

Shinfield Baptist Church Constitution

1. Name of church

The church shall be known as Shinfield Baptist Church or Shinfield Church

2. Affiliation

The church shall look to be in membership of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and to associate with the local regional organisation of the Baptist Union.

3. Membership

a. Membership will be open to all who accept our basis of faith (see Appendix 1) and whose lives and confession bear witness to the love of God working in their life.

b. Believers who have not confessed their faith through the ordinance of baptism by immersion (see 4b) may apply for membership but they will be encouraged to earnestly seek God's will through prayerful consideration to this matter in the light of New Testament teaching.

c. Two church members (appointed by the Leadership Team of the church) will interview each person seeking membership. The purpose of the visit is to inquire into the reality of the person's faith and character. A report and recommendation will be given to the Church Meeting by those two members and if the application for membership is supported by two thirds of those present and eligible to vote the applicant will usually be received into membership at the close of the meeting and become a church member at that point. New members are formally welcomed at the next communion service.

Applicants who are in membership with other recognised churches will normally receive affirmation from their previous church prior to membership.

d. Disputes or Conduct of church members which is thought to be incompatible with their Christian profession will be dealt with in accordance with Matthew ch. 18 v15-17.

'If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.- If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector'

e. The membership list will be reviewed annually by the Leadership Team. Where members fail to be in attendance or there is loss of contact with the church and therefore they become eligible for removal from the list, an effort will be made to contact them and understand the reason for this and if necessary to support the member to continue to be active in the church. If this fails or is not appropriate (e.g. the member has moved away), the person may be suggested for removal from the membership list. Removal of names will require a two- thirds majority vote of members present at a Church Meeting.

4. Communion and Baptism

Communion shall be celebrated regularly (e.g. monthly or as determined by Leadership Team and church together). This will be celebrated as a congregation and / or smaller groups.

b. The ordinance of Baptism shall be that of believers, by immersion in water, in the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, it shall only be available to those who have declared their faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

5. Church meetings

a. Members of this church, when called together as described below, and seeking the will of God

through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, shall be the final decision making authority in all matters relating to the affairs of the church.

- i) All activities, organisations and groups, and their leaders, shall be accountable to it.
- ii) Such a meeting shall be termed 'The Church Meeting'.
- iii) The Church Meeting's key purpose is to listen to God, discern his will and act in obedience to it. The Church Meeting will therefore likely involve worship and prayer, the discussion of important issues and key elements of business under the Lordship of Christ.
- iv) It shall meet at least three times a year at approximately regular intervals.
- v) Notice of a Church Meeting will be given on the preceding two Sundays,
- vi) Decisions a Church Meetings shall require a simple majority except where otherwise stated. The chairman is entitled to vote and in the event of an equal vote he/she shall have the casting vote.
- vii) No member shall vote at any meeting whether General or special unless they have been a member for 1 calendar month and shall have attained the age of eighteen years.

b. An Annual General Meeting will be held, usually, in the first half of the calendar year. Notice will be given at least 4 Sundays in advance. At the meeting time must be taken to undertake the following agenda items (though these items are essential they do not constitute an exhaustive list of all agenda items that may be included in the meeting):

- review of all that God has done in the previous year with time given to honour and thank God for all his works in this respect (there is no set format for how to do this and the review may be given as a verbal overview by the Pastor, Elder or Deacon of the church or may take the form of submission of reports from groups; the review should look to encompass the range of activities of the church);
- review of the vision to which God has called the church and appraise his faithfulness and support to enable his people to achieve this vision;
- annual accounts are presented;
- annual appointments made.

c. A Special Church Meeting may be called at the discretion of the Pastor and / or a majority of the Elders or at the written request of at least one-fifth of the church membership eligible to vote.

i) A Special Church Meeting is required to be held in order to deal with:-

- The calling or dismissal of a Pastor
- The purchase, sale or leasing of church property
- The alteration, improvement or enlargement of church premises, or the erection
- of new buildings when costing over one half of the church's annual budget

ii) Notice of Special Church Meetings shall be given on the two preceding Sundays, together with an indication of the business to be transacted.

iii) Decisions at Special Church Meetings shall require the support of at least two-thirds of those present and eligible to vote, except where stated otherwise.

d. Items for the Church Meeting should be submitted to the Leadership Team in order to allow sufficient time for the item to be discussed at their meeting previous to the Church Meeting. Matters that could not be submitted earlier may be considered under any other business at the discretion of the chairman and they shall normally be only of minor importance.

e. No resolution shall be rescinded unless notice has been given at the Church Meeting preceding the one where such action is proposed.

f. At all Church Meetings, one quarter of the total church membership eligible to vote (or ten members, whichever is the greater) shall constitute a quorum.

