

New Connexions Free Church

Handbook

Also referred to in the Charitable
Incorporated Organisation Constitution;
at section 28, as "*local rules or bye-laws*"

Section 1

1. Name, Affiliations, Beliefs, Objectives

1.1 Name

The Church shall be known as the New Connexions Free Church, High Barns, Ely.

1.2 Affiliations

New Connexions Free Church, High Barns, Ely is affiliated to the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion Registered Charity Number 232674

1.3 Our Beliefs

We accept the Christian faith as set forth in the New Testament and as summarised in the generally accepted creeds of the Christian church.

We do however stress certain doctrines including:

- a. The sovereignty of God in creation, providence, revelation, redemption and final judgement;
- b. The Divine and entire trustworthiness of Holy Scripture and its supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct;
- c. Redemption from guilt, penalty and power of sin, solely through the sacrificial and substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God;
- d. The justification of the sinner by the grace of God alone through faith in Christ;
- e. The priesthood of the whole church, which is the body of Christ and to which all true believers belong;
- f. The expectation of the personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A full doctrinal statement can be found at Annex A

1.4 The Sacraments

The New Testament ordinances of Baptism and Holy Communion are duly observed.

In the case of Baptism the Church respects varying viewpoints, while actively encouraging Believers' Baptism by total immersion, following the profession of repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, alongside the dedication of children of Christian parents, and thanksgiving for children of those who are not believers.

Holy Communion is normally observed on the Second Sunday morning of each month and on such other occasions as appropriate.

All who truly love the Lord Jesus Christ - having accepted Him as Saviour, and seeking to serve Him as Lord – are invited to the Lord's Table whether or not they are members of the Church.

1.5 Our Objectives

We believe that the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ and New Testament teaching define clear objectives for the Body of Christ – The Christian Church. As we understand them these objectives are set out in section 3.

Section2

2. Leadership and Membership

2.1 The Pastor

The Pastor shall be a man recognised by the Church as having been called by God and invited by the Church to serve within the Eldership, as the Church's spiritual leader and guide.

The Eldership shall be responsible for the initial prayerful selection and assessment of a new Pastor, prior to presenting such a man to the Church Leadership, and subsequently to the Church for further approval. In no circumstances shall more than one man at a time be under consideration by the church for this appointment.

The appointment of a Pastor shall take place at a Church Meeting specially convened for that purpose. At least seventy five per cent (three quarters) of the Church Members present shall be required to indicate their approval of the appointment; unless the person being considered is from within the Fellowship, then the required percentage for approval will be eighty-five. The appointment will also require the endorsement of the Trustees of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion.

A Pastor shall continue in that office, subject to periodic reviews, to be defined in a contract with the church, until he recognises his ministry has been fulfilled, or that it is

evident that he is ceasing to fulfil the responsibilities of the office to which he has been appointed; the latter being recognised by the Eldership.

2.2 *Church Leadership*

2.2.1 Spiritual Oversight Leadership and Direction

The spiritual leadership and directing of the affairs of the Church shall be the responsibility of the Eldership (see section 4.1 for details of qualifications, appointment and responsibilities).

The Eldership shall be made up of those men recognised by the Church as fulfilling the Scriptural qualifications for an Elder, called and equipped by God, appointed and ordained by the existing Eldership.

The Eldership shall include a 'chief elder'; a 'leader of leaders' – in our case the Pastor. The Pastor will 'chair' the Eldership meetings, normally be the spokesman for the Eldership and the main preacher/teacher in the Church.

2.2.2 Practical Administration and Leadership

The practical and administrative details of Church life shall be the responsibility of Deacons (see section 4.2 for details of qualifications, appointment and responsibilities).

Deacons will work alongside the Eldership to enable the Elders to carry out their work, being men and women selected from and by the Church meeting the Scriptural qualifications for Deacons and having their gifts recognised and affirmed by the Eldership.

