A member by transfer shall be welcomed in public worship at an early opportunity but enjoys the full privileges and responsibilities of membership from the passing of the accepting resolution.

4.4 The Church Roll shall be kept and brought up to date at least once every twelve months, when it shall be published.

4.5 The essential conditions of membership are:

A profession of faith in Jesus Christ.

A resolution to live day by day according to His teaching.

A willingness to uphold the honour, discipline, work and worship of the Church by individual gifts of time, talent and means.

Regular attendance at Sunday Worship is expected for all active Members.

## **5. LEADERSHIP**

### **5.1 MINISTERS**

The Church, with the concurrence of the Wessex Synod, may call a Minister to be its leader and guide in spiritual matters, to preach the Word, to administer the Sacraments, to exercise pastoral care, and to do all in his/her power to advance the Kingdom of God. He/she shall be an ex-officio member of all committees.

### **5.2 CHURCH RELATED COMMUNITY WORKERS**

The Church may at any one time have one or more Church Related Community Workers. They are called to a ministry of caring, challenging and praying for the community.

### 5.3 ELDERS

Any church member nominated for Eldership shall have been such for at least 12 months to be eligible.

The number of Elders shall be determined by the Church Meeting, following a recommendation from the Elders Meeting.

Ideally there should not be fewer than six duly elected Elders at any one time.

The election of Elders shall take place at the November Church Meeting, to take effect from the following January 1st.

Every nomination, with the consent of the nominee and duly seconded, shall be given to the Secretary not later than fourteen days prior to the November Church Meeting.

The names of retiring Elders and the number of vacancies to be filled shall be published not less than four weeks prior to the November meeting.

Vacancies shall be filled in such a way, that as near as possible, one third of the Elders Meeting retire each year, but are immediately eligible for re-election.

In the event of a vacancy occurring before the November Church Meeting, no action shall be taken, except on the recommendation of the Elders Meeting.

#### 5.3.1 Election of Elders

When electing Elders, two scrutineers shall be appointed and vacancies shall be filled in the order of the highest number of votes received, providing each candidate receives the requisite minimum number of votes – that is two thirds of those present and voting.

Should any vacancies remain unfilled due to the latter reason, the President may at his/her discretion allow further ballots to provide the other candidates a further opportunity of obtaining the requisite support, if necessary eliminating the candidate with the lowest votes.

Newly elected Elders shall be Ordained to their Office and Inducted to serve for a period of three years.

#### 5.3.2 Indemnification

Fleet United Reformed Church, shall indemnify its Trustees (serving Elders) and the appointed Church Officers jointly and/or severally with respect to all damages and costs and expenses which may arise as a result of a wrongful act committed by a trustee or officer acting in their capacity as trustee or officer.

*“Wrongful act shall mean any actual or alleged breach of trust, breach of duty, neglect, error, mis-statement, misleading statement, libel, slander, breach of contract, omission, breach of warranty of authority or other act wrongfully committed or attempted by the*



*trustees or officers or any matter claimed against them solely by reason of their acting as a trustee or officer”.*

## **6. HONORARY OFFICERS, REPRESENTATIVES AND COMMITTEES**

6.1 The Church Meeting shall:

- a) consider the candidates nominated by the Elders’ Meeting for the office of Church Secretary, and Treasurer. If the candidate for Church Secretary is not acceptable to the Church Meeting then a fresh nomination is to be sought from the Elders’ Meeting.
- b) elect a Church Treasurer
- c) elect a person or persons to represent the Church on the Synod. These shall normally be members of the Elders’ Meeting
- d) elect such other honorary officers and representatives to external bodies as it sees fit;

6.2 The Church Meeting and Elders’ Meeting may each establish such committees or ministry groups as they see fit, prescribing their method of appointment, terms of reference and frequency of reporting to the parent body. The Church Meeting may determine to which council of the church (itself or the Elders’ Meeting) any committee or group established by it is to report.

6.3 A list of all posts to be filled / approved, shall be published not less than four weeks prior to the Annual Meeting

6.4 Control of a delegated budget, with or without the competence to sign cheques drawn on church funds, may be delegated to committees, ministry groups or individual officers.

6.5 The Church shall appoint Account Examiners / Auditors annually, who shall certify all accounts. All receipts and payments must go through Church Accounts.

6.6 The Church Year shall be deemed to end on the 31st December.

## **7. THE CHURCH MEETING**

7.1 The Church Meeting, at which every member shall be entitled to vote, shall be convened not less than 4 times a year, and shall be the authority on matters affecting the life and conduct of the Church.

7.2 Normally the Minister or an Assistant Minister (The President) shall preside at the Meetings; otherwise an Elder appointed by the Meeting, shall preside.

7.3 All Church Meetings shall require a quorum of 15% of the number of members on the current Church Roll. Voting on routine business shall be by show of hands, and a motion shall be carried by a simple majority of those present and voting.

#### 7.4 Conduct of Meetings

All Meetings shall be conducted under normal rules of procedure, the main provisions of which are:

- a) The President shall be respected at all times.
- b) Any motion proposed on behalf of the Elders Meeting shall be seconded by a Church Member.
- c) Otherwise all motions shall be both proposed and seconded prior to being discussed.
- d) Amendments to motions shall be taken in reverse order. Carrying of an amendment means the original motion and any intermediate amendments are abandoned.
- e) No further business shall be taken after the President has declared the Meeting closed.