6 The Leadership Team

The Pastor/s and Associate Pastor/s together with the Elders shall make up the Leadership Team and be responsible for the spiritual leadership, oversight and day to day administration of the church. They shall act on behalf of the church in between Church Meetings. One half of the Leadership Team, with a minimum of one Elder present will constitute a quorum.

a. The Pastor

i.) The Pastor shall agree with the church's statement of faith, have been baptised as a believer by immersion and shall maintain and practice the doctrine and rite of baptism by immersion of believers.

ii) A call to the pastorate shall be decided upon at a Special Church Meeting of the church convened for this purpose.

iii) For a call to the pastorate to be sent to a Pastor, at least three-quarters of those members present and eligible to vote shall have voted in favour. Voting shall be by ballot.

iv) The Terms of Appointment and Service shall be as recommended by the church and negotiated by the Elders.

v) The termination of the appointment of a Pastor shall require the support of at least two-thirds of those members present and eligible to vote at a Special Church Meeting convened to consider the matter.

vi) The process of appointment of a new Pastor should be led by the Elders of the church who may wish to seek the advice of the local Baptist Union Regional Pastor, though it is not obligatory for them to do so.

b. Elders

An Elder is appointed as a shepherd of God's people (1 Peter 5.2) and as one who oversees the life of the church. A love for God and his people should be their chief motivation. Since in Scripture, Elders are never elected but appointed (see Acts 14.23, Titus 1.5), Shinfield Baptist Church adopts the following method of appointment for Elders:

i) The name of a potential Elder is suggested by the current leadership team in a Sunday service two Sundays prior to the church meeting at which their appointment would be made. The character and qualities of a person being considered for the role of Elder should be in keeping with those set out in Scripture (see 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 and a summary of Scriptural references to the role of Elder is given as an Appendix 2 to this constitution and should be referenced when nominating any person as an Elder).

ii) The nomination must have the assent of the majority of the leadership team and the consent of the person being nominated.

iii) The church then prayerfully considers this appointment.

iv) If during this period, nothing arises that would deem the Elder unfit from taking up their position, they should be appointed at the nominated church meeting. At this meeting to affirm (but not determine) this appointment a ballot should be taken of church members. A two thirds majority in the ballot in favour of the appointment of the Elder can be seen as a helpful confirmation from the church family of God's leading in this matter.

v) If there is not a two thirds majority in favour of the appointment, the leadership team should pause the process, taking time to prayerfully reconsider. After this, if the leaders still consider that the appointment should go ahead, they may repeat the process listed in point 'Elders b(i)' above. If at the end of this process the nominated Elder is not affirmed by a two thirds majority in the ballot, the leaders should not continue the process further.

vi) Elders shall serve for a term of up to three years. At the end of their first term of service, an Elder may be re-nominated for a second term of service if they are willing. They are appointed to this second term of service in the same process as for their first term of service. After a second term of service they must take a year's break from the role of Elder. After this break they may be considered again for the role of Elder if they are willing. They are re-appointed using the same process as for their first term of service. After this third term they must step down from the role. 'Elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.' 1 Timothy 5.17

vii) Elders shall be at least 18 years of age and shall be elected from among members of not less than six months standing.

viii) There must be at least as many Elders as pastors (including associate pastors). It is highly unlikely that the church should ever require more than five Elders.

ix) Elders must comply with the church's safeguarding policy. They shall only be considered fully appointed when any such procedures are complete. Any person nominated for the role of Elder who refuses to undertake such vetting will be considered unsuitable for the role of Elder.

Voting for the Elders

(a) Voting shall be by ballot.

(b) Two scrutineers shall be elected from members present and not standing for election.

(d) A scrutineer shall report in writing and in confidence to the Chairperson the number of votes cast for each nominee.

(e) The chairman may use his casting vote at any time.

(f) Though Elders are appointed and not elected a two thirds majority in favour of appointment is seen as an affirmation from God's people of the appointment (see b(iv) above).