A Deacon will be appointed as Treasurer and be responsible for the keeping of accounts and for the financial administration of the Church including any specific ministries which might, for good reason, hold separate funds.

A Deacon will be appointed as Secretary and be responsible for the keeping of minutes of Church Members Meetings, for supporting the Pastor in correspondence and general administration.

Other Deacons and Leaders for other Church activities shall be appointed as positions requiring practical and administrative responsibility might emerge. Such positions and their responsibilities are defined in later sections of this document.

2.2.3 Communication

The Eldership shall be responsible for ensuring that meetings are arranged and communication maintained between all involved in the corporate life of the Church.

2.3 *Church Membership*

We accept into fellowship as members all who believe in God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – and confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, and are in agreement with the beliefs and practices of the Church as laid out in this constitution.

Persons desiring to become members of the Church should approach the Pastor or an Elder. After due consideration and visitation from the Eldership, names of prospective members shall be submitted to the Church Members for acceptance (see Section 2.4).

Members of New Connexions Free Church are formally members of New Connexions Free Church Charitable Incorporated Organisation [CIO]. This does not constitute any additional legal or financial risk in UK law, but is simply the technical and legal framework in which most UK churches operate in the legal jurisdiction of the UK. The sister document to this Handbook is the CIO constitution and members or potential members should be provided with both documents.

2.3.1 Responsibilities of Membership

It is expected that all who become members shall:

- a. be constant and regular at Church services;
- b. be faithful in prayer for the Church, its work and witness, its leadership and members;
- c. be generous in giving to support the work of the Church;
- d. be diligent in living a consistent Christian life in the community;
- e. play an active role in the corporate life of the Church, with a full commitment to supporting the discipleship and outreach of the fellowship;
- f. get to know and be concerned for the welfare of others within the Church, and welcome visitors and newcomers.

2.3.2 Leaving Membership

Members moving to another neighbourhood, at such a distance that they cannot conveniently attend shall be urged to apply to transfer their membership to a sound, Bible Believing Christian Church nearer their home.

We accept that on occasions a member may regard it right to withdraw from membership of the Church, but recognise our responsibility in ensuring that every attempt is made to prevent such situations arising.

Members absent from regular worship shall be visited by the Eldership. If the absence continues for a period of 12 months despite further visits by the Eldership, and a satisfactory explanation is not given, they shall be considered by the Church to have withdrawn from membership.

2.4 Church Members Meetings

2.4.1 Purpose

Church Meetings – shall be quarterly, except in the autumn quarter where an *Open Annual Meeting* (a meeting open to all regular adherents) shall take the place of a Quarterly Church Meeting. However any discussion or vote, on issues requiring the decision of the membership alone, will be restricted to the membership and will therefore be tabled as reserved business.

An Annual General Meeting will be held in the winter quarter.

The purpose of Members Meetings is:

- a. to ensure the whole Church Membership is kept informed of the activities, progress and needs of each ministry of the Church;
- b. to deal with matters requiring to be brought before the Church and/or requiring the approval of the Church before proceeding, in particular:
 - changes concerning the appointment of a Pastor, Elder, Deacon or other leader.
 - changes to the membership.
 - changes to the Handbook.
 - specific administrative or financial matters required by the Trustees New Connexions Free Church CIO.
 - specific activities requiring considerable commitment of resource (people, time, money, prayer) over and above those required by regular Church activities.
 - to respond to a specific request from six or more members, which has been previously discussed with the Eldership.

2.4.2 Procedures

Attendance at Church meetings is restricted to Church Members except the Annual General Meeting, as outlined in 2.4.1.