#### 7.4 Special Church Meetings

Special business may only be conducted at a "Special Church Meeting". Notice of such Meeting, stating the nature of the special business, must be included in the Church Notices at least two Sundays before the Meeting. Such business may include:

- a) The calling or termination of the appointment of a Minister.
- b) Major matters concerning Church property.
- c) Any amendment to the Constitution.

Special Meetings shall be convened at the request of the Minister, either or both of the Church Officers, or 20% of all members entitled to vote. Such Meetings shall not be held prior to the Wednesday following the second Sunday on which notice has been given. For special business a majority of not less than two-thirds of those present and voting shall be required to carry a motion, and the voting may be by secret ballot if the Meeting so desires.

The President shall have a casting vote at all meetings.

#### 7.5 Annual General Meetings

The Annual General Meeting shall be held as soon as practicable after the end of the Church Year. This Meeting shall elect officers and representatives. It shall receive the examined / audited Statement of Accounts and Balance Sheet and Reports from the

Church Treasurer and Church Secretary

Reports which describe the year's work may be presented at Ordinary Church Meetings during the year. The Minutes of the Annual General Meeting may be confirmed at a subsequent Church Meeting.

## **8. EMPLOYEES AND PAID CONTRACTORS**

- 8.1 To avoid doubt, this clause does not apply to the appointment of stipendiary ministers or church-related community workers.
- 8.2 Appointment to any employed position in the service of the Church will be made by the charity trustees of the church funds from which the employee is to be paid. The charity trustees of the relevant funds will also be party to any contract with an independent contractor for services to the Church. Unless the services to be rendered are solely to assist the trustees in their function as such, the following rules will apply:
- a) The creation of a new permanent employed position or its permanent abolition requires a resolution of the Church Meeting acting on advice from the Elders' Meeting.
  - b) The selection of an employee, the decision to vary contractual terms or terminate an employment (except for disciplinary reasons) or the decision to contract or terminate a contract with an independent contractor are matters for the Elders' Meeting, on whose directions the charity trustees are to act.
  - c) Another church committee may act in lieu of the Elders' Meeting under the foregoing paragraph but only by express delegation from the Elders' Meeting.
  - d) The charity trustees are to scrutinise the terms of any contract of employment or for services before it is concluded, and may defer acting on a direction in order to allow the relevant Meeting or committee time to consider any concerns the charity trustees have.
  - e) The charity trustees are at liberty to take, without receiving explicit directions, such other measures in relation to employees as good employment practice may indicate.
- 8.3 Charity trustees who employ or may employ staff on behalf of the church will adopt and from time to time review, subject to the approval of the Church Meeting, written procedures for disciplinary cases and for the settlement of employee grievances.

Disciplinary procedures are to provide for warnings when appropriate, emergency suspension when appropriate, a hearing if an employee so requests and for an appeal procedure.

- 8.4 Charity trustees may decline to act upon a direction to employ one of their own number or to contract with a charity trustee for the supply of goods or services, They may only act upon such a direction if all requirements of charity law in relation to the remuneration of trustees are satisfied.
- 8.5 A charity trustee must be absent from the part of any meeting at which his or her employment or remuneration, or any matter concerning a contract to which he or she is party other than as a trustee (including his or her performance in that employment or the performance of the contract) are discussed. He or she must not vote on any matter relating to his or her employment or the contract and must not be counted when calculating whether a quorum of charity trustees is present for that item of business.

## **9. AMENDMENT**

Alterations of, or additions to, this constitution may be made by the Church Meeting, normally on the recommendation of the Elders' Meeting. They must be consistent with charity law and relevant trust instruments where applicable and with the provisions mentioned in clause 2.1 that affect the Church, and must receive the support of at least 75% of the members present and voting at the session of the Church Meeting.

## **10. CLOSURE AND DISSOLUTION**

10.1 Any resolution to close the Church must be passed by the Church Meeting and approved by the appropriate wider council of the URC. When approved the resolution will have the effect of dissolving the Church as an association, at the date agreed between the Local Church and the Synod.

10.2 A direction may be given by the Church Meeting for unrestricted monies held as part of the general funds of the Church to be applied after the satisfaction of debts and liabilities, in a specific manner determined by the Church Meeting (within the charitable objects set out in the relevant trust instrument).

10.3 If no such direction is given the Church Meeting shall be deemed to have directed the trustees to apply the unrestricted monies held as part of the general funds of the Church, after the satisfaction of debts and liabilities, as determined (within the charitable objects set out in the relevant trust instrument) by the Synod.

## **11. INTERPRETATION AND MISCELLANEOUS**

In this constitution:

‘Elder’ refers to a serving Elder but ‘ordained Elder’ refers to any person ordained to the Eldership and includes ministers of word and sacrament who are on the Roll of Members but currently hold no active office in the URC. ‘Minister’ refers also, where the context allows, to the Interim Moderator during any vacancy.

‘Synod’ refers to the Synod of the URC on which the Church is, or was last, represented.