

CONSTITUTION OF TRINITY UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

FOREWORD

1. The Trinity United Reformed Church in High Wycombe is a worshipping community of the wider body of Christ. We seek in our outreach to all people to meet their needs and so demonstrate the relevance of the Gospel of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
2. This constitution is intended as a guide for the regular and orderly conduct of our church life, a help towards the true and complete fulfilment of our members and associates of the Church.

THE CHURCH

3. Members of the United Reformed Church (URC) confess their faith in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and promise to be faithful in private and public worship, to live in the fellowship of the Church to share in its work, and to give and serve, as God enables, for the advancement of His Kingdom throughout the world.

NAME

4. This Church shall be known as Trinity United Reformed Church, High Wycombe (the Church) and shall normally worship at its premises in Easton Street, High Wycombe.

MEMBERSHIP

5. Key expectations of membership are:
 - a) a confession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour;
 - b) a resolution to live day by day according to Christ's teaching;
 - c) regular attendance at Sunday worship, Communion service and the Church Meeting;
 - d) a willingness to uphold the honour, discipline, work and worship of the Church by giving gifts of time, talent and means.
6. Anyone who wishes to become a member is asked to let the Minister or an Elder know either personally or by letter or by introduction of a friend already a Church member. The Minister, at his/her discretion, may arrange classes. After recommendation by the Minister, the Elders may then nominate the candidate to a full Church Meeting, which may then ratify full membership.
7. A person who wishes to attend the Church for an unspecified period but who wishes to retain full membership of another church may be recommended and be ratified for Associate Membership. This may include service personnel, students or people working temporarily in the area.
8. Members from other Christian churches may be admitted by a Letter of Transfer, Certificate of Membership, or any other credentials from the Church of their last communion which are satisfactory to the Church Meeting.
9. Members are normally received into membership at a Communion Service.
10. The names of all members shall be recorded in a Church Register.
11. After a prolonged absence from worship by any member, or a prolonged period of unwillingness to uphold the honour, discipline, work and worship of the Church by giving gifts of time, talent and means, it is the responsibility of all members to encourage this member to return to fellowship. If all responsible efforts fail, it becomes the responsibility of the Minister, Elders' Meeting and Church Meeting to reconsider this membership:-
 - a) By decision of the Church Meeting such members may be moved to the register of non-active members. Non-active members do not have voting rights at the Church Meeting and are not automatically included in Elders' groups for pastoral care purposes.

- b) No name shall be removed from the Register completely except on the death of a member or by decision of the Church Meeting.

THE CHURCH MEETING

12. The Church Meeting shall be held at regular intervals (at least once per quarter).
13. The Church Meeting shall consist of those persons who have been admitted to the full privileges and responsibilities of membership and whose names appear on the Church Register. The Church Meeting may invite other persons who regularly attend worship at Trinity (whose names are not on the Church Register) to attend and to speak at its meetings on particular occasions. These persons shall not have voting rights.
14. Voting:
 - a) a quorum of 20% of the Church Membership and a simple majority is required for voting to take place on decisions arising at an ordinary Church Meeting, except for matters under paragraphs 14b, 27 and 36.
 - b) A quorum of 50% and a majority of 2/3 (two thirds) is required for voting on matters relating to the Church Constitution.
15. Special Church Meetings should only be called after notice has been given by the Minister or Elders.
16. Functions of the Church Meeting:
 - a) to further the Church's mission;
 - b) to develop local ecumenical relationships;
 - c) to further the URC's compassionate ministry in the locality and throughout the world;
 - d) to consider and support the wider work of the URC at home and abroad;
 - e) to consider public questions in relation to the Christian faith;
 - f) to bring concerns for consideration by the Elders' Meeting and wider councils of the URC;
 - g) to call a minister with the concurrence of the Area Committee(s) concerned;
 - h) to elect Elders and Officers, determining their number and period of service, and representatives to wider councils;
 - i) to consider, always on advice from the Elders' Meeting, any application for recognition as a candidate for the ministry and to transmit it, if approved, to the Area Committee;
 - j) to adopt financial reports;
 - k) to receive reports and proposals from the Elders' Meeting, Area Committee, Synod and General Assembly and to authorise appropriate action;
 - l) on the recommendation of the Elders' Meeting to make or provide for the making of arrangements for the maintenance of buildings and the general oversight of all financial responsibilities of the Church.
17. An Annual Church Meeting shall be held, at which:
 - a) an election shall be held for Church Officers excluding the Church Secretary;
 - b) a statement of Church Accounts and verification in accordance with applicable law shall be submitted to the members for approval;
 - c) written reports shall be presented by all Church organisations and representatives of outside bodies;
 - d) the names of all officers of the Church organisations and of Church representatives on outside organisations shall be submitted for ratification.