It is understood that Church membership does not imply democracy, as stated elsewhere; we believe that it is the responsibility of the Eldership to direct the affairs of the Church, acting on their understanding of the revealed will of God; His will being sought through prayer, Scripture and His people. The following procedures offer a practical method of sharing together what God is saying and agreeing to act together in faith on what He has shown us:

- a. It is the responsibility of the Eldership to ensure that all Church members are made fully aware of all matters requiring the approval of the Church and that sufficient time allowed for prayerful consideration and discussion of such matters;
- b. To assess the approval of the Church for the appointment of a Pastor, Elder or Deacon, a secret ballot of the Church membership shall be held. For the appointment of a Pastor or an Elder, at least three quarters of the members voting shall be required to signify approval. In the case of a Deacon, at least two thirds of the members voting shall be required to signify approval;
- c. In other matters defined under section 2.4.1 (b) the assessment of approval shall be conducted as appropriate; viz. written communication, secret ballot or show of hands. On each occasion at least 66% (two thirds) of the members voting will be required to signify approval;
- d. Where such procedures take place during a Church meeting, the quorum required shall be 50% of the Church Membership.

Section 3

3. Church Objectives

It is important that these objectives are taken together; no one objective being over or under emphasised. In this way balanced growth can be expected and maintained in all areas of Church activity. The Objectives are as follows:

3.1 To Develop Relationships

- a. With God – the deepening of both our individual and corporate relationships with our Father, through Jesus, by the enabling of His Holy Spirit in our study of the Word, in our prayer and in our praise and worship.
- b. With one another – developing Christ-centred, loving, caring relationships within the Fellowship – both being disciples and discipling one another.

- c. With the wider body of Christ – working towards the complete unity which Jesus prays for among those who believe in Him (John 17:20–26), and supporting others involved in His work.
- d. With the world – allowing the love of Christ in us to spill over into our relationships with ‘the unsaved’.

3.2 To Make Disciples

- a. By teaching – ensuring the Word of God and its practical application is accurately and consistently taught throughout the Church.
- b. By example – demonstrating the fruit and power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.
- c. By exercise – encouraging people to put into practice the teaching they have received.
- d. By encouragement – recognising God-given gifts and encouraging their development and use within the Church.

3.3 To Reach the Unsaved

- a. By evangelising – preaching the full Gospel;
- b. By example – living lives of Christian witness
- c. By practical caring – reaching out in the name of Jesus to those in need.

Section 4

4. Definitions and Responsibilities

4.1 Eldership

4.1.1 The Definition of Eldership

The Eldership shall be made up of those men recognised by the Church as fulfilling the Scriptural qualification for an Elder, called and equipped by God and appointed and ordained by the existing Eldership.

The Eldership shall include a “chief elder”; a leader of leaders – in our case the Pastor. The Pastor will chair Eldership meetings, be the main spokesman for the Eldership and the main preacher/teacher in the Church.

Notes

- i Scripturally, Elders are not nominated by the membership; but recognition by the Church is necessary.
- ii The plurality of Eldership provides safeguards for the Church members of whom they have oversight.
- iii Once appointed and ordained, an Elder will remain in that office with a periodic review - this being carried out by the Eldership and reported to the Church at the Annual General Church Meeting.

4.1.2 The Responsibilities of the Eldership

- a. To direct the affairs of the Church, as God’s stewards, seeking to hear His Word to the Church and to obey and apply His directives.
- b. To teach from the Word of God whether corporately or one to one.
- c. To ‘shepherd/oversee the flock’ in the light of God’s Word.
- d. To be available to offer ministry – including prayer; anointing with oil; laying-on of hands.

4.2 Deacons

4.2.1 The Definition and Responsibilities of Deacons

- a. Up to seven Deacons shall be appointed, elected from among the members of the Church after nomination by Church members and meeting the biblical qualifications for Deacons, their gifts recognised and affirmed by the Eldership. Any member wishing to stand for election must have been a member for a minimum of six months.
- b. Once selected and appointed, a Deacon’s service will continue for a period of three years, after which they may be re-elected by the members of the Church, at a Quarterly Church Meeting.
- c. The function of a Deacon is to work alongside the Eldership, enabling the Elders to carry out their work without being concerned with the practical and administrative details of Church life, in such areas as finance, fabric, pastoral administration, and others, as they might emerge.

