

Guideline Leaflet C14: Church Handbook (optional extra)

This leaflet is most helpful to churches that are a company or a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. It offers a suggested outline for a church handbook. Churches do not have to have a handbook but some might find one helpful as a guide for new church members.

This Guideline Leaflet is regularly reviewed and updated. To ensure that you are using the most up to date version, please download the leaflet from the BUGB website at www.baptist.org.uk/resources

The date on which the leaflet was last updated can be found on the download page.

C14: Church Handbook (optional extra)

These notes are offered as guidelines by the Legal and Operations Team to provide information for Baptist churches.

The legal services undertaken by the Legal & Operations Team of the Baptist Union of Great Britain are carried out and/or supervised by a Solicitor who is authorised and regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority. Regulatory Information is available here:

[L17 Legal and Operations Team – Regulatory Information](#)

These notes can never be a substitute for detailed professional advice if there are serious and specific problems, but we hope you will find them helpful.

If you want to ask questions about the leaflets and one of the Baptist Trust Companies are your property trustees, you should contact them. They will do their best to help.

If your church property is in the name of private individuals who act as trustees they may also be able to help.

THIS IS A POSSIBLE FORMAT FOR A CHURCH HANDBOOK

Each church needs to have a clear governing document – sometimes this is called a Constitution, or if the church is a company it might be called Memorandum and Articles of Association. However, these documents are often quite complicated. Although they contain a lot of technical details they do not always contain practical information, in a clearly presented form, that is useful to a local church and its members.

The idea of creating a handbook is to record openly and clearly supplementary arrangements that are made to enable the church to function well, as well as providing information for new members about the church, its life, activities, and how to become involved.

The handbook is intended to be useful and informative. Therefore, preparing a document that is written in clear terms, in plain English, with appropriate illustrations is useful.

This draft handbook may be more helpful for churches that have adopted a company structure, and have Memorandum and Articles as their governing document.

If your church has a Constitution, especially if it is based on our Approved Governing Document, you may not need a handbook too. This is optional.

This is a suggestion of what a Church Handbook might look like.

CHURCH HANDBOOK

XXX BAPTIST CHURCH

WELCOME TO XXX BAPTIST CHURCH

The fact that you are reading this handbook means that you have visited XXX Baptist Church and want to know about its work and activities.

As a Baptist Church we are committed to sharing the good news of God's love for people, and this will happen through teaching and explaining the Christian faith as well as practical action.

As a newcomer to XXX Baptist Church we want to tell you about our activities – so that you can join in!

WHAT WE DO

At XXX Baptist Church we try to provide a range of activities for different age groups and interests

OR

[Although XXX Baptist Church is a small church we concentrate on one or two activities, but try to do them well.]

At XXX Baptist Church our normal Sunday services are held at [times and places].

The format of our morning services are [explain] and our evening services are [explain].

There are activities for children and young people during our morning service but also during the week.

A typical week at XXX Baptist Church includes:

Sunday	
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	

WHO'S WHO

Becoming part of a new community of Christians can be an opportunity to make new friends. It also requires some understanding of who people are, and what they do.

The church has a full-time Minister called [name]. You will get to know the Minister quite quickly because she/he will make it a priority to meet you, because we want to know how our Church can help you, and to ensure that any questions are answered. The Minister can be contacted on [telephone number etc].

Everyone else in the Church is a volunteer, using their time to help run the Church and its activities.

There are many people and many tasks – and everyone is important.

The Church has a group that has overall responsibility for leading the Church, and they are called [Diaconate/Leadership Team/Deacons/Elders/Church Treasurer/Church Secretary]. Their photographs can be found on the notice board or on the Church website [web address].

Their names are:

[list of names, contact details, etc (as appropriate)]

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

There is a group that organises the children's and young people's activities. They are:

[list of names, contact details, etc (as appropriate)]

[**OTHER ACTIVITIES** include Designated Person for Safeguarding]

Other mid week activities are organised by:

[details as appropriate]

Pastoral care in the Church is organised by the Minister working with [name]. If you need help and support please contact either [telephone number] or [alternative telephone number].

COMMUNICATION – SHARING INFORMATION

Information about the church and its activities appear on the website.

In addition, there is a monthly magazine called [title] and a printed notice sheet that is handed out on a Sunday. A copy is always pinned to the notice board in the Church hall and details are on the Church notice board outside the building.

VOLUNTEERING AND JOINING IN

There are many activities where we need extra help. We want to encourage you to join in and will try to find an opportunity for you to help, and make new friends.

There are some parts of Church life where we need to take special care. Where activities involve children or vulnerable adults we need to make sure that the people who help are suitable, so if you are asked to take any responsibility for these activities we will need to speak to you in more detail about the Church's policies concerning the protection of children and vulnerable adults.

SAFETY

Safety is always important and we do our best to make sure the Church premises are safe. However, we realise that accidents can happen. Please let one of the [leaders] know if there is a problem.

If you need the First Aid kit it is kept in the [location]. We have two trained first aiders who can help if this is needed.

The Church has a fire alarm system – please follow the instructions in an emergency. Fire extinguishers are located around the building, but we hope you will never need them!

Nobody should be using step ladders or undertaking any kind of maintenance or building work whilst they are on their own in the building. More details of the Church's health and safety policy can be found on the website or on the notice board in the hall.

JOINING XXX BAPTIST CHURCH

XXX Baptist Church is organised through a Church Members' Meeting – and you will not be surprised to know that individual people become members of the Church.