18. The Minister shall normally preside. If the Church is without a Minister, the Interim Moderator appointed by the Area Committee shall preside. In the absence of the Minister or the Interim Moderator, one of the Elders may preside.
19. Members will have the opportunity, through discussion, responsible decision, and care for one another to strengthen one another's faith and to foster the life, work and mission of the Church.
20. Members wishing to introduce business must notify the Church Secretary prior to the Meeting or at the beginning of the Meeting at the chairman's discretion.

THE MINISTER

21. The Minister is called by the Joint Pastorate of which the Church is part (with the concurrence of the Area Committee(s) which is responsible for his/her Induction to the pastorate) to be its leader and guide in spiritual matters – to preach the Word of God, to be a Shepherd (Pastor) to all people, to administer the Sacraments of Baptism and Communion, and by his/her influence, character and service build up the Church in its faith and experience of Christ. In this task of spiritual leadership and pastoral care the Minister is dependent upon the love, prayers, friendship of the Elders and all the members of the congregation.
22. The Minister shall be invited to be a member of all the Church organisations.

CALLING OF THE MINISTER

23. The Elders/vacancy committee will be made up of an equal number of representatives from each church (recommended as a maximum of five each). It is expected that Elders will make up the majority or the entirety of the vacancy committee. Others from each church can be included with the agreement of that Church Meeting.
 - a) Names of candidates suggested for a vacant pastorate shall be considered by the vacancy committee, acting through the Interim Moderator in consultation with the Moderator of the Synod. The vacancy committee shall take appropriate steps to make careful enquiry as to the record and qualifications of the candidate in question, and will, with the Interim Moderator, meet the candidate before bringing the name to the Church Meeting.
 - b) If the vacancy committee wish to proceed, the candidate will be asked to lead worship and preach once at each church; at each church there will be a question and answer session with the candidate; and at each church there will be a social occasion where the candidate can meet people informally. Members and adherents of either church are welcome to attend any of these events.
 - c) The decision whether or not to call a particular minister will be taken at the Church Meeting at which all the members may be eligible to attend and vote, provided they have attended a service at one of the churches led by the candidate and a question and answer session with the candidate. Both churches in the joint pastorate must achieve their majority vote in order to call a minister according to their Constitutions. (See also point 27).
24. Notice of such a meeting shall be given on the previous two Sundays. So that the wishes of the Churches are truly expressed at this Meeting, it is essential that members should by their presence or by postal vote make the Meeting representative.
25. In no case shall the names of more than one candidate be placed before such meeting.
26. Postal Vote:

The following applies to those persons requiring a postal vote:

 - a) they should have attended a service at one of the joint pastorate churches led by the candidate and a question and answer session with the candidate;

- b) the ballot paper should be returned to the Interim Moderator or the Church Secretary prior to the Meeting;
- c) the Interim Moderator shall have discretion to allow a postal vote in exceptional circumstances.

27. Voting:

- a) at least 80% of the votes cast at the Meeting, including postal votes must be in favour of the candidate. In order to make the calling valid, there should be a quorum of at least 2/3 (two thirds) of the active membership.
- b) Non-members are allowed to express an opinion
- c) The vote shall be on ballot papers distributed at the Meeting or by postal vote.

ELDERS' MEETING

28. The Eldership of the Church shall consist of the Elders elected by the Church Meeting. It shall exercise oversight of the spiritual life of the Church. The Elders' Meeting shall serve the Church by its relation to the wider councils and be its representative to the URC. The Minister or the Interim Moderator shall normally preside at the Elders' Meeting.