4.3 House Group Leaders

4.3.1 The Definition and Responsibilities of House Group Leaders

There is not a scriptural definition for this role; however it is regarded as an important pastoral and teaching role delegated by the Eldership.

- a. House Group Leaders will usually be a couple, or two individual people leading together, who are recognised and affirmed by the Elders, as being called and equipped by God to exercise a delegated responsibility for a small group of people within the Church.
- b. House Group Leaders will be overseen and responsible to the Elders.
- c. The level of delegation of these responsibilities may vary, but will be mutually agreed and understood by the House Group Leader and the Elders.

Annex A – Our Beliefs

ABOUT GOD

God is the Creator and Ruler of the universe. He has eternally existed in three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. These three are co-equal and are one God. Genesis 1:1,26,27; 3:22; Psalm 90:2; Matthew 28:19; 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Corinthians 13:14

ABOUT MAN

Man is made in the image of God, to be like Him in character. He is the supreme object of God's creation. Although man has incredible potential for good, he is corrupted by an attitude of disobedience toward God called "sin". This attitude separates man from God. Genesis 1:27; Psalm 8:3-6; Isaiah 53:6a; Romans 3:23; Isaiah 59:1,2

ABOUT ETERNITY

Man was created to exist forever. He will either exist eternally separated from God by sin, or together with God through forgiveness and salvation. To be eternally separated from God is Hell. To be eternally in union with Him is eternal life. Heaven and Hell are places of eternal existence. John 3:16; John 2:25; John 5:11-13; Romans 6:23; Revelation 20:15; 1 John 5:11-12; Matthew 25:31-46

ABOUT JESUS CHRIST

Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is co-equal with the Father. Jesus lived a sinless human life and offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all men by dying on a cross. He rose from the dead after three days to demonstrate His power over sin and death. He ascended to Heaven's glory and will return again to earth to reign as King of kings, and Lord of lords. Matthew 1:22,23; Isaiah 9:6; John 1:1-5, 14:10-30; Hebrews 4:14,15; 1 Corinthians 15:3,4; Romans 1:3,4; Acts 1:9-11; 1 Timothy 6:14,15; Titus 2:13

ABOUT SALVATION Salvation is a gift from God to man. Man can never make up for his sin by self-improvement or good works. Only by trusting in Jesus Christ as God's offer of forgiveness can man be saved from sin's penalty. Eternal life begins the moment a person receives Jesus Christ into his life by faith. Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8,9; John 14:6, 1:12; Titus 3:5; Galatians 3:26; Romans 5:1

ABOUT ETERNAL SECURITY Because God gives man eternal life through Jesus Christ, the believer is secure in salvation for eternity. Salvation is maintained by the grace and power of God, not by the self-effort of the Christian. It is the grace and keeping power of God that gives this security. John 10:29; 2 Timothy 1:12; Hebrews 7:25; 10:10,14; 1 Peter 1:3-5

ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT The Holy Spirit is equal with the Father and the Son as God. He is present in the world to make men aware of their need for Jesus Christ. He also lives in every Christian from the moment of salvation. He provides the Christian with power for living, understanding of spiritual truth, and guidance in doing what is right. The Christian seeks to live under His control daily. 2 Corinthians 3:17; John 16:7-13, 14:16,17; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 2:12, 3:16; Ephesians 1:13; Galatians 5:25; Ephesians 5:1

ABOUT THE BIBLE The Bible is God's Word to all men. It can be considered 100% The Word of God in 100% the words of men. Human authors, under the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit, wrote it. It is the supreme source of truth for Christian beliefs and living. Because God inspired it, it is truth without any error. 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20,21; 2 Timothy 1:13; Psalm 119:105,160, 12:6; Proverbs 30:5)

We also agree with the following statements on [Gospel Unity](#), [Women in Ministry](#) and [Same Sex Marriage](#), as set out by the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches [FIEC]. These are intended to bring clarity to our life and ministry as a Fellowship, not to be raised to the level of our Doctrinal Basis.