For people who have recently become Christians this will normally include being baptised by immersion as a sign of their newfound faith in Jesus Christ.

Belonging to a Baptist Church involves some responsibilities. As well as having the opportunity to participate in Church Members' Meetings there is a responsibility to listen carefully to what others are saying, speaking carefully, and helping to make good decisions about the life and work of the Church.

When people want to join the Church they are usually visited by two people who are already members, who will ask some questions about the applicant's Christian journey and hopefully make a recommendation to the next Church Members' Meeting. From time-to-time people move house and can no longer be members of the Church. Usually those choose another Church and their membership is transferred. On other occasions people do not want to continue with their membership so they may resign. Sometimes people are missing for a long time and even though we encourage them to return, this does not happen. At this stage the membership list would need to be adjusted.

Very occasionally there are difficulties and an individual may not have maintained the high standards expected of Christian believers and Church members. They may have caused disagreements in the Church and their behaviour may have become unhelpful and disruptive. In these rare circumstances it may be necessary to reconsider the person's membership but this would only happen after every other opportunity for resolving the problems had been tried. Sometimes the church members need to end a person's membership.

MEMBERS CHOOSING THEIR LEADERS AND MINISTERS

The [leaders and] ministers in a Baptist Church are chosen by the Church members. Therefore, there are processes for appointing people to these important responsibilities.

Once a minister has been appointed that person normally serves the Church until the time when they resign or retire. Very rarely will a minister be asked to leave the Church by the Church Members' Meeting.

The leaders [use appropriate title] of XXX Baptist Church are appointed from among the members. They usually serve for a period of [state timescale] years. To make it easier to ensure continuity one third of the [leaders] retire each year, so that over a three year cycle each leader has stood down and been re-appointed.

[After serving six years leaders are required to take a one-year break, this has the benefit of allowing opportunities for new people to be appointed as leaders.]

In this Church we have [number] leaders.

In [month] there is an election of [leaders] but the process will begin much earlier.

In [month] Church members will be asked to nominate individuals who might be suitable to serve as leaders. A list of candidates will be prepared and at the Church Members' Meeting a vote will be taken. To be appointed as [leaders] of XXX Baptist Church the candidates must receive XXX number [%] of the vote.

There are details in the Church's governing document (called the [Constitution] Memorandum and Articles of Association) and if you have questions about this you should ask [name].

MONEY

The Church receives income from donations made by members and individuals who attend the Church. Taxpayers are encouraged to complete a Gift Aid declaration so that tax can be recovered, giving added benefit to the Church and increasing its income.

In this Church we aim to follow the following principles in managing our money:

1. To give 5% of our income to Home Mission (the funds of the Baptist Union of Great Britain) and to give 5% to BMS World Mission.

2. To give a further XXX% of income is applied to support other external charities – decisions about this are made by the [leaders].
3. All our money is used to advance the Christian faith – but this involves many payments that are practical that are associated with the organisation and maintenance of the Church. Our principle expenses include:
 - Paying our Minister.
 - Buying materials to be used in our young people's work.
 - Paying gas, electricity and water bills.
 - Maintaining the Church grounds and buildings.
 - Reimbursing reasonable expenses to those who volunteer for the Church, especially when they are asked to attend conferences or other events that are in other towns or cities.

JOINING IN – AND YOUR IDEAS

We hope you will like attending XXX Baptist Church. We hope that you will find friends and be able to join in some of our activities.

We welcome your ideas and suggestions. Normally new ideas are discussed at a Church Members' Meeting – but if you have ideas or suggestions please contact [name] or [name].

Association Trust Company	Contact
Baptist Union Corporation Ltd East Midland Baptist Trust Company Ltd	Baptist Union Corporation Ltd Baptist House PO Box 44 129 Broadway Didcot Oxfordshire OX11 8RT Telephone: 01235 517700
Heart of England Baptist Association	Heart of England Baptist Association 480 Chester Road Sutton Coldfield B73 5BP Office Mobile: 0730 505 1770
London Baptist Property Board	London Baptist Association Unit C2 15 Dock Street London E1 8JN Telephone: 020 7692 5592
Yorkshire Baptist Association	17-19 York Place Leeds LS1 2EZ Telephone: 0113 278 4954
West of England Baptist Trust Company Ltd	West of England Baptist Trust Company Ltd Little Stoke Baptist Church Kingsway Little Stoke Bristol BS34 6JW Telephone: 0117 965 8828

This is one of a series of *Guidelines* that are offered as a resource for Baptist ministers and churches. They have been prepared by the Legal and Operations Team and are, of necessity, intended only to give very general advice in relation to the topics covered. These guidelines should not be relied upon as a substitute for obtaining specific and more detailed advice in relation to a particular matter.

The staff in the Legal and Operations Team at Baptist House (or your regional Trust Company) will be very pleased to answer your queries and help in any way possible. It helps us to respond as efficiently as possible to the many churches in trust with us if you write to us and set out your enquiry as simply as possible.

The Legal and Operations Team also support churches that are in trust with the East Midland Baptist Trust Company Limited.

If your holding trustees are one of the other Baptist Trust Corporations you must contact your own Trust Corporation for further advice. A list of contact details is provided above. If you have private trustees they too should be consulted as appropriate.

Contact Address and Registered Office:

Support Services Team, Baptist Union of Great Britain, Baptist House, PO Box 44,
129 Broadway, Didcot OX11 8RT
Tel: 01235 517700 Fax: 01235 517715 Email: legal.ops@baptist.org.uk
Website: www.baptist.org.uk Registered CIO with Charity Number: 1181392

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