7. Deacons - Team Leaders, Deacons, Group Leader

The word Deacon in the bible is used to describe those in some form of practical leadership in the church. Deacon is therefore a technical term for those who are involved in day to day leadership of the activities (ministries) of the church from small groups to youth groups, management of fabric to organisation of finances. In Shinfield Baptist Church the word Deacon is synonymous with the term 'Team Leader' and 'Group Leader.' Deacons are different from Elders in that they are responsible for leadership of specific tasks or groups while Elders are responsible for the oversight of the whole church. Deacons are leaders of activities (ministries) within the church but are not part of the leadership team as described in 6 above. Appendix 3 provides scripture references and further guidance as to the role, nature and character of a Deacon.

a. The number of Deacons that can be appointed shall be decided upon from time to time by the leadership team of the church.

b. Deacons must agree wholeheartedly with Shinfield Baptist Church's statement of faith as set out in this constitution.

c. Deacons must be members of the church and can be recommended for their role by other members of the church, subject to the final approval of the Elders. A list of the Deacons serving the church should be available at the Church AGM.

d. The character and qualities of any person being recommended for the role of Deacon should be in keeping with those set out in Scripture (see in particular references in Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3).

e. Deacons must comply with the church's safeguarding policy and be scrutiny to any of the vetting procedures described within it. They shall only be considered fully appointed when any such procedures are complete. Any person nominated for the role of Deacon who refuses to undertake such vetting will be considered unsuitable for the role of Deacon.

f. Deacons will be asked to serve a term of one year which may be renewed on the approval of the Elders (it is advisable to have a short probationary period of 3 mths before committing to a longer period of service).

g. Deacons may not serve for more than six consecutive years in a particular role. After six years they must take a break of one year before resuming that role.

h. Deacons report to the leadership team.

8. Church accounts

a) A statement of the church accounts, examined in keeping with the guidelines of the Charity Commission appropriate for the size of the budget and prepared by the church treasurer under the scrutiny of the leadership team shall be presented at the annual general meeting.

b) Under the auspices of the leadership team, the Treasurer may delegate any or all of the day to day running of these accounts to appointed persons within the organisations, provided that all accounts are produced for audit at the required time and are operated in line with the church's financial statement of control.

9. General

a) Lead person(s) of all groups, teams or organisations connected with the church shall normally be church members.

b) In the event of a vacancy occurring in any such groups, teams or organisations, the leadership team is empowered to fill that vacancy, though members of the church, particularly of the group where a vacancy occurs, are encouraged to recommend people suitable for the post.

c) Each group, team or organisation shall accept the guidance of the Pastor and leadership team as representatives of the Church Meeting.

d) The Pastor, shall be the ex-officio Chairman of all organisations and is entitled to preside at all business meetings or may recommend one of the leadership team to represent him if he so wishes.

e) As far as is practicably possible, meetings held on church premises should seek permission of the leadership team and meet upon such conditions as they may decide. Regardless, the leadership team has the right to refuse any meeting on church premises and should provide a clear reason why this is the case.

10. Alteration to church rules

a) The foregoing (a copy of which shall be given to each church member) may be altered (providing the alterations do not conflict with the trust deed) only at a Church Meeting where it has

been advertised that alterations are being sought.

b) Three months' notice shall be given in writing, at a Church Meeting, of such proposed alterations, and the opinion of the Leadership Team shall be made known before a decision is taken.

Appendix 1

Shinfield Free Church Basis of Faith.

(articles 1-7 as laid down in the trust deeds of 1910)

1. The divine and full inspiration and authority of the Holy Scripture in all its parts and the supreme and sufficient rule of faith and practice, and the right and duty of individual judgment in the interpretation of it
2. The Unity of the Godhead and personality of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
3. The fall and sinful state of men.
4. The vicarious sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.
5. The Justification of the sinner by faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ, a faith which works by love and produces holiness.
6. The work of the Holy Spirit in the regeneration, sanctification and spiritual enlightenment of all who believe.
7. The resurrection both of the just and the unjust; those who have believed and obeyed the Gospel shall be openly welcomed into Glory, but the unbelieving and wicked being condemned, shall suffer the punishment due to their sins according to the Scriptures.
8. The expectation of the personal, visible return of the Lord Jesus Christ in power and glory.