Gospel Unity Statement

Introduction

While we may differ with one another on a number of matters not essential to salvation, we strive to maintain the unity we enjoy together in Christ. We also seek to express Christian fellowship with other Gospel churches and para-church groups outside FIEC. Our commitment to the Gospel means that we are unable to express Christian fellowship with those who cannot affirm the fundamental truths of the faith.

God's Purpose of Unity

From the very beginning of creation God's purpose was that the entire human race would be united in fellowship under His good rule of love and blessing. Tragically ever since Adam and Eve rebelled in the Garden of Eden, sinful humanity has been characterised not only by alienation from God but also by broken relationships, suspicion and division from one another. However God, in His great grace, purposed to save a people for Himself out of the broken community of this sinful world, and to build a new humanity united as a single body.

The ultimate fulfilment of this vision is the single people united in worship before the throne of God in glory (Rev 7v9). This unity of God's people is effected through the saving work of Christ on the Cross. Through Him both Jews and Gentiles are reconciled to God:

"...His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross... For through Him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit." (Eph 2v15-18 NIV)

The whole church is to be built up "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." (Eph 4v13 NIV). This is part of God's cosmic purpose "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ." (Eph 1v10); indeed all things are to be reconciled in Him:

"For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross." (Col 1v19-20 NIV)

Christian unity is therefore at the heart of the purposes of God.

Unity in the Gospel

Christian unity is established through the Gospel. It is through this message that we are saved and united to Christ (1Cor 15v1-2, Rom 1v16, Eph 1v13). When the Lord Jesus prays for unity, it is amongst those who receive the Gospel (John 17v20). Some say that we are united as believers by our experience of the Holy Spirit. This is true, but it would be wrong to set the Holy Spirit in opposition to the Gospel. We receive the Spirit through the Gospel (Gal 3v2, Eph 1v13). It is the Spirit who gives us new birth (John 3v5-8), but He brings this new life through the Word (Jam 1v18, 1Pet 1v23). If we have a real experience of the Holy Spirit, then we will find that He deepens our understanding and appreciation of Christ, and His Word (1Cor 2v9-16). When we work and cooperate together, it is in the cause of the Gospel (Phil 1v27).

This truth finds practical expression within FIEC by the prominence that we give to the essential truths of the faith. If we are to find common cause with other believers, it will be partnership on the basis of a shared commitment to the Gospel. This will be expressed by a shared doctrinal basis.

Rejection of False Teachers

Whilst we long to enjoy unity with all who profess the name of Christ, the New Testament warns repeatedly of false teachers and false prophets coming into the church. Whilst such false teachers profess to know Christ as Lord, and appear as brothers, they are in reality wolves in sheep's clothing (Matt 7v15, Acts 20v29-31). In twisting or distorting the Gospel they rob us of our message for the lost, and instead of building up believers in the truth lead them astray to spiritual ruin (Col 2v18-19, Rev 2v20-23). Elders are charged with the primary responsibility of guarding the flock against such malign influences, and we are commanded to reject them and remain separate from them (Rom 16v17, Gal 1v8-9, 5v12, Phil 3v2, 2Pet 2, 2John 9-10, Jude). These New Testament teachings require us to stand apart from those who would deny the core truths of the gospel, whether implicitly or expressly.

It is important to understand the pastoral motivation of Jesus and the apostles in warning against false teachers. Matters of spiritual life and death are at stake if these false brothers are accepted and their deviant doctrines embraced. We are therefore obligated by love to stand apart from them, both for the sake of the church and its witness to Christ, and also for the sake of such false teachers themselves, as we would long for them to come to repentance and true saving faith.

Summary of Implications

Jesus prayed for the unity of his people, and this is an essential element of our witness (John 17v23). We are urged to maintain spiritual unity, in the face of differences of belief and practice which are not essential to the Gospel. Our commitment to unity extends not only within FIEC, but to all who are united to Christ in a variety of church and para-church groups. We look forward to the day when all of God's people will be united before Him in glory.