29. Elders' functions;

- a) to foster in the congregation for witness and service to the community, evangelism at home and abroad, Christian education, ecumenical action, local inter-church relations and the wider responsibilities of the URC;
- b) to see that public worship is regularly offered and the sacraments are duly administered, and generally to promote the welfare of the congregation;
- c) to ensure pastoral care of the congregation, in which the Minister is joined by the Elders having responsibility for groups of members;
- d) to nominate from among its members a Church Secretary;
- e) to arrange for worship leader supply in a vacancy;
- f) to keep a Church register (see paragraph 9);
- g) to be responsible for the institution and oversight of work among children and young people and all the organisations within the congregation;
- h) to call for the election of Elders and advise on the number required;
- i) to consider the suitability of any applicant for recognition as a candidate for the ministry and advise the Church Meeting about its recommendation to the Area Committee;
- j) to recommend to the Church Meeting arrangements for the proper maintenance of buildings and the general oversight of all financial responsibilities of the Church;
- k) to act on behalf of the Church Meeting and bring concerns to the wider Councils of the URC;
- l) to do such other things as may be necessary in the pursuance of its responsibility for the common life of the Church.

30. Each Elder shall serve for three years and on retirement shall be eligible for re-election for a further three years. An Elder may serve for six years (two consecutive terms) and be eligible for re-election after one year's sabbatical.

31. All members of the Church may be eligible for service as an Elder, providing they have been on the Church Register for at least one year or that they have held office as an Elder in another church of the URC and have been commended on this basis.

ELECTION OF CHURCH OFFICERS AND ELDERS

32. Before the elections of a Treasurer, recommendations for the Office shall be made to the Church Meeting by the Elders' Meeting.

33. The election of Elders and other Church officers shall normally take place at the Annual Church Meeting, or as soon after as can be conveniently arranged.
34. Nominations for Elders shall be given to the Church Secretary in time for a list of nominees to be published at least one week before the AGM.
35. Notice that nominations are required shall be given at church services on two Sundays preceding the Church Meeting at which the nominations are to be made. Nominations for Elders must be proposed and seconded in writing with the consent of nominee.
36. Voting papers with the names of the nominees shall be distributed at the meeting at which the election is to take place. At least 80% of the votes cast must be in favour of each nominee before the Church Meeting will elect them to the post of Elder. If there are more nominees than open positions, there will be two ballots, the first will be used to select, on a first-past-the-post basis, which nominees will be considered for the positions, the second ballot will elect the nominees selected who each secure 80% vote of confidence.

FINANCE

37. Cheques should be signed by two of the three designated signatories. If one of the signatories requires payment he/she should not sign the cheque.
38. An organisation connected with the Church requiring monetary assistance or any other help should present their needs to the Elders, who will decide on further action.

CONSTITUTION

39. All Church members shall be given a copy of the Church Constitution on paper or electronically. This will also be available on the website.
40. Amendments:
 - a) Notice of proposed amendments must be given to the church Secretary at least two weeks prior to the Church Meeting at which the amendments are to be discussed;
 - b) Amendments are to be discussed at the next meeting and then voted on at a subsequent meeting.

HOLY COMMUNION

41. The open table form of Holy Communion is preferred by the URC. In the church the decision of the Minister administering Holy Communion shall prevail.

BAPTISM

42. The URC observes the Gospel sacrament of Baptism as the Sacrament of entry into the Church and its corporate ministry. Baptism may be administered in infancy or at any age of responsibility. When administered at an age of responsibility upon profession of faith, the baptised person at once enters into the full privileges and responsibilities of membership. When administered to an infant, he or she is placed under the nurture of the Church until old enough to make his/her own profession of faith in Christ as Saviour and Lord and so enter into full privileges and responsibilities of membership. (For further information consult URC Manual Section H, copy of which is held in the Church Office).

STRUCTURE OF THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

43. The URC is divided into thirteen Synods (Trinity URC is in the Thames North Synod), Synods into Areas (Trinity URC is in the Chiltern Area), such division comprising the geographical area assigned by General Assembly.

44. The oversight of the URC is the concern of both of the local church and wider representative councils. These councils are:

- a) the Church Meeting and the Elders' Meeting of each local church;
- b) the Synod (including the Area Committee, which is a Synod committee)
and
- c) the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church.

Each of these three parts has functions assigned to them and set out in the manual, and each is recognised by members of the URC as possessing such authority, under the Word of God and the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, as shall enable it to exercise its functions.