The Evangelical Alliance Basis of Faith

1. The one true God who lives eternally in three persons – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
2. The incarnation of God's eternal Son, the Lord Jesus Christ – born of the virgin Mary; truly divine and truly human, yet without sin.
3. The love, grace and sovereignty of God in creating, sustaining, ruling, redeeming and judging the world.
4. The divine inspiration and supreme authority of the Old and New Testament Scriptures, which are the written Word of God – fully trustworthy for faith and conduct.
5. The dignity of all people, made male and female in God's image to love, be holy and care for creation, yet corrupted by sin, which incurs divine wrath and judgement.
6. The atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross: dying in our place, paying the price of sin and defeating evil, so reconciling us with God.
7. The bodily resurrection of Christ, the first fruits of our resurrection; his ascension to the Father, and his reign and mediation as the only Saviour of the world.
8. The ministry of God the Holy Spirit, who leads us to repentance, unites us with Christ through new birth, empowers our discipleship and enables our witness.
9. The church, the body of Christ both local and universal, the priesthood of all believers — given life by the Spirit and endowed with the Spirit's gifts to worship God and proclaim the gospel, promoting justice and love.
10. The personal and visible return of Jesus Christ to fulfil the purposes of God, who will raise all people to judgement, bring eternal life to the redeemed and eternal condemnation to the lost, and establish a new heaven and new earth.

Appendix 2

Appendix 2 Elders

Character and Qualities

An Elder is appointed as a shepherd of God's people (1 Peter 5.2) and as one who oversees the life of the church. The chief defining quality of an Elder is a love for God and his people and they should be an inspiration and example to others in this. The character and qualities of an Elder are described chiefly in 1 Timothy 3 and in Titus 1. The qualities and character for an Elder in the following description are drawn chiefly, almost verbatim, from these passages.

An Elder should be full of the Spirit of God and wisdom. Elders are to be above reproach, faithful to their spouse (if married), temperate, self-controlled, respectable (having a good reputation in the community they live and work in), hospitable, able to teach, not susceptible to drunkenness, gentle and not violent. They should be averse to quarrelling and with a heart that isn't set on amassing financial wealth. They must manage their own family well, seeing that their children respect them by bringing them up in a manner that is worthy of full respect and that their children are obedient towards them. It is not a good idea for someone who has recently become a follower of Christ to be an Elder, since they may begin to serve for ulterior motives and their pride may be their downfall.

Key Role

The key priority of the Elders is the ministry of the word and prayer (Acts 6) As overseers of the church their major role is to ensure that this ministry is the church's pre-eminent purpose. They must both hold on to the deep truths of the Christian faith and ensure that the church also holds onto these, gently correcting those who oppose them. In doing so they are to keep a growing love for Christ at the heart of the church, ensuring that he remains its 'first love' and is not forsaken in business and activity (Rev 2.4) As people of prayer, in constant communication with the Father and spending time reading and meditating on his word, they are to set the strategic direction of the church in its worship, evangelism, discipleship, family life and service in such a way so that it will please 'the whole group' of people who are in fellowship with Christ. This direction must keep with Christ's command to 'proclaim the kingdom of God,' and 'to go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything [Christ] has commanded [us].'

Elders, like Christ, are to be servant hearted, not considering themselves above practical tasks. They must ensure the church is governed and managed well. But they themselves are to be people chiefly of prayer and they are to ensure that neither this nor the ministry of the word is neglected due to their attention on administrative and practical tasks. Instead they should ensure that these are diligently carried out by others in the church who are full of the Spirit of God and wisdom. (Acts 6.3)

The types of activity that Elders engage in would be therefore:

- **Prayer** - leading and organising church prayer activities and meetings and encouraging growth in church prayer life, including fasting, culturing their own personal prayer;
- **Praise and Worship** – leading worship, developing, deepening and extending the praise and worship of the church – including overseeing the development of musical worship, and encouraging and finding ways to help people worship daily, culturing their own worship life;

- **Teaching and preaching of the word of God** – preaching, teaching and leading small groups, overseeing the teaching programme of the church,
- **Evangelism** – overseeing and extending the evangelistic activities of the church so that the word of God is spoken boldly, sincerely and in such a way that people can grasp it so that God adds to the number those who are saved.
- **Discipleship** – overseeing and extending the discipleship activities of the church for all ages so that people’s love for Christ grows and they develop their ability to serve one another, their community and the church in a way that is pleasing to God;
- **Leadership** – directing the strategic oversight of the church so that the kingdom of God is proclaimed, Christ grows greater in the church and the community is transformed; ensuring through the Deacons of the church that it is well governed and managed (though Elders themselves should avoid getting directly involved in these activities so that the ministry of the word and prayer does not suffer);

Availability and Communication

For practical purposes, Elders should, within reason, be available for people to contact them by phone and email (for confidential, as well as safeguarding reasons, their email address must be personal and not shared address either with a spouse or household). In a way that is safe and appropriate they should be willing to meet with people in their home.