This spiritual unity is to be expressed amongst all who confess the truth of the Gospel. It is through the Gospel that we are saved, and built up in the faith. Jesus' prayer for unity was for those who would believe in him through the message preached by the apostles (John 17v20). Our Basis of Faith affirms that true fellowship between churches exists only where they are faithful to the gospel. The gospel of salvation by grace is so precious to us that we desire to stand together with all who believe and preach it. For the same reason, we cannot express Christian fellowship with those who reject it. The New Testament warns us repeatedly to guard the church against the influence of false teachers who deny the truth. Therefore we cannot join in partnership in evangelism or activities of Christian fellowship with those who are unable to affirm the essential doctrines of the faith as expressed in the FIEC Basis of Faith and similar statements. We are unable to affiliate formally to groups such as Churches Together which exist to express unity between churches naming Jesus as Lord, but without concern as to whether they hold to the core doctrines of the gospel as expressed in our Statement of Faith.

There are many opportunities for us to find common cause with others (both inside and outside the professing church), if these do not compromise our distinctive testimony to the Gospel. For example we may be able to speak together on moral issues, in defence of our religious liberties, or to work together in acts of practical charity and compassion. Such activities are at the discretion of local church leaders.

Women in Ministry Statement

Our position on the role of women in the church is explained in this document.

Joint heirs in salvation

Before examining the biblical data which address the issue of women in ministry it is essential that we reaffirm the equality men and women have in creation and redemption. Both men and women are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). Both men and women receive the Holy Spirit and are heirs with Christ. We are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26-29). Women as well as men belong to the body of Christ and their service and gifts are essential for the proper functioning of the body (1 Corinthians 12:7). It is within this context that discussion about the role of women in the church takes place.

Complementary in ministry

At the creation God stated that it was not good for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18). Men and women are to work together in partnership both in the family and the church. There are, however, distinctions in the roles. The biblical texts which speak directly of the roles of men and women in Christian ministry have attracted much attention over time. It is our conviction that, although some of the details may be debated, the essential thrust of these passages is clear:

1 Timothy 2 and 3

Timothy was charged with bringing order to the dysfunctional Ephesian church (3:14-15). There had been problems within the leadership of the church (e.g. 5:19-20), and a key aspect of Timothy's role was to make sure the church in Ephesus had suitably qualified elders (3:1-7). The qualifications assume that the elders will be men (3:2). This should not surprise us given that he makes it clear in the immediately preceding context that men, and not women, were to do the authoritative teaching (2:11-15).

1 Corinthians 11 and 14

At first glance, there appears to be a contradiction between 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, which assumes that women will pray and prophesy, and 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 which commands that women be silent in the church gathering. However one seeks to resolve this tension, it is clear that restrictions of some kind are being placed upon women. In 1 Corinthians 11, whilst Paul reminds us of the interdependence of men and women, he also makes it clear that issues of authority are at stake: man is the head of woman. The section in 1 Corinthians 14 also indicates that the women do not have the same freedom to speak in the gathering as the gifted men.

Creation and Trinity

Paul roots the prohibition of 1 Timothy 2 in creation (vv. 13-14) and that of 1 Corinthians 11 both in creation (vv. 8-9) and the nature of the Godhead (v. 3). These commands are therefore driven neither by culture, nor by a particular crisis in the church; rather, they are deeply rooted in who we are as creatures and the relationships within the Trinity.

Marriage

Paul's teaching on marriage also has some bearing on this discussion. There has been debate as to whether the term "head" implies authority, but the command for the wife to submit implies/suggests that it does. Husbands and fathers have responsibility for the welfare of their families and they should exercise authority in a loving way for the spiritual and physical welfare of their wives and children.

Role of women in the Old Testament

What we see in the New Testament is, as we would expect, a reflection of patterns laid down in the Old Testament. Leadership and teaching were reserved for men; priests, prophets and kings were men. There were exceptions with regard to prophecy, but these are few and far between. However, as in the New Covenant so under the Old, women are co-workers with the men. In the book of Proverbs, we note that both the mother and the father are to be involved in the teaching and training of the children, and the virtuous woman of the closing chapter has a wide remit in terms of service.

Role of women in the New Testament

Women, like men, receive the blessing of the Holy Spirit and are involved in the work of the gospel. Women are witnesses to the resurrected Christ (e.g. Matthew 28) and are to pass on this Good News. Many of the gospel workers mentioned by Paul in Romans 16 are women. Women are included in the command for us all to teach one another in the body of Christ (Colossians 3:16).

Implications for church life

Reflecting upon the biblical data, we can see that the primary leaders and teachers of the church are to be suitably qualified men.

Teaching, though, is not to be restricted to pastor/teacher/elders. All Christians are to be involved in teaching and encouraging one another. This includes women who are to teach other women (Titus 2:4) and who may well be involved in teaching in other forums. How exactly this works out in practice may well vary from church to church.

To ignore the prohibitions of Scripture is not something we can endorse, nor can we be silent on the issue. Healthy oversight is essential for the welfare of the churches, and we believe the word of God makes it clear that this must be done by suitably gifted and qualified men.

Same Sex Marriage Statement

Our convictions about the issue of same sex marriage are explained in this document.

We hold to the traditional Christian ethic:

1. Sexual intimacy is a gift from God and is to be enjoyed exclusively within the context of marriage;
2. Marriage is, by definition, heterosexual.

These convictions are derived from the clear teaching of Scripture: in both the Old and the New Testament, marriage is painted in a positive light, and homosexual activity, along with all other sexual intimacy outside of (heterosexual) marriage, is declared by God to be sinful. Nowhere in the Bible is there an expectation that marriage can exist between two or more people of the same sex.

Old Testament Background

In the beginning God created Adam and Eve – one man united to one woman (Genesis 2v18-25). It is to be noted that sexual intimacy was part of the pre-Fall relationship between the man and the woman and is a gift to humankind. Reading through the rest of the Old Testament, it is apparent that the model set forth in Genesis 2 is the God-given pattern for marriage (e.g. Genesis 24, Song of Songs, Proverbs 31v10-12). Wherever sexual activity occurs outside of marriage it is presented in a negative light, and the Mosaic Law expressly forbids adultery (Exodus 20v14) and fornication (Exodus 22v16), as well as homosexual sex (Leviticus 18v22, Leviticus 20v13).

New Testament Confirmation

It has been pointed out that not all the commands of the Mosaic Law are carried over into the New Covenant; for example, the food laws are rescinded (Mark 7v19), and the New Testament commands loving church discipline, as opposed to the death penalty, for those who wilfully and persistently break God's laws. The New Testament, however, upholds the teaching of Genesis on marriage; Jesus when asked about divorce refers to Genesis 1-2 (Matthew 19v5-6), showing that he understands marriage to be a one-flesh relationship between a man and a woman. Further, the presupposition in Paul's teaching is that marriage entails a husband-wife relationship (Ephesians 5v22-33). Again, all the references to homosexual sex are negative and indicate that it is sinful (Romans 1v18-32, 1 Corinthians 6v9-11, 1 Timothy 1v8-10).

Reaffirmation of Christian Convictions in the Current Climate

Despite pressures from society, we continue to uphold the traditional biblical view that:

1. sexual activity is a gift to be enjoyed only within (heterosexual) marriage and that, outside of this setting, it is sinful;
2. marriage involves a man and woman, bound together in covenant relationship – a relationship that cannot be redefined. At the same time, we will always seek to make clear
3. the forgiveness and grace that extend to all repentant sinners – including those for whom sexual sin has formed a major part of their backgrounds.

Implications for Practices our Church

In line with the above reaffirmations:

1. we will seek to uphold traditional biblical sexual ethics in both our teaching and our practices;
2. recognising that many Christians struggle with sexual temptation (whether same-sex attraction or heterosexual), we will prayerfully foster, within our church, gracious support of one another in such struggles.