Elders should be willing and available, within reason, to meet with the Pastor for counsel and discussion. They should also be willing and available, within reason, to meet with the others who are leading activities (including Deacons) within the church.

Safeguarding

Elders must comply with the church’s safeguarding policy and be scrutiny to any of the vetting procedures described within it. They shall only be considered fully appointed when any such procedures are complete. Any person nominated for the role of Elder who refuses to undertake such vetting will be considered unsuitable to take on the role of Elder.

Term of Office

Elders typically serve a three year term. They may serve two terms of three years after which they must take a break of a year before being reconsidered as a potential Elder. At the end of a three year term, they must be nominated again and come under the scrutiny of the church for appointment as set out in the constitution. They may then serve a further two terms of office after which they must step down from the role. ‘Elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.’ 1 Timothy 5.17

Appendix 3

Appendix 3 Deacons (Team Leaders and Ministry Leaders)

What is a Deacon?

The word Deacon in the bible is used to describe those in some form of practical leadership in the church. The role seems to have been created when the church had to tackle the practical problem of how to provide adequate welfare services to the widows who were part of the church family (Acts 6). As the church grew so it would seem the range of leadership tasks Deacons undertook grew. Deacon is therefore a technical term for those who are involved in day to day leadership of the activities (ministries) of the church from small groups to youth groups, management of fabric, to organisation of finances. Deacons are different from Elders in that they are responsible for leadership of specific tasks or groups while Elders are responsible for the oversight of the whole church.

Character and Qualities

The character and qualities required for Deacons are highlighted in the bible being described in particular detail in Acts 6, 1 Timothy 3 and the following description is taken almost verbatim from these passages. The character of Deacons should be marked by the presence of the Spirit of God in their lives and a desire to live in a way that seeks the support, help and guidance of God's Spirit. They should demonstrate wisdom (sound judgement rather than an academic ability). Deacons, like Elders, should be people worthy of respect. They should be sincere in character not seeking office for personal gain or for reasons of pride and self-worth or those who seek to achieve things by any means possible, including dishonest means. They should be moderate in their drinking habits. They must hold to the deep truths of the Christian faith.

Key Role

The key role of Deacons is to ensure that practical tasks in the areas of worship, evangelism, discipleship, family life and service are undertaken lovingly and diligently so that the church is healthy and can grow and Elders are able to maintain their focus on the ministry of the word and prayer (Acts 6 1-7). Therefore Deacons, like Jesus, need to have humble, serving hearts. Not working out of selfish ambition or empty pride, rather in humility they should consider others more important than themselves. They should look not only to their own interests, but also to the interests of others. In this way they set an example to others.

Activities that Deacons might lead and organise could be:

- **Worship Activities** – Sunday morning worship team, Sunday Services, welcome team for Sunday mornings
- **Evangelistic Activities** – eg. Alpha, Children's Holiday Club, outreach services e.g. Carols
- **Discipleship Activities** – e.g. DG Groups, Youth and Children's Groups
- **Service Orientated Activities** – Charity Café, Afternoon Tea,
- **Friendship and Family Activities** – Shinfest, Weekend Away, leading and organising a pastoral care group
- **Administrative and Management Activities** – Property, health and safety provision, finance, Safeguarding and Personnel

Availability and Communication

In order for good communication and healthy relationships, for practical purposes, Deacons should, within reason, be available for people to contact them by phone and email (for confidential, as well as safeguarding reasons, it is helpful if their email address is personal and not a shared address either with a spouse or household). In a way that is safe and appropriate, they should be willing to meet with people to listen, discuss and offer help and support.

Deacons should be willing and available, within reason, to meet with the Pastor and Elders as necessary for discussion. They should also be willing and available, within reason, to meet with others who are leading activities within the church.

Term of Office

Deacons will be asked to serve a term of one year which may be renewed on the approval of the Elders (it is advisable to have a short probationary period of 3 mths before committing to a longer period of service). A list of the Deacons of the church will be presented at each year's AGM.

Safeguarding

Deacons must comply with the church's safeguarding policy and be scrutiny to any of the vetting procedures described within it. They shall only be considered fully appointed when any such procedures are complete. Any person nominated for the role of Deacon who refuses to undertake such vetting will be considered unsuitable to take on the role of Deacon.

Appointment

For details of appointment see the church constitution. Generally, though Deacons can be recommended for their role by active participants of the church, must be members and their final approval is subject to the decision of the Elders and pastors.